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Review

Skewed rural development policies and economic malaise in Zimbabwe

Jephias Mapuva

Bindura University of Science Education, Department of Geography (Development Studies Stream), P.O. Box 1020, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

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Rural development hinges on the dictates of the growth poles theory. François Perroux introduced the idea of economic Growth Poles in 1949 whose central notion is based on the concept of abstract economic space. The theory argues that decentralization of activities from the centre to the periphery enables the general populace to access services and opportunities better and helps to curtail migration to the centre. In line with the dictates of the growth poles theory, Zimbabwe in 1980 established growth points which helped in the curtailment of rural-urban migration through the decentralization of services to rural areas and the creation of employment opportunities for the rural folk. This paper deliberates on the practicalities and challenges of implementing the growth poles theory and the theory impacted on rural development in Zimbabwe, on the backdrop of skewed rural development policies and economic malaise. The author suggests that political will and a stable economic environment would unlock the prospects and propensity held by the growth pole theory.

Key words: Rural development, Growth Poles theory, growth points, decentralisation, employment opportunities, populace, services.

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe was a British colony from 1890-1980 and during that period, the country was called Rhodesia. The colonial government passed a myriad of legislative instruments that consolidated land gains by the white settler farmers and ensured that indigenous groups remained disadvantaged and confined to unproductive land among other economic facets. Through instruments such as the Native Reserve Act in 1899, the Native Land Husbandry Act in 1930, the Land Tenure Act of 1969, the Hut Tax, the bottle neck Education System among others, the white settlers were able to consolidate power. The pieces of legislation manifested from the British rule and ensured that whites owned areas comprising of the best agricultural land while blacks occupied reserves located in agro-ecologically low potential regions. Consequently, the colonial legislation can be attributed to the deterioration of rural areas in Zimbabwe, and not much gain or reversal of the situation has been attained to date. In1980, the new political dispensation brought a shift in polices meant to redress colonial imbalances brought about by colonialism with a view to promoting rural development. Notable remedial policy positions that were introduced include the Communal Land Act of 1981, Growth with Equity Policy, First Five Year National

E-mail: mapuva@gmail.com

Development Plan (FFYNDP) in 1985, Free Educational Policy, the Land Acquisition Act in 1992, Land Reform Programme in 2000, the Fast Track land Reform Programme (a sequel to the Land Reform Progamme of 2000) as well as the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Policy. The paper deliberates on the principal idea of the growth pole theory, and Zimbabwean context. The paper further explores the failure of the growth pole theory in Zimbabwe on the backdrop of skewed developmental policies and the attendant economic challenges that the county has experienced since the mid-1990s. The paper explores rural development colonial legislation, prospects of the growth pole theory in bringing about sustainable rural development and the associated challenges. The paper concludes that economic challenges and skewed implementation of rural development policies on the backdrop of economic challenges have derailed prospects for the successful implementation of the growth pole theory as an alternative to rural-urban migration and centralization of employment and investment opportunities. Lastly the author recommends that the establishment should reconsider, review and revise existing investment policies and Rural District Councils should provide incentives to investors and local communities to promote and enhance rural development.

THE IDEA BEHIND THE GROWTH POLES THEORY

François Perroux introduced the idea of economic *Growth Poles* in 1949 and defined it in terms of abstract economic space. In the theory, François Perroux sought to highlight the fact that policy makers hold the presumption that economists could supply the technical analysis needed to make sense of the policies based upon the concept of growth poles. The central idea of the growth poles theory is that economic development, or growth, is not uniform over an entire region, but instead takes place around a specific pole (or cluster) (James, 1996). On the same note, Hughes and Kozlcwski (2008) concurred that poles are usually urban locations, benefiting from agglomeration economies, and should interact with surrounding areas spreading prosperity from the core to the periphery. This pole is often characterized by core (key) industries around which linked industries develop, mainly through direct and indirect effects (Hughes and Kozlcwski, 2008). Additionally, core industries can involve (and invoke!) a wide variety of sectors such as automotive, aeronautical, agribusiness, electronics, steel, petrochemical. Direct effects imply the core industry purchasing goods and services from its suppliers (upstream linked industries), or providing goods and services to its customers (downstream linked industries) (Hughes and Kozlcwski, 2008). Indirect effects can involve the demand for goods and services by people employed by the core and linked industries supporting the development and expansion of economic activities such as retail. The expansion of the core industry implies the expansion of output, employment, related investments, as well as new technologies and new industrial sectors (Hirschman, 1999). Hirschman (1999) further argues that because of scale and agglomeration economies near the growth pole, regional development is unbalanced, with transportation, especially transport terminals, playing a significant role in such a process. The more dependent or related an activity is to transportation, the more likely and strong this relationship. At a later stage, the emergence of secondary growth poles is possible, mainly if a secondary industrial sector emerges with its own linked industries, contributing to the regional economic diversity (Johnson, 2000). Global supply chains have challenged several dimensions of the growth poles theory since growth and linkages generated by a core industry could concern activities located elsewhere (Hughes and Kozlcwski, 2008). Observation of naturally occurring growth poles has inclined planners to create new growth poles; the best-known attempt at creating growth poles having taken place in the Mezzogiorno (south) of Italy, with industrial complexes planned at Taranto and Bari (Darwent, 1999). In summation the growth poles theory manifests in economic development over entire regions and usually concentrated in urban locations and benefiting from agglomeration economies, interacting with surrounding areas spreading prosperity from the core to the periphery.

Growth poles theory and rural development in Zimbabwe

Taking a cue from François Perroux's discourse on the need to enhance economic space, Zimbabwe at independence in 1980, sought to curtail rural/urban migration and decentralize employment creation and opportunities, set off towards the establishment of growth points, in line with the dictates of the growth poles theory. Given the discussion on the Growth Pole Theory above, it can be inferred that the theory enables the decentralization of economic functions and institutions to local levels. Additionally, the theory enables the government to access the populace much easier by offering job opportunities through facilitating the opening up of industrial concerns within the local environments through deliberate enabling policies. Additionally the implementation of the theory facilitates the erection of infrastructure in rural areas, thereby curtailing rural/urban migration as people come to towns and cities in search of employment opportunities. Through the growth pole theory, the longstanding belief that urban areas are the economic hub of countries would fast lose its attraction as rural areas soon boast of the same/similar infrastructure and institutions previously the preserve of urban areas. In addition to the decentralization of institutions and functions, the growth pole theory also helps in cutting distances which rural people would have to travel to the nearest town as similar services would be found at growth points. In Zimbabwe the dawn of political independence in 1980, saw the government adopting the growth pole theory through the establishment of growth points in all major rural centres and equipping these with infrastructure akin to that found in urban areas. Through the growth pole theory was to spread its tentacles as it became necessary for local authorities to come up with services at growth points similar to those found in urban areas, such as proper housing for those working and living at growth points. In addition the provision of proper sanitary conditions, including clean drinking water and proper housing became necessary. However, the noble idea of growth points in Zimbabwe soon endured the economic challenges that the country endured, especially from the late 1990s. This provided an impediment to the implementation of the growth pole theory in Zimbabwe's rural areas and this subsequently impacted negatively on rural development as the road network became neglected and provision of clean drinking water difficult.

Rural development and colonial legislation in Zimbabwe

Rural development refers to the process of improving quality life and economic well-being of people in relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas (Menes, 2005). Traditionally, the development of rural areas centred on agriculture and forestry. However, due to globalization and the need to diversify, rural development has transformed to mining, tourism and manufacturing. Rural development also caters for locally produced economic development strategies and rural development programmes have seen a shift from a top-down approach form non- governmental organisations (NGOs). The bottom up approach allows for participation of rural people and it has been adopted for rural development. A rural area is a countryside area where the major economic activity is largely agriculture and has less than 500 people per square mile (Conyers, 2001).

The quest for economic space is all that characterized colonial rule in Zimbabwe Through a plethora of restrictive pieces of legislation, the colonial administration in Zimbabwe was able to take advantage of Africans during which white settlers were able to curve out large pieces of prime land for themselves. To compound the precarious situation in which Africans found themselves under colonial rule, further legislation was enacted to impoverish the indigenous Africans, notably the hut and cattle taxes. These taxes acted as sources of revenue to prop up white colonial rule and at the same time curtail African economic advancement. Additionally, there was no tangible physical development in the areas where the majority of Africans lived, with the only infrastructural development being roads and railway lines meant for the expropriation and ferrying of resources to factories and industries for processing. Consequently rural development lagged behind as expropriation of resources was done to benefit the settler administration.

The colonial legislation manifested itself through practices that sought to benefit the colonialists. Discriminatory spatial allocation was one such behaviour of the colonial administration. This included the creation of native reserves or tribal trust lands here indigenous people were relegated to or forced to stay. These native reserves comprised of 42% of Zimbabwe's land area, with as much as 75% of it located in drought prone areas (GoZ, 1998). The colonial settlers reserved prime and fertile land on which they produced cash crops. Tribal trust lands were established as a way of accommodating and keeping indigenous people away from urban areas and would only be allowed into towns to provide cheap labour in industry, mines and on farms, most of which were in peri-urban areas. Zvobgo (1986:3) noted that the colonial government used an Order-In-Council to establish colonial land segregation through the Tribal Trust Lands Act of 1898. This resulted in the creation such communal areas as Shangani and Gwaai which were (and still are!) characterized by infertile land and erratic rainfall patterns. It is therefore commonplace that such areas experienced and continue to experience low agricultural yields and possible famine annually.

To seal the fate of African claim to land, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 was enacted and this exacerbated indigenous people's loss of land rights and can subsequently be blamed for the current state of rural areas in Zimbabwe. The Land Apportionment Act shaped the character of landlessness as well as the attendant congestion that became commonplace in the country's rural areas, on the backdrop of population increase. Culminations of the Land Apportionment Act included inequitable land distribution, submission to over-exploitation of natural resources all leading to environmental degradation and a threat to sustainable livelihoods. Accordingly, Moyo (2000) has noted that the colonial government established state forests for conservation at the expense of local people, thereby leading to the exclusion of local people from the exploitation of resources. The establishment of state forests also forced people in communal areas to submit through over-exploitation, the few available timber resources and thereby leading to the depletion of timber reserves as well as the subsequent environmental degradation. It can therefore be argued that colonial legislation could be responsible for the current state of rural areas in Zimbabwe due to skewed land tenure policies and the attendant implementation of the cited pieces of legislation.

In 1969, the Land Tenure Act was enacted and it provided a platform for further land alienation. This piece of legislation favoured the white minority race at the expense of the black majority. The Act enabled white settlers to seize 18 million hectares of prime fertile arable land in agro-ecological regions. Black people were subjected to low lying areas with poor soils. Chemhuru and Masaka (2010) cited that colonial settlers targeted areas which are classified in natural region 1, 2 and 3 with good and reliable rainfall patterns, while most communal areas where blacks had been moved to fell in the regions 4 and 5 which had the least potential to support even small scale farming. As a result, food insecurity and persistent low agricultural production became characteristic of most rural areas such as Bubi where people would survive on low communal production system. Available literature (Scoones, 2008; Manjengwa, 2010) has concurred that areas in regions 4 and 5 have experienced sporadic dry spells and outbreaks of livestock diseases due to the nature and location of such places. Subsequently the relegation of indigenous people to these regions exposed them to the natural calamities associated with these geographical locations.

To further impoverish Africans and justify their need to seek employment to raise levies imposed upon them, the Hut Tax Ordinance of 1894 was proclaimed requiring every adult male to pay an annual hut tax of 10 shillings. Accordingly, Maravanyika and Huljzenveld (2010:25) have maintained that taxation was used as a weapon to coerce Africans into the labour system. The ordinance was amended in 1901 to detect and bring to book African males who defaulted or evaded paying tax. To further tighten the tax regime, the Hut Tax Ordinance was further amended, giving birth to the Native Tax Ordinance of 1904 making the payment of the hut tax incumbent upon individuals and not on the number of huts in existence. This meant that those evading tax or those male adults who stayed together in the same hut would each be obliged to pay 20 shillings per annum. As a result, the taxation system improvised people further as some ended up having to sell their livestock in order to acquire the prerequisite financial resources to either pay current taxes or offset overdue taxes or debts in terms of the hut tax.

The education sector was not spared by the segregatory colonial policies that sought to serve the interests of the white male-dominated colonial socio-economic order. The colonial education system in the then Rhodesia did not have a specific policy for the education of women and girls (Gordon, 1994), with limited opportunities for African males as well. Through the bottle-neck system of education, the colonial policies ensured a pyramidal structure of education provision where less Africans would access educational opportunities outside the primary school levels. Dalelo (2010: 5) has concurred that the educational system during the colonial era was a type of a bottleneck and rural areas had few schools. Only 12, 5% of all African children completing primary school could proceed for secondary education and this policy further marginalised female children who were already under-represented in the educational system (Dalelo, 2010: 5). In light of the above, it can be noted that colonial legislation can be blamed for the sparse school population in rural areas at independence and subsequently the current state of rural areas in Zimbabwe as few schools were built, a situation which became the post-colonial dispensation's first task to increase education opportunities for Africans, mostly in rural areas. However the new schools continue to be dogged by lack of adequate resources to be able to maintain high educational standards in line with international best practices.

To exacerbate the deteriorating conditions of land in reserves and land expropriation, the colonial regime passed the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951, through the Legislative Assembly (Selby, 2006:7). The Act imposed destocking and conservational practice both of which disadvantaged Africans. These measures were disruptive to the already fragile economies of the reserves and contradicted traditional culture of accumulation of livestock, thereby exacerbating poverty among the indigenous populace. The Land Husbandry Act usurped the powers of land appropriation, management and tenure out of the hands of chiefs as traditional leaders. In Shangani, destocking of cattle impacted negatively on the very core of the Ndebele people's social economy which depended on cattle as a symbol of wealth and social status. Before the promulgation of the Land Husbandry Act, the Ndebele State boasted of possibly the largest herd in the region. Consequently the scanty cattle herd in the region as well as the attendant regular bouts of cattle herd depletion can be attributed to colonial administration practices of destocking. Consequently, despite their perceived abolition, most colonial legislation still haunt much of the rural populace and impact on rural development in general. Manjengwa (2010) points out that we cannot divorce the current state of most rural areas in Zimbabwe to the colonial legacy of promulgations and ordinances.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE GROWTH POLE THEORY IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE

When the new democratic dispensation took over the reins of political power in 1980, it had to immediately address the imbalances that existed in various political and socio-economic sectors, with the education sector having taken precedence. In a paper entitled Information for Rural Development: A Zimbabwean Perspective[1], Lawton Hikwa roundly summarizes the endeavours by the new democratic government in Zimbabwe towards alleviation of rural poverty as follows:

At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had a dual economy, inherited from its colonial past. It was characterized by "… a relatively well-developed modern sector and a largely rural sector that employed about 80% of the labour force. The newly independent government sought to address some of these inequalities…"

[1]Information for Rural Development: a Zimbabwean Perspective: paper presented at the ProLISSA Conference held on 7 – 11 March, 2011, Pretoria, South Africa by Lawton Hikwa

(Government of Zimbabwe, 2004: 11). The new government gave priority to the reduction of poverty and government geared its spending towards increased "… social sector expenditures, expansion of rural infrastructure and redressing social and economic inequality including land reform." (Ibid). Among major and positive developments was the primary school enrolment which became almost universal. This development had a direct bearing on the need to develop structures for the delivery of information, especially in the rural areas (p 11).

Pursuant to that, the new government introduced deliberate policies that were geared towards creating an egalitarian society based on equal employment opportunities and maintain a uniform education system. According to Zvobgo (1984:4), the government abolished the distinction between African and European education, introduced free and compulsory primary and secondary education for all. Government sought help from donors to construct schools in rural areas. The quality of African education improved and more to that, girls had now greater chances of acquiring education. Education was heavily subsidized especially in rural areas and children who could not go to school due to financial problems were now in a position to acquire education. Literacy levels in rural areas increased remarkably and the government ensured that children could not walk for than 5 kilometres to reach a school, thus enhancing accessibility to education. This was a stride towards rural development and upliftment.

Another contentious issue that acted as a catalyst and a precursor to the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe was the visibly evident land shortage, which land had been expropriated during colonialism. This created imbalances in terms of land possession and tenure. Upon attainment of independence, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a serious and accelerated land resettlement programme in order to de-congest rural areas which had become increasingly overpopulated. This also created an opportunity for poor and landless rural farmers to own land, thereby economically empowering them on the aftermath of the enduring colonial legislation on rural development. Additionally the agrarian post-colonial epoch brought abandoned and underutilized land into production. According to Moyo (2000), with monetary assistance from the British Government, Zimbabwe resettled 52,000 families with differing schemes, including Model A, B, C and D, prior to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme that came on the dawn of the new millennium.. Under the Model A, families received permits to reside, cultivate de-pasture on resettlement lands. Despite the fact that the initial resettlement programme uplifted and enhanced the position of black Africans to be in possession of fertile land, the willing-buyer-willing-seller did little to have an impact on land ownership for blacks as many white commercial farmers were not willing to sell their prime land. Hence, Africans were still disadvantaged, leaving the Government in a quandary on how best to expeditiously allocate land to the landless people.

The post-colonial dispensation made frantic efforts to further improve the livelihoods of its people, especially the rural folk. In a bid to improve lives of the rural population, the government developed the Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP) in 1982 and The First-Five-Year National Development Plan (FFYDP) which focused on reducing inequality, reduce poverty and create employment (GoZ, 1998). The TNDP created over 150.000 jobs and enhanced agricultural production of small scale communal land farmers. The government launched the Second-First-Five Year Development Plan (SFFYDP) whose thrust was to improve service delivery in the education and health sectors. Rural planning of the SFFYDP aimed at constructing infrastructure in rural areas, and in most rural areas, clinics, roads and schools were constructed. Improvement in service delivery culminated in enhanced reproductive health services, with rural people enjoying free medical treatment.

Furthermore, decentralization of resources and opportunities to rural areas was the most notable post-colonial development. To curb the insistent migratory behaviour of most Africans through urbanization, sparked by the dictates of the 'bright lights theory', the growth pole policy was activated, formulated and adopted to try and promote rural development through physical development at designated centres. These designated centres of physical development in rural areas came to be known as *growth points*. According to Manyanhaire et al. (2011), the adoption of the growth pole policy resulted in the establishment of centres that included Murambinda, Mubayira, Juru, Mupandawana and Gokwe. In no time, these centres were accorded town status, thereby further enhancing employment and business opportunities for the rural folk and building investor confidence. The town status bestowed upon growth points also boosted the revenue base for rural district councils that manned such centres. Infrastructural development was enhanced and the government supported rural growth centres for public and private investment as well as for the creation of equal job opportunities for the rural folk. Davies (1999) concurs that the growth pole policy deliberately sought to address regional disparities that had long existed between urban and rural areas through decentralization of services and investor focus. Decentralisation of power was enhanced, and Rural District Councils were established and equally empowered to execute duties just like their urban counterparts. The implementation of the growth pole policy in rural areas had numerous positive spin-offs for the rural folk. The policy promoted rural development through infrastructural development, enhanced agricultural diversification and increased employment opportunities and creation), all of which had been the preserve of towns and cities. Physical infrastructure such as banks, modern transport and health facilities, departmental stores, tarred road networks and even modern food outlets began to make their appearance at such growth centres. In addition, processing of agricultural products, such as cotton ginneries, were established at most growth points, further increasing employment opportunities, availing markets for agricultural productions and reducing transport costs to rural farmers.

In addition to the various rural development initiatives by government, electrification of rural growth points increased the rural resemblance of urban areas and provided convenience and a conducive environment for business operations. On electrification of rural areas as a rural development strategy, Mapako and Prasad[2] (2011) have argued that national electrification programmes have been given priority in many developing countries and the level of electrification has been generally seen as one of the key indicators of development. However, on the contrary, it has been noted that power utilities find rural electrification programmes a challenge because the returns on the investment made in grid extension are minimal given the usually low levels of power consumption in rural areas (Mapako and Prasad, 2011). Similarly the electrification of growth points attracted investment and created business and employment opportunities for the rural folk. It has also been noted that in addition to rural electrification, the Rural Electrification Agency, at the insinuation of the GoZ, has extended the grid to the growth points where it has provided loans and deliver to site electrical machinery like grinding mills, irrigation equipment and welding machines that local entrepreneurs may order (Mapako and Prasad, 2011). Such a move has further enhanced rural business opportunities and development. A survey conducted by Mapako and Prasad (2011) concluded that the increase in both the scope and number of enterprises at specific growth points suggests that electrification contributes to an increase in rural enterprise opportunities. Many of the activities like running nightclubs, bottle stores, grinding mills and welding activities are greatly driven by presence/existence of electricity. The findings of the survey suggest that the impact of rural electrification in rural development cannot be under-estimated.

In 1998, the Government of Zimbabwe launched the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Transformation (ZIMPREST), a clear indication and evidence of the adoption of the neoliberal approach to economic development (GoZ, 1998). The aim of the policy was to reduce inflation, facilitate public and private savings and investment and provide safety nets for disadvantaged people in rural areas. However, due to the impacts of the IMF/World Bank-induced Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP), ZIMPREST failed to live to its expectations. On the devastating impact of ESAP, Hikwa had this to say:

The decade of the 1990s saw a decline of the economy and the problems of high poverty and inequality persisted, all of which was largely blamed on recurrent droughts and floods and the failure of the economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP).

Hikwa further notes that

the decline could also be attributed to internal political challenges that have led to the isolation of the country from those nations that otherwise hold the necessary altruism to support service infrastructure. This created an identifiable development gap where the establishment of information infrastructure could guard against deterioration of the near-universal primary school enrolment and the general development of communities.

In addition to the failure of macro-economic policies such as ESAP, at micro/communal level, community empowerment programmes began to take shape. Unlike the colonial regime which did not recognize indigenous people's right to the ownership and management of natural resources, the new political dispensation put in place polices in this regard. Thus the new government came up with the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), "a Zimbabwean community-based natural resource management programme introduced in the postcolonial era to empower communities and promote sustainable utilisation of natural resources (Satchell, 1996: 19). The CAMPFIRE became one of the first programmes to consider wildlife as renewable natural resources, while addressing the allocation of its ownership to indigenous peoples in and around conservation protected areas. Natural resources management and intervention improved the social and economic well-being of local communities in rural areas.

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The growth pole theory holds the propensity for rural development in Zimbabwe if applied correctly and under a stable economic environment. The idea of the growth pole theory to bring to curtail rural-urban migration by bringing employment and investment opportunities to rural areas is a noble idea since the competition for opportunities in urban areas would be minimized. Although rural development became the thrust of the new post-colonial dispensation, but the pace that it was taking was not agreeable enough. The acquisition of land for resettlement purposes was moving at snail pace, culminating in increased demands for the speedy process of resettlement from the increasingly impatient rural folk,

[2] Maxwell Mapako[1] and Gisela Prasad[2] (2011) "Rural electrification in Zimbabwe reduces poverty by targeting income-generating activities" CSIR Natural Resources and the Environment, and 2Energy Research Centre, University of Cape Town.

as evidenced by the Svosve community which initiated the expedited land resettlement process in 1999. The slow pace of resettlement emanated from a clause in the Lancaster House Constitution (1979) which not only provided for the willing-buy-willing settler land acquisition, but gave a 10 year grace period for the compulsory acquisition of land. Although it can be acknowledged that from 1981 up to the late 1990s many people were resettled, economic and political challenges as well as population increase led to expression of impatience and restlessness with the land issue as people thought it was delaying. In May 2000, using the Presentational Powers (Temporary Measures Act) of 1986, more changes were made to the Land Acquisition Act and Zimbabwe implemented the second Land Reform Programme (Zimbabwe Institute, 2005). According to Scoones (2013), the Land Reform Programme reconfigured Zimbabwe's rural areas dramatically and small scale farmers were relocated near medium and large scale farms, sharing labour, technologies, market, chains, skills and expertise. The land reform policy enhanced on-farm investment for increasing levels of productivity and enhanced smallholder farmer's progression on the socio-economic ladder and livestock ownership became an agri-business that was enhanced by land reform in rural areas. This reconfigured the face and mode of rural development to some extent.

Furthermore, it can be argued that one of the deliberate remedial measures to promote rural development in the country was through the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Programme. Matunhu (2012:4) has contended that the Zimbabwean Government committed itself to empowering the historically marginalised members of the society to climb out of poverty and under-development through deliberate policies. It was envisaged that the policy would enhance economic empowerment of rural communities to develop themselves, promote the delivery of critical infrastructure such as roads, and enhance social and economic equality and prevention of exploitation. Additionally, Matunhu (2012:12) maintains that the indigenisation policy embedded opportunities for rural development and enhanced the transfer and transformation of wealth from a capitalist system to the previously marginalised rural people. The policy provided opportunities for narrowing the gap between rural and urban economies and encouraged the establishment of Communal Development Trusts. However, these efforts were eroded by the economic challenges that bedeviled the country as a result of 'sanctions' imposed on the country culminating in an economic meltdown of the late 1990s and early years of the new millennium. The ensuing unfriendly hyper-inflationary environment eroded investor confidence and led to a gradual decline in foreign direct investment (FDI), which is the ideal driver of economic development. However, the benefits drawing from these policies are yet to be seen. As a result the possible opportunities drawing from the economic policies are as in limbo given the obtaining economic and political challenges bedeviling the country, with the prospects for economic development equally fading.

TUNNEL AT THE END OF THE LIGHT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The economic challenges bedeviling the country present a bleak picture of the way forward for the application and enhancement of the growth pole theory in Zimbabwe's rural areas. Additionally, prospects for the fruition of the growth pole theory require a complete overhaul of the economic set-up as well as evident political will to achieve the same. The ensuing economic and political challenges of the first decade of the new millennium provided a gloomy picture for rural development. With the hyperinflation of the early 2000s, an exchange rate that the country could not sustain and a country riling under economic sanctions, these became symptoms of ensuing fissures in the country and a barrier to rural development. Unlike the rosy days of political independence in the early 1980s, when growth points manifested themselves as an epitome for rural development, the economic (and political meltdown) of the early years of the new millennium saw the former rural economic flagship depleting to unprecedented levels. Thebe (2010) concurred that the late 1990s experienced a general economic malaise that impacted negatively on rural development and eroded investor confidence. However Sachikonye (2011) disputes that with the attainment of political independence was to come assured rural development through the dismantling of the enduring impact of colonial rural legislation and the attendant empowerment of the rural folk through the resettlement programmes. Sachikonye (2011) further notes that colonial legislation had set the tone for rural under-development and would take much political will (and not half-hearted attempts) to reverse the impact of such policies. Setting aside the foregoing arguments, the picture that presented itself was that of a state that was enduring not only the impact of colonial policies but that was at the receiving end of its own skewed policies. This left the state (including local authorities) with a lot to do to promote and enhance rural development.

While the transformation of growth points to towns provided a semblance of urbanizing rural areas and promoting rural development, but economic (and to some extent political) challenges tended to denigrate these formerly promising growth points to white elephants. In most former growth points, the prevailing economic challenges have devastated most business outlets which have succumbed to the existing economic climate, leading to closure. Shortage of commodities and an unfriendly economic climate eroded investor confidence, leading to the diminishing of business and employment opportunities at growth points, which had been the essence behind the establishment of such centres. Rural District Councils, which had benefited from the growth of business outlets and an increased revenue base has continued to experience the impact of business closures and employment opportunities as their revenue based was threatened (Matunhu, 2012). The future of growth points as centres of economic development is now in limbo with remote prospects of recovery, at least in the foreseeable future. There have been numerous costs (and deprivations) to local authorities, business and local communities. Local authorities have lost out on revenue and the prestige of managing a town centre. Local communities have also lost out on services and employment opportunities as well as the idea of neighbouring a town centre, while business enterprises have lost out on business, with remote chances of recovery. Consequently, the current unfriendly economic climate in the country (on the backdrop of economic sanctions) has made growth points an epitome of failed economic policies. This has been further exacerbated by the failure of the political establishment to align and harmonise existing local government legislation to the new constitutional order, culminating in overlaps, duplication and stalled development. Additionally, the lack of political will to concentrate development at growth points through deliberate policies has also seen many enterprises and business opportunities being lost, let alone the erosion of investor confidence. The debilitating provisions of some of the existing policies such as the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy[3] have been blamed for the erosion of investor confidence. Thebe (2010) has concurred that current economic policies have crippled investor confidence. It can therefore be argued that with the absence of vibrant rural economic activity on the backdrop of failed implementation of the growth pole theory, it has become reminiscent of days when urban areas were the predominant centres of economic activity and employment opportunities. With no major economic activity in both urban and rural areas and limited employment opportunities, migration to other countries have already started to take shape once again, a situation reminiscent of the period during the last decade of the 1990s when millions of Zimbabweans flocked to neighbouring countries as well as to faraway destinations in the diaspora.

Subsequently there is currently a wave of pessimism on the prospects of rural economic development. Hence there is now a tunnel at the end of the light, which implies that there are impediments to rural development which would require strong and appropriate polices to eradicate. There is also a dire need for political will to revamp both urban and rural economic development so as to reactivate and reignite rural business activity and create employment opportunities, mainly for the rural population.

Conclusion

The growth points that were established in the 1980s have served their purposes but economic and political challenges have presented barriers to further rural development. The essence of the centres had been to address the economic challenges and imbalances created by the colonial legislation which placed unequitable distribution of resources. Vibrant growth points and attendant industrial concerns that had come up were all foiled by economic problems such as an exchange rate that the country could not sustain, inflation and sanctions that the country endured from the early 2000s. All these factors as well as natural calamities such as drought and unpredictable weather patterns put a damper on the efforts of the government to establish flourishing growth points. To some extent the Land Redistribution Programme of the late 1990s went a long way in redressing the imbalances created by colonial legislation on resource allocation and utilization thereof. From the discussions of this paper, one may argue that the colonial legislation retarded the development of rural areas and can be blamed for the current state of rural areas. On the other hand, colonial legislation provided a catalyst for the execution of the Land Reform Programme and all its attendant benefits for the rural populace. A number of Acts such as the Native Reserve Act in 1899, the Native Land Husbandry Act in 1930, the Land Tenure Act of 1969 and the Hut Tax impacted negatively and contributed to the under-development of rural areas in Zimbabwe. However, remedial measures were introduced in the post-colonial era through policies and programmes include the Communal Land Act of 1981, Growth with Equity Policy, First Five Year National Development Plan (FFYNDP) in 1985, Free Educational Policy, the Land Acquisition Act in 1992, Land Reform Programme in 2000, the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy to develop rural areas. These policies and programmes went a long way in alleviating rural poverty, though economic challenges kept poverty levels high. In addition, economic challenges as well as erratic weather patterns as a result of bouts of climate change have all combined to paint a gloomy picture of prospects for rural development and recovery thereof.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the current economic climate, this paper would recommend that in order to curtail rural-urban migration, promote rural investment and economic activity, it is incumbent upon the establishment to reconsider, review and revise existing investment policies, notably the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Policy. Such a review and revision of the said policy framework would most likely incite investor

[3] The Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy provides for 49-51%bshare holding capacity between the foreign investor and the Government and local investors respectively.

confidence. Additionally political will should be evident so as to incite investors and promote infrastructural development. Local authorities, notably Rural District Councils, should provide incentives to investors as well as local communities so as to promote and enhance rural development. Local communities should also take the initiatives to promote economic development within their areas of jurisdiction by making concerted efforts to engage their local authorities for seed resources to start business enterprises that would act as a catalyst and an enticement for outside investors to invest in those communities. Additionally continued engagements between local authorities and line Ministries should also be a common feature and a continuous process to assist in revamping local economies and infrastructural development. The government should engage local communities and local authorities when taking major policies positions that affect these institutions. An example is the privatization of the Central Mechanical Equipment Department (CMED) which would have helped in infrastructural development and whose mandate to provide road infrastructure would go a long way in enticing investors and provide an efficient road network. With the privatization of the CMED, services are expensive and beyond the reach of local authorities leading to dilapidated and dysfunctional road infrastructure. With such bad road network, investors would most likely be discouraged. Local communities would need a good road network for the transportation of their agricultural produce. There is need for the political establishment to mend fences with the international financial institutions as well as investors. It is also mandatory that the establishment cease the politicization of public institutions, programmes and policies as experience have shown that such behaviour has not augured well with international financial institutions, business sector as well as NGOs who usually provide for the much needed relief in times of need. Corruption and corrupt practices should be monitored and curtailed is citizens are to benefit from the proceeds of the exploitation and expropriation of natural resources in the country. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, active citizen participation in policy formulation and implementation is mandatory if citizen trust is to be enhanced. Bestowed with an abundant of natural resources, there is a big chance that the country could recover from the economic (and political?) malaise and become a bastion for economic development on the African continent. However, it remains to be seen whether the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), a post-2013 economic blue print will transform the country’s economic quagmire.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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