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CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF POVERTY IN ZIMBABWE

TARIRO TENDENGU[1]

Abstract

To effectively analyse economic causes and propose potential solutions to the problem of poverty, the article starts the review by outlining available working historic, contemporary economists' and contemporary institutions' definitions of poverty. It proceeds to the characteristics of the Third World and shows the treatment each of the definitions receives under different analytical perspectives. The views on the responses to poverty by the different schools of thought are highly influenced by the definition that each of them utilises. After the provision of 12 definitions of poverty and the characteristics of the Third World, this essay provides a critical analysis divided into sections describing the broad economic frameworks to which each of the poverty theories belongs. It begins with the treatment of poverty by the classical and neoclassical schools, then proceeds to those theories that emerged partially as a reaction to the assumptions, hypotheses and conclusions derived by the classical economists. Within this group of theories are those which accept and depart from the foundational premises of classical economics but introduce several novelties, namely the theories of economic liberals, such as Keynes and those that examine the problem from a completely dissimilar perception of the socio-economic system, namely the radical economic theorists, such as the Marxists.

Keywords: Neoclassical theory, classical theory, development, gender, policies, egalitarianism

INTRODUCTION

In most developing countries, poverty is more widespread and severe in rural than in urban areas (Khan, 2000). The World Bank (2000) indicated that rural poverty accounts for nearly 63%of poverty worldwide. The causes of rural poverty are complex and multidimensional, involving the forces of nature, markets and public policy. Khan (*ibid.*) argues that distorted policies of governments, such as penalising the agriculture sector and neglecting the

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rural social and physical infrastructure, have been major contributors to both rural and urban poverty. According to Lipton and Ravallion (1995), in the context of rural developing countries, poverty is studied extensively only in the 40 to 50 years, it is the focus of public policy for no more than 30 years. Poverty is not only a state of existence but also a process with many dimensions and complexities. It is almost always characterised by high levels of deprivation, vulnerability and powerlessness. These characteristics form the core of inadequate well-being. Several policy options are identified and explained that can be used by developing countries to alleviate rural poverty, including land reform programmes, promoting agricultural growth, investment in, and access to the physical and social infrastructure, provision of safety nets and access to credit. The main thrust of the article is to critically examine policy options open for developing countries to alleviate rural poverty.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

POVERTY

Khan (2000) suggests that poverty is economic deprivation. Human rights are moral principles or norms that describe certain standards of human behaviour and are regularly protected as natural and legal rights in municipal and international law. Poverty erodes or nullifies economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education. A society where such inequality exists, with so much wealth and power at the one extreme and so much poverty and hardship at the other, is neither healthy nor just (O' Connor, 2001). A human rights approach to poverty calls for a paradigm shift in how we understand and address poverty. Sen (2001) defines poverty as a condition that results in the absence of the freedom to choose arising from a lack of what he refers to as the capability to function effectively in society. This multidimensional interpretation moves far beyond the notion of poverty as being solely related to a lack of financial resources but divides it into two components, namely absolute and relative poverty.

Relative poverty is seen as poverty that is partly determined by the society in which a person lives. The Human Poverty Index ranks countries according to an index of several factors, differing between developing and developed countries (Darrow, 2012). While calculating the number of people living on extremely low income is a convenient way of identifying poverty, it is widely acknowledged that the definition of poverty is broader than income data. According to Sen (2005), the identification of poverty with low income is well established, but there is, by now, quite substantial literature on its inadequacies. In addition to low income, Sen (*ibid.*) identifies four types of contingencies that determine variations in the impact of poverty, namely individual physical characteristics, environmental conditions, social conditions and behavioural expectations within the community. These characteristics vary by individual, family and society, such that a given level of income may result in one person living in poverty in terms of their capability to lead a life they value, compared to another with the same income but whose functioning provides a higher level of happiness or well-being. In sum, real poverty can easily be much more intense than can be deduced from income data building on this challenge to monetary income as a sufficient measure of poverty. Several alternative tools of measurement have been proposed, such as the World Happiness Report (2012), which provides a broader indicator of human welfare than do measures of income, poverty, human rights, education and gender viewed separately.

The above definition of poverty concurs with that proposed by Rowntree (1901), who distinguished primary and secondary poverty. He understood primary poverty as "earnings insufficient to obtain the minimum necessaries for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency" (Rowntree, 1901, quoted in Townsend, 1979). To him, the concept of secondary poverty was based on the more subjective judgement of whether the people he interviewed were "in obvious need and squalor", despite lying above the poverty line he delineated (Laderchi *et al.*, 2003). This last consideration made the definition of poverty explicitly dependent on the socio-economic environment at the time, that is, it had a strong relative and absolute component.

Contemporary economists' definitions currently see poverty as the situation where "a person's resources (mainly their material resources) are not sufficient to meet minimum needs (including social participation)" (Todaro and Smith, 2012). This definition is based on historic definitions such as those above, but also adopts elements from broader definitions of poverty by acknowledging the importance of the social life of the individual and not merely his or her purely material circumstances. Hence, it captures both the absolute and relative characteristics of poverty.

RURAL DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The term rural developing countries is being replaced with terms, such as developing countries, least developed countries and third world. Nafziger (2008) mentions the issue of low-level and inadequate living standards, whereas he argues that the developing countries are characterised by low living levels. He goes on to say that not only most the populations of these countries are poorer as compared with their western counterparts but are also wretched financially in comparison with their own small elite living in big towns and cities. These low levels of living can be observed both qualitatively in the form of low incomes, inadequate housing facilities and poor health, limited or no education, low life and work expectancy and hopelessness. Todaro and Smith (2012) highlight that developing countries are not only furnished with low levels of living, but they are characterised by low levels of labour productivity. The low productivity of labour in he developing countries is attributed to capital deficiency, reduced managerial qualities and obsolete and defective institutional structures. Moreover, labour lacks the quality of self-improvement, are sluggish, are least hard-working and ambitious, do not believe in innovations and experiments and are fond of work shirking. According to World Population Data Sheet (2000), the birth rate in developing countries was increasing and at the same time the death rate was very high as compared with developed countries. According to Todaro and Smith (2012), there was high and rising levels of unemployment and under-employment.

CLASSICAL THEORIES OF POVERTY

The classical theories of poverty typically assume that the outcomes of exchanges taking place in the marketplace are efficient and hence wages faithfully reflect individual productivity. Accordingly, poverty is seen mainly because of poor individual choices like lack of "self-control" which affects productivity negatively, although it is also acknowledged that pure differences in underlying genetic abilities are also potential causes of poverty. The assumption is that choices made by individuals may lead them to find themselves in a "poverty or welfare trap". Therefore, state intervention is generally viewed adversely as a source of economic inefficiency; by generating incentives that are misaligned between poor individuals and society, welfare programmes are perceived as a potential cause for or reinforcement of poverty through welfare dependence. The government is, at most, justified to intervene whenever poor people need supportive activities to correct perverse economic incentives. A large majority of policy prescriptions under this view focus on efforts to raise the productivity of deprived individuals for them to join the labour force as soon as possible.

Behavioural or Decision-based Theory

The Behavioural or Decision-based Theory is one such theory classified under classical perspective. Esping-Andersen (1990) argues that classical views on poverty correspond for the most part to the market-espousing, *laissez-faire* principle that tends to attribute responsibility for the outcomes of individuals, such as their well-being, to their own economic decisions. Hence, in this view, people are to be held accountable for their experiences of poverty, which are ultimately linked to purely individual deficiencies. Rank *et al.* (2003) point out that these individual characteristics can range from "the lack of an industrious work ethic or virtuous morality to low levels of education”. The crucial underlying premise is thus that although other options are available, they still make choices that limit their access to economic resources, thereby raising their risk of ending up in poverty (Blank, 2010). Contemporarily, if this theory is to be applied in a country like Zimbabwe, the interpretation would be that poor people are poor because of their choices. Their deficiencies prevent them from being rich.

The "Sub-culture" of Poverty Theory

The Sub-culture Theory is another theory of poverty that is categorised within the classical theoretical framework. This theory claims that behavioural preferences are passed across generations within dynastic families, due either to a genetic component or upbringing. Hence, "poverty begets poverty", as children growing up in dysfunctional families feed from the deviant behaviour of their progenitors who act as role models (Blank, *ibid.*). Contributions arising from this perspective assert that the intergenerational transmission of attitudes relating to poverty perpetuated via a persisting "culture of poverty" help poor families cope with low economic means. Lewis (1965, quoted in Townsend, 1979), suggests that the poorest sections of society tend to form a special sub-group with distinctive "largely self-perpetuating" traits. He stated that "poverty, in short, is a way of life, remarkably stable and persistent, passed down from generation to generation along family lines". He enumerated several social and psychological characteristics that underpin this sub-culture such as lack of ability to defer gratification, crowded quarters and frequent resorting to violence.

NEO~CLASSICAL THEORY

Building on the classical tradition, the Neo-classical Theory stresses the role of the unequal initial endowments of talents, skills and capital that determine productivity of an individual in generating poverty, within a market-based competitive economic system. Market failures such as externalities, moral hazard and adverse selection and incomplete information, are also viewed as aggravators of poverty (Davis, 2007). Uncertainty may play a major role in causing poverty because the poor are more vulnerable to shocks to their well-being. Under this neo-classical school of thought are the Monetary Theory and the Human Capital Theory of poverty.

HUMAN CAPITAL THEORY

The Human Capital Theory argues that poverty is a result of lack of human skills. Becker (2002) observes that human capital refers to the skills, education, health and training of individuals. It is capital because these skills or education are an integral part of mankind that is long-lasting in the way a machine, plant or factory lasts. Although exclusion from basic education is widely recognised both as a denial of a fundamental human right and as a deprivation of an essential economic asset in the struggle against poverty, the Human Capital Theory shows how an increase in education leads to increased productivity and efficiency of workers by increasing the level of their cognitive skills (Rolleston, 2009). People invest in education to increase their stock of human capabilities that can be formed by combining innate abilities with investment in human beings (Babalola, 2000). Examples of such investments include expenditure on education, on the job training, health and nutrition. However, the stock of human capital increases in a period only when gross investment exceeds depreciation with the passage of time, with intense use or lack of use. Olaniyan and Okemakinde (2008) argue that the provision of education is seen as a productive investment in that the proponents of Human Capital Theory consider to be worthwhile than the physical capital. Human Capital Theorists have established that basic literacy enhances the productivity of workers' low-skill occupations. Similarly, investment in health is desired. This is so because a society that is fully educated but devoid of good health cannot be productive effectively. Thus, health investment is desirable to increase productivity and reduce the level of poverty in the economy. From the above analogy, human capital development through investment in education and health is desirable because of its valuable and sustainable benefits to the individual and society at large. The acquirer uses his or her talents and capabilities to transform as well enhance the wellbeing of himself or herself as an individual and family and his society. It covers not only the expenditure on education and training, but also the development of attitudes towards productive activities (Ejere, 2011). Meanwhile, the Human Capital Theory is criticised for emphasizing investment only in education and neglecting investment in other aspects of human capital development, thereby revealing its short comings.

KEYNESIAN OR NEO-LIBERAL THEORY

The Keynesian or neo-liberal school of thought focuses on macroeconomic forces and emphasizes the role of government in providing economic stabilisation and public goods in which poverty is considered largely as involuntary and caused by unemployment (Davis and Sanchez-Martinez, 2015). Even though the neoliberal school of thought led by the new-Keynesians also adopts a money-centred, individual stance towards poverty, the importance assigned to the functions of the government allows for a greater focus on public goods and inequality. On the other hand, new-Keynesians are in line with neo-classical economists in their belief that overall growth in income is ultimately the most effective element in poverty removal. Unlike the classical approach, unemployment, viewed as a major cause of poverty, is largely seen as involuntary and in need of government intervention to combat it. Excessive inflation, high sovereign debt and asset bubbles are other macroeconomic factors, besides weak aggregate demand, believed to cause poverty. The paramount importance assigned to unemployment as a primary source of poverty under the liberal view is based on the logic that if individuals do not receive labour income, they are more likely to be poor. This sensitivity of poverty to unemployment can actually be amplified if poor individuals tend to experience discontinuous, short employment spells throughout their lifetime. Individuals from low-income backgrounds who secure employment but are unable to sustain it, regardless of their wages, are likely to revert to poverty upon leaving their jobs. This is primarily due to the insufficient level of savings accumulated, which is inadequate to support a standard of living above the poverty threshold.Aassve *et al*, 2005). In some pension and social security systems they are also likely to face poverty in retirement due to gaps in entitlements (Pemberton *et al*, 2013). Hence, the steadiness of employment is a central feature in preventing poverty persistence, not least because it also enables individuals to envisage better career prospects that allow higher expected future income, thereby facilitating borrowing (leading to longer term consumption-saving decisions) and investment in one's own skills and knowledge and social capital. It influences ability to transform assets into entitlements. It underlines the importance of distinguishing between transitory and persistent poverty.

MARXISTS THEORY

The Marxists Theory contends that capitalism and related social and political factors based on class division cause poverty. Adherents to this school of thought advocate that "the market is inherently dysfunctional" (Blank, 2010). According to this view, capitalist societies keep the cost of labour unnaturally lower than its value-added through the threat of unemployment and, therefore, poverty in a capitalist economy can be alleviated only via strict regulation of the market, for example, minimum wages. A wider range of authors in the field of political economy suggest that poverty is predominantly a result of structural factors, including stratified labour markets and prejudice and corruption.

A minimum wages theory is the anti-poverty proposal of the Marxian or radical views of poverty. Riessman (1996) propounds that this law considers class and group discrimination as central to poverty and assigns a key role to the state in its intervention. Card (2001) defines minimum wages as the minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage-earners for the work performed during a given period. This definition refers to the binding nature of minimum wages, regardless of the method of fixing them. Minimum wages theory tells of how these wages can be an element of a policy to overcome poverty by promoting the right to equal remuneration for work of equal value. By suggesting radical changes in the socio-economic system, Marxian economists and other radical theorists highlight that the economic growth alone maybe insufficient to lift poor people out of relative poverty, because those who belong to certain classes may not reap any of the benefits of overall income growth. Similarly, by emphasizing the concept of class, it provides a shift in perspective, focusing on group rather than individual characteristics, with individual status considered dependent on the socio-economic environment in which they live. Nevertheless, minimum adequacy of income remains a key factor as supported by Miler *et al.* (2004). Within capitalists' system alleviation of poverty, they require minimum wage laws. A further contribution of Marxian/radical economists is the sense that poverty is a moral mainstream economic framework, except when they integrate political theories of justice in their analytical framework. Thus, shifting the perspective from unemployment to poverty leads to a considerable enrichment of the theory of the minimum wage.

Discrimination and class theory is grouped under Marxist perspectives as the theory of poverty. This theory involves a broad category of system flaws associated with poverty relating to groups of people being socially stigmatised because of race, gender, disability, religion, status, class or other groupings, leading them to have limited opportunities regardless of personal capabilities. No treatment of poverty can be complete without acknowledging that groups against which discrimination is practised, have limited opportunities regardless of legal protections. Discrimination of all kinds, for example, age, gender, racial and caste systems, all lead to exclusion, something that makes people vulnerable to poverty. Giddens (2006) is of the view that people who are disadvantaged or discriminated in other aspects of life have an increased chance of being poor. Discrimination is an unequal treatment of others. Inequality is more frequently related to issues of discrimination, exploitation and oppression, differential access to resources and an inability to exercise power effectively and to resist those who oppress. According to Hall and Midgley (2004), countries with high rates of inequality often have high rates of poverty. Haralambos and Holborn (2010) are of the view that any society in which there is inequality is bound to have poverty. They also argue that poverty is a class thing closely related to a general situation of class inequality. Thus, when there are forces of discrimination and classes, poverty is inevitable. Poverty involves an inability to participate in approved social activities considered normal, for example, going on a holiday. One, therefore, can observe that only the ruling class, the elite and the working class can afford to participate in approved social activities, while it will be costly for the poor. Class is a major factor determining the production, distribution and redistribution of resources and these are the ruling class and the upper class. Poverty serves the interests of those who own the means of production. Discrimination and classes entail inequality and social exclusion. Social and economic opportunities in all societies have always been inequitably distributed and large numbers have suffered the negative health and capability outcomes deriving from such exclusion (Hulme and Shepherd, 2003). If poverty is measured in terms of access to services and levels of income or consumption, those seemingly excluded from market participation and services require integration into state and market systems for poverty to be addressed (Green and Hulme, 2005). This integration or, rather, the terms on which certain social groups are integrated, can be a point of transition from social exclusion to a sustainable community or a less impoverished society. Therefore, one can argue that where there is discrimination and the issue of class, chances of poverty are high.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION THEORY

The Social Exclusion Theory argues that poverty is a process that involves denial of resources, right, goods and services and the inability to participate in normal relationships and activities available to most people in society due to economic, social, cultural or political arenas (Booth, 2003). This concept must be seen in terms of the poor having to live only in poor surroundings with other people excluded from enjoying social equality. This Social Exclusion Theory may lead to increased health issues like managing living circumstances, discrimination and decreased opportunities for positive self-esteem. This can worsen the plight of the so-called poor in society.

The Theory of Social Capital was originally proposed by Loury (1977), who contends that it is a complement to the Theory of Human Capital in explaining income disparities between black and white youth. As a matter of fact, this author views the notion of social capital as describing "the consequences of social position in facilitating the acquisition of standard human capital characteristics and, thus, economic status" (Johnson and Mason, 2012). In his initial investigation of race-based differences in outcomes, he argues that whites might be better positioned to build the type of social connections necessary to capitalise on job-market opportunities. Loury (1977) further claims that human capital is inseparable from social context and social origin and, hence, the latter two are crucial conditioning factors in the acquisition of the standard characteristics that lead to the accumulation of this productive stock. The importance given to this type of capital is evident in his statement that the social context within which individual maturation occurs, strongly conditions what otherwise equally competent individuals can achieve (Osterling, 2007). As a result, Loury's 1977) conceptualisation of social capital renders it useful in helping explain the dissimilar economic outcomes between, for example, minorities and non-minorities. Given that it can explain these inequalities, the concept of social capital is equally suitable for explaining the occurrence of poverty.

METHODOLOGY

The article uses literature review methodology to explore poverty in Zimbabwe. The literature is based mainly on scholarly views and augmentation in the form of books and peer reviewed journal articles.

POVERTY ON HUMAN RIGHTS

United Nations human rights bodies define poverty as a human condition characterised by sustained or chronic deprivation of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living. Human rights define the entitlements considered necessary for a life of dignity in society, including the right to an adequate standard of living, that is, the right to be free from poverty. At this high level of abstraction, the elimination of poverty and realisation of human rights are similar in that both clarify what needs to be done so that all human beings enjoy minimal standards of a decent existence. Collier (2007) argues that persons living in poverty are confronted by the most severe obstacles physical, economic, cultural and social to accessing their rights and entitlements. Persons experiencing extreme poverty live in a vicious cycle of powerlessness, stigmatisation, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which all mutually reinforce one another.

Poverty is a human right issue, one that affects people across the globe. People living in poverty around the world are often marginalised and face various forms of discrimination simply for being poor. Poverty is an insult to human dignity (Blank, 2010), but it can also reflect a violation of human rights when it is the direct consequence of a government policy or its failure to act. Human Rights Watch's (2020) research on poverty exposes governments for failing to meet basic needs of the poor in areas such as health, education and access to clean water, how the poor are vulnerable to exploitation because of their economic status and how extreme forms of economic inequality are created and perpetuated by corruption and mismanagement of public resources. The World Conference on Human Rights, in its 1993 Vienna Declaration, stated that:

> "the existence of widespread extreme poverty inhibits the full and effective enjoyment of human rights, its immediate alleviation and eventual elimination must remain a high priority for the international community'.

It further affirmed that extreme poverty and social exclusion constitute a violation of human dignity and urgent steps are necessary to achieve better knowledge of extreme poverty and its causes, including those related to the problem of development, to promote the human rights of the poorest and to put an end to extreme poverty and social exclusion and to promote the enjoyment of the fruits of social progress (Ferraz, 2008). It is essential for states to foster participation by the poorest people in the decision-making process by the community in which they live, the promotion of human rights and efforts to combat extreme poverty.

Human development shares a common vision with human rights. The goal is human freedom. In pursuing capabilities and realising rights, this freedom is vital. People must be free to exercise their choices and to participate in decision-making that affects their lives. Human development and human rights are mutually reinforcing, helping to secure the well-being and dignity of all people, building self-respect and the respect of others (Sen, 2001). A good example is William Easterly, an economist who is quite explicit in attributing the failure of many poverty-reduction projects to the failure of economists to break out of their technocratic straightjackets and to apply human rights. Poverty is really about a shortage of rights, 'the poor should have the same rights as the rich'. Among government economists, the farther one moves from trade, finance and treasury departments of governments, including in their multilateral settings.

POVERTY ON EDUCATION

It is widely agreed that the relationship between poverty and education operates in two directions: poor people are often unable to obtain access to an adequate education and without an adequate education, people are often constrained to a life of poverty. Poverty is strongly correlated with a range of home background variables, including parental education, which also influence children's educational outcomes. Thus, it may be difficult to separate these influences and to know the extent to which the education of poor children is being held back by too few financial resources rather than other home background factors.

Absolute poverty, the absence of adequate resources, hampers learning in developing countries through poor nutrition, health, home circumstances like lack of books, lighting or places to do homework and parental education. It discourages enrolment and survival to higher grades and reduces learning in schools (Fields, 2000). High financial costs of schooling make education less affordable to the poor, who are very cost-sensitive and opportunity costs of education are often also high. For example, children may work in agriculture or do domestic chores such as fetching water. In many societies, the benefits of education may be low or not well understood, particularly for girls. Goldin and Katz (1999) observe that the absolutely poor in developing countries usually have low education levels and some may still not even have access to or complete their primary education.

The relative poverty perspective emphasizes exclusion from the mainstream in rich countries, which can reduce the motivation of the relatively poor and their ability to gain full benefits from education (Schnepf, 2004). Relative poverty influences education when the poor are marginalised, preventing them from full participation in social and economic processes. In developed countries, there are sometimes groups of students who are excluded from the social mainstream. Some of the factors associated with this include poverty, language, ethnic minority status or immigrant status (Schnepf, 2004). Thus, social exclusion is a common feature that usually affects students who are mostly from poor backgrounds, consequently putting them at risk educationally.

Education improves food security and reduces malnutrition which, in turn, improves their livelihood, consequently eradicating poverty. When people learn about agriculture and farming techniques, they gain the ability to grow and maintain healthy crops, which provide vegetables for meals and additional income (Bravo, 2003). Families also learn what nutrients their children need for healthy development and foods pregnant women need to eat to promote their babies' growth. In this regard, education empowers communities to start poverty eradicating projects.

Poverty on Gender

The importance of analysing the phenomenon of poverty from a gender perspective is based on the need to recognise that poverty affects men and women in different ways. It is possible to identify the gender factors that increase or decrease the probability of individuals experiencing poverty and how the characteristics of poverty are different for men and women. Moreover, a gender perspective enhances the conceptualisation of poverty because it goes beyond a descriptive analysis to look at the causes of poverty. It approaches poverty as a process, thereby giving it a more dynamic perspective (Blank, 2010). In addition, a gender perspective contributes to the design of policies allowing measures to be directed at the severest poverty and the most vulnerable populations.

Poverty is defined as a situational syndrome in which the associated factors include under-consumption, malnutrition, precarious living conditions, low educational levels, poor sanitary conditions, an unstable position in the productive apparatus, feelings of discouragement and anomaly, little participation in the mechanisms of social integration and perhaps adherence to a particular scale of values that differs, to some extent, from that of the rest of society (Ruggeri *et al.*, 2003), and the concept of gender, as a theoretical and methodological approach to the cultural construction of sexual differences that alludes to the inequalities between the female and male sexes. The analysis of poverty from a gender perspective develops both concepts to help understand several processes inherent to this phenomenon, its dynamics and characteristics in specific contexts. It helps to explain why certain groups, by virtue of their sex, are more likely to be affected by poverty.

Gender contributes significantly to the analysis of the concept of poverty, since it approaches it in an integral and dynamic manner and identifies other dimensions in which the phenomenon is manifested. The gender approach disputes any definition of poverty based on income alone and emphasizes the fact that poverty encompasses both material and non-material and both symbolical and cultural aspects and that it is fundamentally affected by the power relations or social hierarchies, that determine the greater or lesser access of individuals to material, social and cultural resources as a function of their gender (Bravo, 2003). In that sense, gender can determine the degree of poverty and the risk of being poor.

Although the idea of the feminisation of poverty is questioned, it has pointed out the need to acknowledge that poverty affects men and women in different ways and that gender is a factor that influences poverty and increases women's vulnerability to it. In that sense, the probability of being poor is not distributed randomly among the population. Assigning the domestic sphere to women, the sexual division of labour causes an inequality of opportunities for women, as a gender, to gain access to material and social resources and to participate in decision-making in the main political, economic and social policies (Bridge, 2001). In fact, women have not only relatively fewer material assets, but also fewer social assets and fewer cultural assets, all of which places them at greater risk of being poor (Bravo, 2003).

Another of the gender perspective's contributions to the analysis of poverty is to expose discrimination both in the public sphere and in the household, revealing in both cases the power relations and unequal distribution of resources. In that sense, it is possible to link general and specific perspectives and to relate economic and social development to people's daily lives, thereby demonstrating the connections between both levels and helping to understand the complexity of the processes engendered by the phenomenon of poverty. This conceptual analysis of poverty is of crucial importance in that the definition of poverty also defines its measurement indicators as Bruce (1989) observes that what is not conceptualised cannot be measured and the type of policies needed to overcome it. Nonetheless, it is important that the debate on the conceptualisation of poverty does not limited by the possibilities of its measurement, in that it should transcend the existing measurement possibilities.

POLICY OPTIONS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES TO ESCAPE FROM RURAL POVERTY

POVERTY-REDUCTION POLICIES IN ZIMBABWE

AGRICULTURAL GROWTH POLICY

Agricultural growth is a policy available for poverty reduction at a local level. According to Lipton (1998), agricultural inactivity and deterioration has affected the poor, mostly since it has reduced their entitlement to jobs, food shortages and higher prices, hence there is need to promote agricultural growth. This implies that agriculture is usually recognised as a segment where growth is especially likely to lead to poverty reduction, either directly through raising productivity and incomes of farming households and generating jobs for farm labourers or indirectly through its production and consumption linkages with rural and urban non-farm economies. Khan (2000) asserts that agricultural growth, through technological change, is one of the most important ways to reduce rural poverty. Agricultural growth is essential for overall growth since it stimulates growth in the non-agricultural areas, resulting in increased employment and reduced local poverty (Lipton, 1998). Booth (2003) further indicates that in developing countries, agriculture is often the single largest source of employment and both the second largest sector in the economy in value terms (second usually to services) and the main source of export revenues. In such cases, the overall economy is unlikely to grow unless agriculture grows. It is important also to bear in mind that staple foods which account for half the consumption of poor households, are produced mainly from domestic agriculture (Lipton, 2004). For all these reasons, agricultural productive sectors play a major part in policy strategies designed to tackle poverty. Hence, one notes that agricultural growth is one of the poverty-reduction policies at a local level.

Access to credit represents a significant policy avenue for alleviating local poverty. Ahluwalia (1990) posits that the absence of credit access exacerbates the poverty experienced by numerous local communities, particularly because the economic frameworks in many nations do not confine the impoverished to wage employment alone. This deficiency in access frequently stems from institutional biases that hinder financial entities, such as banks, from adequately addressing the needs of the poor, even for projects that hold economic potential. Khan (2000) emphasizes that individuals, especially those with limited resources, require financial support to stabilize consumption due to their low and fluctuating income levels, as well as to acquire necessary inputs before agricultural revenues materialize. Credit is available from both informal sources, including moneylenders, merchants, landlords, and personal connections, as well as formal institutions like banks and government entities. Lipton and Ravallion (1995) contend that credit from the informal sector is often prohibitively expensive, reflecting the costs associated with managing small loans and the risks of default, which may fall short of fulfilling consumption and investment needs, potentially leading borrowers to mortgage their assets, such as land and labor. In response, governments have sought to either supplement or replace informal credit systems by providing assistance directly or through the banking sector. Thus, it is reasonable to assert that access to credit is a crucial component of poverty reduction strategies.

The other policy option that can reduce local poverty is investment in infrastructure and allowing the poor access to the same infrastructure. Awkwardly crafted policies of governments, such as penalising agriculture and neglecting the rural infrastructure, have been the major contributors of rural poverty. According to the World Bank (2000), among the policy biases which act against the rural poor is the urban prejudice in public investment for infrastructure and provision for safety nets. Booth (2003) asserts that the infrastructure which affects the productivity of the rural sector and quality of life of the poor includes economic (transport, communications, extension, irrigation) and social (education, health care, water and sanitation). Since most of it is provided through public funding, the level of spending, cost-effectiveness, quality of service and access of poor to the infrastructure and public services are important factors in determining the impact on human capital and productivity in rural areas. This assertion implies that the infrastructure might be there but, if people have no room to familiarise themselves with that infrastructure, it might be a waste of time since the infrastructure will serve no purpose. Rural areas that have managed to utilise the available social and economic structures through the support of a policy, to some extent, have dealt with poverty a long time ago. Therefore, it can be clearly noted that investment in infrastructure is one of the poverty-reduction polices at a local level

SAFETY NETS

Safety nets refer to alternative means of livelihood that individuals may adopt when formal employment opportunities are scarce. Lipton (2004) posits that safety nets can serve as viable policy options for alleviating poverty. Localized poverty often arises when individuals are unable to engage in the formal labour market of a nation. While many aspire to secure positions in offices or government roles with regular salaries, the stark reality is that only a small fraction—approximately 1% of the population—may have the chance to work in these sectors. In this context, the informal sector emerges as a crucial safety net, particularly in developing countries where a significant portion of the population resides in rural areas. The informal sector offers employment opportunities for individuals who may lack specific skills or the means to fulfil tax obligations required by the formal economy. Although the informal sector is a significant safety net, its effectiveness is influenced by the distribution of the population and the prevailing working conditions within the country. Hence, one can argue that safety nets is one of the polices that can reduce poverty in a country.

A land reform programme is one of the fundamental policy options open for developing countries to alleviate rural poverty. Khan (2000) argues that landlessness or inadequate access to agricultural land is probably the most important contributor to rural poverty. Alesina (1998) asserts that a higher concentration of landownership and unfair tenancy contracts are a predominant feature, hence a major reason for rural poverty in many developing countries of Asia and Latin America. On the other hand, in many sub-Saharan African countries, poor quality of land and erosion and customary land rights have become the major obstacles to agricultural growth and alleviation of poverty. According to lia (1990), land reform is a potentially powerful direct instrument for improving access to land for the rural poor and creating a set of favourable initial conditions for egalitarian growth. Gaiha (1993) posits that land settlement for the landless can help a great deal in alleviating the pressure on cultivated land and increasing agricultural output and income of the rural poor.

Khan (2000) argues that there is good evidence that both agricultural growth and poverty alleviation can be facilitated if land inequality is reduced, land rights are well defined and protected and the tenants are protected by fair and well-enforced tenancy contracts. A good example of the effectiveness of a land reform programme in alleviating rural poverty is in Zimbabwe, where it has provided significant benefits to many of the estimated 150 000 to 300 000 people, most rural who have been resettled under the programme (Vitoria *et al.*, 2012). The numbers of people who have benefitted from the programme are small in terms of the overall rural population, but the livelihoods of these people have improved because of access to more and better land, some of which is being used for commercial purposes. Mujeyi (2010) claims that a research study in Masvingo in 2010 found that on average, each household had invested more than US$2 000 (£1 200) on their land since they had settled on it, clearing land, building houses, buying farm equipment and digging wells. This investment has led to knock-on economic activity in surrounding areas, boosting the rural economy land. Mujeyi (*ibid.*) further indicated that land reform programme has created radical changes to the rural economy in Zimbabwe, breaking previously monopolistic commercial and state structures and resulting in new arrangements in economic relationships and in value chain operations. These changes have benefited some players in the rural economy and resulted in economic benefits being more widely distributed. Vitoria *et al.* (2012) asserts that there is also evidence of substantial investment in new businesses in and around the new resettlements, including shops, bottle stores, butcheries and transport operations, resulting in increased rural employment. Lipton (1998) argues that land redistribution, if it is not confiscatory and does not force the new owners into collectivised or forced cooperatives, is a source of increased efficiency, expands the demand for labour and reduces rural poverty. However, the efforts of this policy to alleviate rural poverty have been minimised in most developing countries due to resistance to land redistribution that comes from entrenched power of the rural elite whose hold on land empowers them in the political system (Khan, 2000).

Access to Credit

Gaiha (1993) argues that the involvement of formal institutions has alleviated somewhat the credit problems of farmers. Governments in developing countries can move from large-scale credit programmes that have attempted to target the poor to flexible and unsubsidised credit programmes that work for the poor, including those who have no collateral. Lipton (1998) advocates decentralised and group-managed or community-based credit programmes, that lower the transactions and diverse groups of the rural poor. In many of these programmes, the poor borrowers have started experimenting with small savings schemes tied to the rural poor. Gaiha (1993) claims that private financial institutions and governments can use the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as a support mechanism for group-lending to the rural poor. For example, in Zimbabwe, microfinance institutions (MFIs) typically offer financial services like credit to the rural poor which include banks, non-banks financial institutions for example non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government owned institutions (Mujeyi, 2010). Gaiha (1993) further indicates that these credit programmes reduce both the administrative cost and risk of default because of joint liability. Khan (2000) posits that the success of the targeted group-based credit, of course, depends on the size of the group, its homogeneity and cohesiveness, extent of direct participation by members and previous experiences with group activities. However, the government's intervention in the rural credit market has generally revealed serious problems that include rationing of subsidised credit and cumbersome procedures leading to rent-seeking, hence creating inconveniences and raising the cost of formal credit to small borrowers and credit is restricted to productive inputs and to creditworthy individuals who have collateral of land or other assets (*ibid.*).

CONCLUSION

The article discussed the definitions of poverty and the characteristics of rural developing countries. Among those characteristics, poverty is the key factor. The article also projected on different theories of poverty, revealing their different definitions of the causes of poverty and consequently affecting the responses to poverty concept. The developing world must consider implementing policies that suit their context because it was found that some policy options for these countries tap on are not effective in addressing rural developing countries.

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