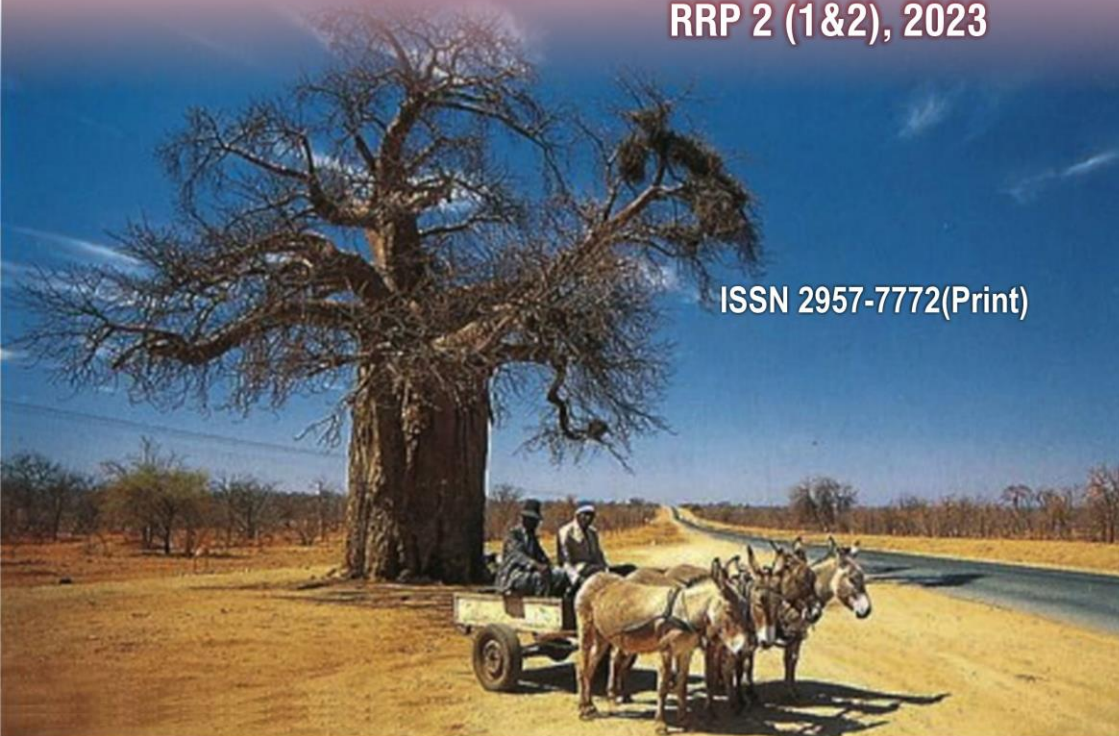




# REVIEW OF *Rural* *Resilience* *Praxis*

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The purpose of the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* is to provide a forum for disaster risk mitigation, adaptation, and preparedness.

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# Project Resilience: Relevant or a Far-fetched Concept in the Context of Zimbabwe's Rural Projects by NGOs?

REGINA BANDA<sup>1</sup>, HALLELUAH CHIRISA<sup>2</sup> AND NYASHA NDEMO<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

Project resilience ensures the continued existence and relevance of projects. It is a product of a variety of factors, thus a complex phenomenon that requires a systems approach to analysis. Little research exists on project resilience. For on-governmental organisations (NGOs) to remain relevant and essential, there is need for analysis of their projects using project resilience concepts. This article discusses the factors that affect project resilience in rural projects involving NGOs using a systems approach. It then suggests the Panarchy Model be used to do a project resilience analysis using three eco-cycles. After carrying out a narrative literature review, 35 articles were included in this study. A three-layered eco-cycle in the model is suggested with individual resilience at the bottom layer, community resilience in the middle layer and project resilience at the topmost layer. These layers have various players that interact in a cyclic manner. It was found that collaboration, knowledge generation, understanding the context and monitoring and evaluation are among key issues that ensure project resilience. It is recommended that NGOs partake in bottom-up collaboration with communities to inform their projects. Researchers are recommended to also do empirical studies to test the three-layered eco-cycle suggested for its relevance in practice.

**Keywords:** *adaptive capacity, vulnerability, poverty, sustainability, livelihoods, monitoring and evaluation, eco-cycle*

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## INTRODUCTION

Resilience that is viewed as both a process and an attribute or outcome has been a central topic across disciplines and no agreement to a single definition exists (Manyena, Fordham and Collins, 2008; Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020). Resilience is a complex concept that is a product of a variety of factors and it, in turn, affects numerous areas of human existence (Manyena, 2006). Viewed as a process, the concept of resilience is not static as it affects and is affected by the environment (Moenkemeyer *et al.*, 2012). As a product, resilience it is a creation of context that varies across cultures, social settings, economic and historical aspects (Tierney, 2015). Resilience includes the ability to bounce back and continue to function, the ability to predict potential problems and prevent them, the ability to improvise using available resources in innovative ways, having a shared vision of danger and how to address it and a way to constantly monitor the ever-changing environment for threats (Aguirre, 2006). Project resilience is defined as the capability of project systems to understand their contexts and weaknesses and to adapt in a manner that allows the projects to recover from stressors to achieve set objectives (Rahi, 2019). Project resilience entails creation of resilient projects and resilient management styles as managers may notice adversities more and correctly interpret the risks, giving room to act realistically to manage the risks and recover from any setbacks (Kutsch and Hall, 2016).

NGOs aim to eradicate poverty in rural areas by developing institutions and creating the ability to distribute assets and capacity in people (Begum *et al.*, 2004). Poverty is the opposite of resilience that is associated with vulnerability (Mutambara and Bodzo, 2020). This means after project completion, NGOs need to leave communities independent and empowered. Resilient projects can be seen by producing resilience in the communities they target. For this reason, NGO effectiveness entails the evaluation of both processes that NGOs go through in providing aid and the impact they then have on the communities. However, NGOs fail to adequately impact communities positively, at times due to poor implementation of effective strategies (Mago *et al.*, 2015). Poverty eradication is possible if there exists a clear understanding of what poverty is according to the communities receiving the aid. Poverty varies across places and time, and it manifests in a variety of ways, thus no single indicator can determine poverty and ultimately



vulnerability (Mutambara and Bodzo, 2020). Vulnerability and resilience are opposing dimensions of adaptability and household resilience is necessary to ensure project resilience (Cassidy and Barnes, 2012). Vulnerability is the reduced capacity to cope with stress and it indicates a need for systems to change (Aguirre, 2006; Mutambara and Bodzo, 2020). Vulnerability are distinct yet intertwined concepts. Vulnerability is the exposure to stress or difficulty, while poverty is the lack of access to resources that satisfy basic needs (Dube, 2021).

Another aspect linked to poverty reduction is the improvement of livelihoods. Livelihoods include activities and assets that people use to make a living (Mago *et al.*, 2015). Assets include natural (land, property etc.), social (networks, empowerment, etc.) and human (knowledge, skills, etc.) assets (Chitongo, 2013; Mago *et al.*, 2015) Livelihoods of individuals and communities determine resilience of the people and understanding the dynamics linked to livelihood in communities informs the level of acceptance of NGO efforts (Carr, 2019). Context remains a key aspect that NGOs need to understand because it breeds variability. Carr (2019) claims that, in some cultures, for instance, livelihoods are linked directly to men's authority, thus bringing forth power dynamics that are gendered. Livelihood brings focus to assets and the options people must partake in various activities to survive in context (Chitongo, 2013). Control of resources is political and political constraints and opportunities affect operations of social movements and these vary across contexts because of culture and set norms (Mutongwizo, 2017). Interfering with community livelihoods places NGOs in a position where they need to have an in-depth understanding of each community's power dynamics, hence the need for community participation in project implementation.

Community participation ensures NGOs activities are informed by the needs and circumstances of its beneficiaries (Chitongo, 2013). However, at times, NGOs fail to carry out a need's assessment for their projects in the communities they are assisting, that then affects effectiveness of interventions (Chofi, 2010). To effectively understand community needs, participation of the community needs to be from the onset of the projects, starting with project

identification, its design and eventual implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Tagarirofa & Chazovachii, 2013; Mago *et al.*, 2015).

To ensure rural communities are sufficiently served by NGOs to eradicate poverty, understanding project resilience is key. Project resilience helps to identify inherent risks of projects and how to manage the risks to ensure continued adaptation and existence of NGO projects (Rahi, 2019). This is essential in shaping quality of aid given and in determining relevance of NGO involvement in community development projects. To appraise the effectiveness of NGOs, the article adopts the view of project resilience both as a process and a product that is organised in a systemic way. Being systemic, the concept comprises layers that are interdependent. In this study, three hierarchical layers are proposed, with individual resilience being the bottom layer, followed by community resilience and finally the top layer being project resilience.

## **BACKGROUND**

The world is constantly facing shocks and disturbances in human existence. To guarantee communities adapt and survive, NGOs were made to fulfil social purposes through organising people and creating awareness in the communities to ensure the people are development oriented (Begum *et al.*, 2004). NGOs have always led efforts in providing economic development, with Christian NGOs emerging from missionary efforts in the colonial era (Bornstein, 2002). They supplement government efforts given that most governments, especially in the third world, are incapacitated to care adequately for the needs of their people (Begum *et al.*, 2004; Matsvai, 2018). The donor community also prefers NGOs to governments as key agencies for empowerment of communities, citing better accountability than governments (Mago *et al.*, 2015). Bornstein (2002) argues that NGOs in the 1990s came to the fore, leading development more than governments. This may suggest an evolution in processes to ensure continued relevance of NGOs in Zimbabwe. How this evolution in processes occurs needs to be investigated as it has fostered NGO relevance and adaptation in a context.

To eradicate poverty, NGOs engage in a variety of interventions. Empowerment is one social aspect that NGOs focus on. Meetings and

discussions are agents of empowering individuals and giving them awareness while raising their entitlement to the communities (Begum *et al.*, 2004). NGOs also empower women through actively improving provision of formal and informal education given that the best way to develop human resource is through issuance of appropriate education (Begum *et al.*, 2004, Bornstein, 2002). Women, for instance, could now speak up for their development (Bornstein, 2002). Employment was another method used to empower communities. NGOs create employment by assisting communities through micro financing and assistance in management skills building to create and run own organisations and by employing members of the communities in their NGOs (Begum *et al.*, 2004; Han and Goetz, 2015; Nipa *et al.*, 2022).

However, the effectiveness of NGOs has been brought to question. It has been suggested that since the donor community prefers to fund NGO efforts, to ensure funding is obtained, NGOs target projects that are assured of getting funding at the expense of the needs of the beneficiaries' needs (Mutongwizo, 2017). Other scholars claim NGOs concentrate on the causes of poverty instead of changing the attributes linked to the poverty, thus addressing symptoms of poverty, not the root causes (Begum *et al.*, 2004). Involving communities may be more effective in addressing relevant poverty concerns for communities, ensuring projects are relevant and so resilient. Inclusion of community members ensures inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems that arise from community experiences, technologies and skills and local governance (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013). Some scholars are sceptical of the notion that indigenous people's possession of indigenous knowledge translates to effective use of this knowledge to obtain sustainability that is only possible in resilient communities (Gwimbi, 2009).

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The Panarchy Theory, also known as the adaptive cycle, provides concepts that help elucidate complex systems and their dynamics (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Panarchy in resilience emphasizes the ability of self-organisation across multiple scales and that disruptive change is inevitable since disruption creates opportunities (Tierney, 2015). The model describes how complex systems are organised in space and time using the systems approach that emphasizes hierarchical structuring. Tierney (*ibid.*) states the model proposes that not only

top-down control is key, but attention should be paid to bottom-up processes to inform how multiple subsystems interact. As a tool, the adaptive cycle focuses on reorganisation and destruction to understand growth and conservation. An analysis of preconditions for resilience is key to elaborate how different stakeholders in the system create resilience to support innovation (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008). This article adapts some principles from this model to help evaluate the resilience of NGO rural projects.

The adaptive cycle model is a three-layered eco-cycle of the project. It comprises the individual resilience as the bottom layer, community resilience as the second layer and the project resilience at the topmost layer. Each layer of the eco-cycle is connected to the other as the players in these layers continuously interact in community projects. Each level has internal and external factors that influence its performance with cyclical relations, rather than linear ones (Garmestani and Benson, 2013).

There are four phases in the adaptive cycle, the exploitation, release, reorganisation and conservation phases (Allen *et al.*, 2014). The exploitation or rapid growth phase is where establishment of the system is done, there is assumption of a perception of unlimited opportunity and available resources are exploited to result in growth. Resilience is high. The conservation phase follows the exploitation phase, where resources are accumulated and connections in the system increase. The system becomes more rigid and structured. Resilience is low. Release or collapse phase follows where the shock outside the system exceeds the system's resilience and uncertainty is rampant. Resilience is low. Reorganisation is the renewal phase. The system is open to reorganisation and the likelihood of creative change is highest. Here, the resilience is high. Understanding project resilience using this model will inform NGOs of the fact that resilience levels differ across phases and rejuvenation of projects to ensure continued resilience depends on manipulating each stage to foster future existence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Understanding resilience aids in the better understanding of acute and chronic challenges to adaptation (Carr, 2019). Resilience is both the capacity a system

holds to react adequately to crises not anticipated and the ability to anticipate the crises and act upon them systematically to mitigate effects (Aguirre, 2006). Resilience comprises a network of adaptive capacities that impact social capital, improve community competence and foster effective communication and economic development (Tierney, 2015). Resilience aids in the recognition of systems weaknesses so the system can successfully bounce back after challenges (Rahi, 2019). Aguirre (2006) also finds that resilience comprises various systems, including psychological, social, and physical subsystems. Resilience entails, in addition to being consistent and robust in the face of disturbances, utilising opportunities opened by the disturbances as systems evolve to give new trajectories (Carr, 2019).

A project is viewed as an ecological system that is complex with multiple interlinking subsystems (Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020). Situations vary in context and adversity and the ability to handle the unexpected events depends on competencies, previous experience and attitudes (Amaral *et al.*, 2015). Resilience requires that a system be flexible enough to manage change through learning and information sharing (Reed *et al.*, 2015). Actions linked to resilience include the ability to plan, absorb shocks, recover from shock and adapt to various situations (Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020). Most aspects linked to individual resilience are found in community resilience, though new dynamics arise from how the team members interact (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020).

Projects must be structured in a manner to enhance capacity of learning and reorganising (Reed *et al.*, 2015). Communities need to be flexible and open to learning. Knowledge heightens community resilience (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020), as the ability to learn and reorganise is essential in attaining resilience for a system (Chitongo, 2013; Matsvai, 2018). Community resilience is defined as the ability for communities to renew themselves to restore after facing shocks (Matunhu *et al.*, 2022). Other processes, for example, networking, capacity-building and collaboration must also be in play (Reed *et al.*, 2015). Knowledge-building occurs continuously at different levels to enable the continued use of technologies after NGOs withdraw their assistance (Matsvai, 2018). Capacity-building is also key in building community resilience. Following a setback, it is important to ensure the innovative capabilities of individuals are strengthened (Moenkemeyer *et al.*, 2012). Action research

provides guidance in building capacity for those that are marginalised and in challenging underlying assumptions and power structures (Reed *et al.*, 2015).

Reed *et al.* (*ibid.*) found participatory assessment by stakeholders with the support of experts was key in coproduction of knowledge of the whole system through the bottom-up process that is part of resilience-building. Application of local knowledge in projects was found to be an important factor of empowerment to local communities (Gwimbi, 2009). Community involvement from planning stages is key for successful projects (Kativhu *et al.*, 2017). Other scholars agree with the participatory approach being key in knowledge generation (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008; Mago *et al.*, 2015;). Development processes must consider levels of knowledge that vary to enable partaking in skills development that ensures future survival of projects (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013). Indigenous knowledge systems are vital in relevant knowledge generation since interventions may be a vital source of knowledge that supports resilience of projects as this informs disaster preparedness of communities basing on inherent capacities of the communities (Gwimbi, 2009; Manyena *et al.*, 2020). Communities are the focal points in dealing with shocks and stressors and communities must be able to self-organise, adapt and learn (Gwimbi, 2009).

Resilience is found in the immediate environment. If resources are perceived as inadequate, the challenges that come with change are seen as a threat, rather than a healthy challenge (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008). Closely linked to this notion, resilience of individuals, communities and projects is affected by the livelihood of individuals and communities. A livelihood is viewed as sustainable where it can withstand stresses and shocks (Matsvai, 2018). NGOs complement each other in their interventions to give a complete package of sustainable development and livelihoods. Positive spillovers were also noted to those that have not participated in the projects by NGOs (*ibid.*). Livelihood is partly dependent on the distribution of assets. Household assets are important for community resilience and adaptation (Lwasa, 2018). One aspect of economic resilience includes infrastructure as this, among others, improves access to various markets and makes houses affordable (Nipa *et al.*, 2022). Olayide *et al.* (1981) as cited in Matsvai (2018) define rural development as provision of basic social services, including infrastructure and

improved agriculture aimed at improving social and economic need of the rural people.

A resilient system is where there is awareness of potential hazards and acting in anticipation of the demands to minimise them (Aguirre, 2006). However, environments are not static, they are continuously evolving and changing as subsystems interact. There are various power dynamics that exist at different ecological levels of systems, making adapting to the ever-changing environment by NGOs a continuous effort (Mutongwizo, 2017). With the effects and causes of disturbances being observed at broader levels, core impacts usually arise from individuals or the community that are then cascaded up through the projects (Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020). In individuals, a psychological level of resilience is considered where a shift from the external disruption to the internal strength of the individual (*ibid.*). Project resiliencies is a form of a temporary way of organising meant to react to disruptions and the creation of long-term resilience at various systemic levels (Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020).

Collaboration is a key ingredient in resilient projects (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008). Various stakeholders include academics, NGOs the business society and the political system to collaborate (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008; Matunhu *et al.*, 2022). Community involvement is another form of collaboration necessary to ensure project resilience. Having direct contact with communities ensures NGOs know needs and circumstances of the communities (Matsvai, 2018). Community participation and application of local knowledge has the advantage of positively addressing local socio-economic concerns. A different way of thinking is necessary where people aspire to achieve more than the minimum coping to stressors and reduction of vulnerability (Manyena *et al.*, 2020). Vulnerability and resilience are opposing dimensions of adaptability and household resilience is necessary to ensure project resilience (Cassidy and Barnes, 2012). Cassidy and Barnes (*ibid.*) also find that social connectivity affects household resilience. Policy and legal framework reforms have also been found to be key in ascertaining resilience (Matunhu *et al.*, 2022).

Community leadership must be able to encourage communities to partake in development projects (Gwimbi, 2009) Although the bottom-up approach collaboration with communities is recommended, some scholars feel top-to-bottom approaches may be necessary. Although people may have experiences of their lives, they may fail to scientifically analyse and resolve their problems, thus creating a gap for external help, including NGOs who assist in analysing the problems (Begum *et al.*, 2004). Some communities with the opportunity to select priorities linked to their resilience, opt for aspects that address immediate threats only, rather than those that deal with transformative change resulting in outcomes that are not as meaningful as others (Carr, 2019).

In addition, participatory development has not ensured practical and meaningful involvement of the people in their development projects. NGOs employ structured approaches that leave little room for community participation as they are prescribed to meet community needs in the short term (Dube, 2021). Different stakeholders also hold different interests, and they need to be satisfied with their level of involvement from the beginning (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013). In Bangladesh, NGO projects did not meet the needs of the communities (Saifuddin, 2006). Manyena *et al.* (2020) echoe the same sentiments as they find that NGOs do not meet the needs of the Tonga. In Kabuda, NGOs carried on distributing food where communities felt they could produce their own and did not need the donations (Nyathi, 2012). NGOs also lack appropriate evaluation of their projects, especially where the donors are not sensitive to the local communities' needs (Johnson-Lans & Kamdar, 2005). An understanding of poverty affects how the elite prioritise poverty alleviation and the measures they take and are willing to support (Hossain, 1999). Even with these concerns, however, resilience ensures an accommodation of interests of multiple stakeholders who may have divergent interests (Tierney, 2015). Accommodation of interests is aided by an analysis of how different stakeholders in the system create resilience to support innovation, given that innovation is a precondition for progress (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008). In addition, direct involvement in projects complemented by close monitoring and evaluation systems is essential in successful NGO projects (Matsvai, 2018).

NGOs at times have their agenda to fulfil. Some believe there are NGOs that are political yet not all NGOs care for politics, as others are focused on delivering development to communities (*ibid.*). The distortion prevalent is



that participation means merely coming together of stakeholders, yet no consultation is really done (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013). It seems that NGOs impose their will on the people they are supposed to be assisting in implementation of projects (*ibid.*). Some NGOs are religion-based, for instance, World Vision and Christian Care (Bornstein, 2002). This means that communities' needs are determined by combining relative development with exposure to Christianity. Bornstein (2002) argues that economic development in Zimbabwe is a religious act for those involved and religion is viewed as a unifying social force. Cultural sensitivity thus becomes relevant and an in-depth understanding of communities benefiting from interventions is necessary to ensure that these interventions are in line with community cultures. Strategy, culture and structure are the building blocks of project resilience (Rahi, 2019). In Africa, the realms of spirituality care not divorced from material aspects (Bornstein, 2002).

An enabling environment breeds transformation, thus NGOs need to take heed of the contexts of communities they are carrying out projects in. This gives rise to socio-ecological resilience comprising management of social and natural aspects in a system to maintain certain socio ecological statuses (Carr, 2019). Social factors act as catalysts or hindrances of transformation. Some socio-ecological projects threaten the social order and so are a threat to the stability of a system. Therefore, resilience that accounts for the social difference, power within communities and agency in the communities need to be theorised (*ibid.*).

## **METHODOLOGY**

A narrative review of literature was adapted for this study. This provides a qualitative analysis of existing literature to establish concepts linked to project resilience (Manyena *et al.*, 2020). The review enabled this study to elucidate on the complex relationship of NGO project resilience with its subsystems of community and individual resilience (Allen *et al.*, 2014). To avoid researchers bias, , although no framework exists for narrative literature reviews (Ferrari, 2015), some systematic literature review concepts were utilised. Google and Google Scholar search using key words “project resilience” and “NGO rural projects”, was employed. Only peer reviewed articles in open access were used. The researchers read the article abstracts to further screen the articles for relevance.

Articles excluded from the study include project resilience articles that were linked to projects undertaken by organisations as temporary measures to address shocks. Narrative review allowed the researchers to identify a pattern in the articles read in terms of concepts raised. These concepts were utilised to identify more articles to be included in the review. Researchers utilised the reference lists in the articles that met the inclusion criteria of being articles that dealt with rural projects done by or in partnership with NGOs. Researchers also included articles identified from key concepts raised in selected articles and these derived key words included “resilience”, “community resilience”, “livelihoods” and “vulnerability. Using prevalent themes, cases were identified and summarised in the findings, basing on key concepts they were addressing. These key concepts were identified through thematic analysis. The Panarchy Model was then used to analyse the relationships found in the subsystems that the researchers felt were different levels of resilience that influenced project resilience, and these are individual resilience and community resilience. Project resilience was found as the third layer of resilience. Concepts identified from articles reached saturation point, the researchers stopped searching for additional articles.

## **RESULTS**

Thirty-five articles were reviewed in this study. Below is a discussion of some cases that stood out in the Zimbabwean setting. All cases are rural area setting cases. Various themes raised included the importance of collaboration, monitoring and evaluation of projects, knowledge generation, capacity building and empowerment, project systems analysis using the Panarchy Model and understanding the context.

### **CASES**

The following cases illustrate major factors found to affect project resilience. The review by Dube (2021) based on literature concerning rural cases of Zimbabwe. The cases that follow the Dube (*ibid.*) review summary cover various areas in Zimbabwe across provinces to provide a variety in spatial location of the cases.

#### ***REVIEW OF THE STRATEGIES USED BY (NGOs) TO REDUCE VULNERABILITY IN ZIMBABWE RURAL AREAS, DUBE (2021)***

Dube highlighted how communities were excluded from projects they were supposed to benefit from. Households and individuals were found to be incapacitated to make decisions. Indigenous systems were not considered, for instance, an oversight of traditional methods to care for the poor was mentioned, for example, *Zunde raMambo* and growing of grain resistant crops. A case in Chivi, for the Rupike Irrigation Scheme, was identified where outsiders took over the irrigation scheme and excluded the beneficiaries in the decision-making processes. The researcher highlighted how Zimbabweans lacked disaster preparedness. Inclusive participation was stated as a way of encouraging innovativeness in the communities. A deficit of research was posited as one cause of the inability of NGOs to reduce vulnerability as this created a literature gap.

Dube also found that NGOs focused on short-term poverty reduction as they met the immediate needs of the communities. The researcher alluded to the assertion that sustainable development could not be promoted by NGOs because they were not engaged for that purpose by their donors. Development was said to be more political as it was controlled by Whites who were not in the context. Some NGOs instead created a dependency syndrome, hardly empowering to the communities.

Power dynamics were also found to be inherent in communities and these shaped who participated in the projects instead of using the needs basis. NGOs thus needed to prioritise communities and relinquish power to design and plan the programmes. This was found to address better the root cause of vulnerability, not just addressing the symptoms of poverty.

***STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNALLY MANAGED WATER FACILITIES IN NYANGA, CHIVI AND GWANDA DISTRICTS. KATIVHU ET AL. (2017)***

Kativhu found that financial capital was necessary to ensure project resilience for the water supply project in Nyanga, Chivi and Gwanda districts. Households had to provide finances for the maintenance of their boreholes. This was not sustainable due to low levels of income. On average, households earned USD38 per month, while the poverty datum line was pegged at USD481 (Zimstat, 2016). This created a vicious cycle in that water sources

were not producing enough water waterto assist in income generation, since they not adequately maintained. This brings forth a systemic relationship that gives insights into livelihoods of households and project resilience. Some water points were, however, useful in maintaining nutrition gardens that supported livelihood activities.

***STUDY ON EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS OF SMALL DAMS' REHABILITATION IN MUSHANGASHE COMMUNITY, MASVINGO PROVINCE***

This article (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013) revealed the need to understand the socio-political setup of communities in their contexts. A top-down approach to projects was found to be prevalent. The development agent planned the projects alone and then informed the Village Development Committee (VIDCO) of the plans. This case showed how some collaborations are done in the life of the projects. Partial consultations were made at some points of the projects where all participants indicated they were consulted in identifying the project but were left out in the planning stages (55% excluded). Some participants were not involved in the implementation (25%) and only 25% took part in monitoring and evaluation. Undemocratic leadership was found to be ineffective in motivating the community in partaking in community projects. Technocrats and those labelled professional experts usually dominate decision-making and so manipulate, rather than facilitate, development processes. Politicisation of projects was found to have a huge impact on defining how projects were run. Participation or lack thereof resulted in labelling of some members along political party lines. NGOs were found to be hypocritical. on paper claiming to include communities, yet implementation differed on the ground. This study emphasizes on the need for partnership, transparency, empowerment and cooperation among communities and project implementers.

***STUDY ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF NGOS TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN MUREHWA DISTRICT WARD 28***

The Chitongo (2013) study focused on Catholic Relief Services and how they protected vulnerable livelihoods of communities. Fifty five percent of the Zimbabwean rural population, according to the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC), were found to have no livestock that

could be sold in times of need. The majority were found to rely on agro-based casual labour for livelihood. Factors affecting vulnerability were identified in this article as including wealth, power relations and market access. Natural calamities threaten food security. NGOs perceived as critical of the government, face repression and were not afforded freedom of operation as politics plays a key role in determining their operational space. This article introduced the need to have external support that was in line with community needs to ensure project resilience.

### **NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND RURAL POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN BINGA**

Mago *et al.* (2015) did a study in Binga where they indicated a limited understanding of the livelihoods of the poor in the community? Poverty was found to be worsening, even with NGO aid. Sustainable livelihoods were found to be a goal for alleviating poverty. Productivity, poverty reduction, enhanced capabilities and resilience of livelihoods, sustainability of natural resources govern sustainable livelihoods. Sixty-seven and a half percent of the participants were found to be living in poverty. NGOs had failed to create an independent and empowered people. Instead, a dependency syndrome was found to be prevalent in some areas. Binga is a rich place in natural resources, but due to the dependency syndrome, communities are not utilise these resources.

NGOs were concerned only about meeting their objectives as community needs were not taken into account and addressed. For example, NGOs were issuing fertiliser in Siachilaba, the most arid ward in Binga District. Some NGOs like CADEC and Save the Children, gave out food to those who were not in need as the recipients exchanged the food they received for alcohol. No consultation on projects was done with the communities. In Kabuda, food distribution has no benefit to the communities because they produce their own food. Five percent in Manjolo confirmed benefiting from the NGOs and most of these were the unemployed elderly. NGOs were also found to be duplicating efforts.

How communities defined poverty seemed to differ from NGO definition of poverty, resulting in little improvement in poverty levels. The local people's

definition of poverty includes a lack of hospitals, schools and infrastructure and NGO efforts are not addressing these. NGOs view poverty as a uniform phenomenon across geographic places. Another limitation of NGOs in alleviating poverty was linked to donors instructing NGOs on what to do without consulting and understanding the communities that were benefiting. In addition, NGOs failed to reach the poorest members of the community as they were inaccessible, especially during the rainy season due to lack of proper roads and bridges. NGOs do not do home visits, thus many needy people, including those with disabilities and the elderly, are excluded. NGO offices are located far from the beneficiaries, thus a call for NGOs to decentralise. Some of the needy may have been excluded because selection of beneficiaries was left to kraal heads who may not be aware of these needy families.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Panarchy Model informs how resilience is a systems concept where multiple layers in the system exist. This article takes a stance of having three eco-cycles to denote the subsystems that are linked to project resilience. The lowest level is individual resilience, followed by community resilience and the topmost layer is project resilience. A systems approach is adapted as complex subsystems have been found to be linked to project resilience (Naderpajouh *et al.*, 2020). Factors that affect individual resilience, in turn, affect community and project resilience, though the relationship is not linear but cyclical (Allen *et al.*, 2014).

At the individual level, aspects found to influence resilience include livelihoods, empowerment, social relations, social support, control of resources and level of awareness and knowledge, among others (Chitongo, 2013; Mago *et al.*, 2015; Dube, 2021). For projects to be resilient, NGOs need to understand these needs and the individual contexts that they occur in as they vary. Collaboration was found as a necessary ingredient that informed NGO projects (Richtnér and Södergren, 2008; Matsvai, 2018; Reed *et al.*, 2015; Matunhu *et al.*, 2022). A labyrinth of factors were found to affect collaboration that understood context, donor influences, political and social factors of the communities. Collaboration also bred an understanding of community needs that was believed to foster project resilience. NGOs had to

understand and get clear needs of individuals as their resilience affect project resilience.

Most aspects linked to individual resilience are found in community resilience. Community resilience also depends on capacity-building and collaboration (Reed *et al.*, 2015), community knowledge and capacitation (Matsvai, 2018), socio political variables like control of resources and power dynamics (Begum *et al.*, 2004, Mago *et al.*, 2015). Control of resources is political; thus, NGOs need interpersonal skills in leadership that can navigate the power dynamics existing in communities (Mutongwizo, 2017). Community resilience is dependent on knowledge (Nyahunda *et al.*, 2020) and this knowledge includes that which is necessary for the communities to carry on with projects after donor funding has been discontinued.

Community livelihood is a necessity for community resilience, and this depends on, among others, empowerment of communities (Mago *et al.*, 2015). Empowerment was found to be a function of indigenous knowledge systems where adaptation of the communities, with the assistance of NGOs, could benefit if NGOs paid attention to inherent strengths of communities and to build on these (Lwasa, 2018). Understanding context informs NGO approaches, and this can be possible with enough consultation of communities from project implementation levels (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii, 2013).

This article suggests the topmost eco-cycle to be is project resilience itself (Allen *et al.*, 2014). As project resilience entails creation of resilient projects and resilient management styles to act realistically to manage the risks and recover from any setbacks (Kutsch and Hall, 2016), this study suggests NGOs identify across the three eco-cycles the stages of adaptation where the systems are accepting to change and high in resilience (Allen *et al.*, 2014). Resilient projects produce resilience in the communities. NGOs must ensure they have capable leadership that navigates the multiple relationships that inform the layers of resilience across the eco-cycle. Collaboration with the community ensures project resilience and the Panarchy Model champions a bottom-up approach to inform decisions and actions (Matsvai, 2018). Context must always be understood to limit conflicts that are linked to the different stakeholders that partake in community projects as each stakeholder has their own interests. Strategy, culture and structure are building blocks of project resilience (Rahi, 2019). Another key aspect necessary to maintain project resilience is monitoring and evaluation (Matsvai, 2018). These two processes will ensure projects remain relevant to their communities and that set

objectives are being met. Effective monitoring and evaluation will ensure NGOs understand the trajectory that their projects are taking, and corrective action can be taken timeously. Involving the communities helps the NGOs to understand the context they are operating in, given that the environment is not static, but continuously changing.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, project resilience may seem a far-fetched concept in Zimbabwe. Most cases reviewed indicated, to a large extent, the failure of NGOs in meeting community needs which are a prerequisite for project resilience. Given the complex nature of factors that affect project resilience, adapting a systems approach to analysing project resilience is necessary to investigate the multiple relationships that exist against the subsystems. This article suggests three layers in the eco-cycle as the Panarchy Model is employed to analyse resilience of projects by NGOs. There are a variety of internal and external factors that give rise to shocks and opportunities to ensure project resilience is attained. Collaboration, understanding the context and able leadership that possesses good interpersonal skills, allows for the different interests of the stakeholders to be championed to benefit both communities and NGO relevance in rural projects. Monitoring and evaluation is a necessary component that will ensure NGOs are still relevant to their cause and are achieving goals that they set out to achieve. Just like any other stages in the project, monitoring and evaluation must be done with the collaboration of communities.

NGOs remain key in the fight to eradicate poverty in Zimbabwe, as in other Sub-Saharan countries, because of the government's incapacity. However, genuine NGO efforts must be witnessed. It is, therefore, recommended that genuine collaboration with the communities be done, and monitoring and evaluation of projects be done effectively. It is further recommended that the Panarchy Model be used to understand the relationships of the multiple subsystems in existence as discussed. Empirical studies by researchers must also be done using the suggested project resilience eco-cycle layers to improve and perfect its application and test its relevance in real life settings.

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