

PUTTING THE LAST FIRST: USING THE CHAMBERIAN LENSES TO EXPLORE POVERTY AT SIVOMO VILLAGE, NKAYI DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Over three decades ago, Robert Chambers published a timely piece of work in the field of rural development. In his tome, he raised a plethora of issues which remain pertinent to academia, practitioners as well as policymakers. His work critiqued the approach to rural development and advocated for a new approach to dealing with development in the periphery. The publication of his work was timely for Zimbabwe given the renewed focus by the new government on development. However, poverty and backwardness remain rife in contemporary Zimbabwe. Using a Chamberian lens, this paper discusses poverty in rural Zimbabwe both from an existential perspective as well as in conceptual terms. It recognizes that some assertions made by Chambers do not play out identically at Sivomo where distance and household income have a strong negative correlation ($r = -.553$ (two-tailed), $p < .05$). Assuming such perspectives, the paper makes a modest contribution to the continued call for broad rural development for the millions in the third world. The paper suggests that a more concerted effort be adopted to realize some of the elusive ideals of rural development as outlined by Chambers.

KEYWORDS: *Rural Development, Elites, Community Development, Zimbabwe*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1981, the World Bank published a report entitled ‘*Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*’. The publication highlighted the developmental challenges of most African countries. Largely framed as economic challenges, the report however, recognizes that rural development needed to be incorporated into the matrix for living standards and broader development to set in. Although framed within neoliberal policy prescriptions, the report was part of a slew of publications starting from what Chambers christens the ‘development, administration movement’ in the 1960s which drew attention to the third world and offered solutions to how development challenges could be overcome. Some of the most notable works of this era were debates over the form and nature of development ranging from Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein and Walt Rostow. Not long after, Robert Chambers published his largely celebrated 1983 work entitled ‘*Rural Development: Putting the Last First*’. Although the generality of his focus was on instituting rural development, the text touched on various related issues such as *inter alia* duality of economies, centre-periphery relations, the morality of actors in the development process, cultural complexities as well as approaches to development.

While all these perspectives provide a rich tapestry from which to draw insights, the paper will draw on four key aspects from Chambers' book and use these as the lens through which to conceptualize and connect with the experiences of people in Sivomo. During the discussion, the paper uses vignettes from rural Nkayi to highlight the shifts and continuities which have been realized since the publication of the book. These contours in the development terrain are -much like Chambers' own work- indicative of a field in flux. To borrow from Chambers' metaphor, development -akin to the process of publishing a book- is 'like painting a long bridge: by the time one end is reached, the other needs redoing.' Such has been the general experience in the third world and especially in much of the nebulous yet commonly referred to 'sub-Saharan Africa.' Development has assumed many shades with various priorities guiding the process in different directions from one country to another.

Although the general conditions of rural Africa have been addressed in the book by Chambers, there are many conceptions and realities which portray a very diverse pastiche of the rural reality. Rural Africa is not a homogenous form across the more than fifty geopolitical spaces. Differences range from climatic conditions to cultural systems. Resultantly, the levels of development, aspirations and expectations of the populations will vary from place to place. Despite the variability, basic infrastructure and needs in life are prerequisites which governments and other development actors seek to meet. A key appendage to the rural sector narrative is its intertwined nature to colonial history and attendant policies of exclusion. The pattern is consistent across states such as Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania and so forth where land was part of the political economy of exclusion on the continent. Through racially segregationist legislation (such as Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and Land Husbandry of 1950 in Zimbabwe as well as the Group Areas Act 41 of 1950 and the 1904 Native Locations Act), a skewed distribution of resources ensued culminating in what Sir Arthur Lewis identified as a dual economy. In Zimbabwe, the division witnessed a distinction across three interloping sectors in the form of urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Although some changes have ensued with the advent of political independence in many of the countries, the structure of individual economies still reflects colonial biases wherein agriculture is the most popular livelihood and accounts for a significant chunk of the economy, while other sectors remain in the nascent stages of development.

The multi-layered textures which Chambers attends to will be addressed in the first section of the paper. These include poverty (un)perceived, knowledge ownership, integrated rural poverty and practical action. These will be succeeded by a snapshot of the research site and the methodology employed. Thereafter, a discussion of the development experience and conceptions will follow relying on a Chamberian lens to reveal the (re)shaping of rural development from the time of his work publication.

Chambers on Rural Poverty

Robert Chambers attends to a vast array of issues which in his opinion hinder the development of rural areas. While the challenges range from elitist biases, the invisibility of the poor, asynchronous cultures to power dynamics in knowledge, the focus in this paper will be on four areas which have been identified in four of his thematically structured chapters, namely:

- Rural poverty unperceived,
- Whose knowledge,
- Integrated rural poverty and,

- Practical action.

A useful starting point in discussing the text as well as themes contained therein is in paying homage to the dominant discourses of the time. From the tools which Chambers himself deploys, a world-systems perspective permeates the language through the core-periphery dyad. In his conception, the core comprises of advanced countries and the elite which it contains while the periphery comprises of third world countries and especially the rural folk. In ignoring a semi-periphery, Chambers' conception fits well with a dual economy thesis which sees economies as comprised of a rural sector and an urban sector, each characterized by different labor market equilibria. According to Lewis, the rural sector was characterized by surplus labor in relation to marginal output in agriculture. Because of this surplus amount and the resource endowments in urban areas, labor tended to migrate from rural to urban areas. The plausibility of this perspective is contestable. Despite the criticism, Chambers deploys these frames to reveal nuances within the rural development arena across third world countries. There are biases and stereotypes which maintained the colonially-rooted apathy towards rural sectors. For example, Moyo (1986) quotes a media article which maintained that:

'but miracle really isn't the right word. The success of farmer Makuyana and thousands like her is the result of a conscious government policy and a lot of hard work. Since independence in 1980 the government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe has *vigorously promoted agricultural production, particularly among the country's peasant farmers*. While many African countries were making headlines with tragic stories of famine and starvation, Zimbabwe's farmers brought 925,000 tons of corn to market last year, almost enough to feed the whole country despite three consecutive years of drought. *What's more, small-scale or peasant farmers like Makuyana marketed 378,000 tons of corn, or over 40% of the crop and over four times their pre-independence record of 80,000 tons.*' (p.166) [emphasis in the original]

In the case of the rural farmers alluded to above, the expectation was they remain marginally productive and not become key actors in the agricultural sector. The reasons for such lowly expectations were that communal farmers were in arid parts of the country and they did not employ capital-intensive methods of production. The legacy of colonialism was therefore still in force, yet a renewed ethos coupled with government support appears to have ushered a substantial increase in output.

Chambers also offers warnings to the academic and professional elite on how to handle rural poverty, both as a phenomenon and as a concept. When consumed as a cultural form, a pluralist optic is advanced instead of looking at rural poverty from one fixed analytical perspective. In other words, poverty is not only what the academia says it is. Neither is it solely what state mandarins construe it to be. It is a much broader form encompassing many aspects of life and manifests in various ways which a person specializing in one field often fails to acknowledge let alone comprehend. As a result, rural poverty as a concept requiring complete understanding and as a condition requiring intervention is often misunderstood. Such a failure to broadly appreciate rural poverty is also plagued by the challenge of knowledge and power.

While modern development scholarship and the policymaking elite is familiar with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) as a conception and approach replete with its own methods and approaches, it is through insights from Chambers that power dynamics between practitioners, experts, farmers and communities were revealed. In making a case for the development architecture, he indicates that the links of modern scientific knowledge with wealth, power and prestige condition outsiders to despise and ignore rural people's own knowledge. He then alludes to the various biases which outsiders wittingly and unwittingly demonstrate when dealing with those to whom knowledge is channeled. International and/or foreign knowledge is given primacy over the knowledge of the farmer regardless of how inappropriate

such foreign knowledge may be. An underlying indicator of power derived from knowledge is the embeddedness of a person in the modern economy. In rural settings, therefore, it is people like teachers, nurses, doctors, agricultural extension staff who have authority and enlightenment.

Integrated rural poverty is yet another theme which Chambers deploys to deconstruct the multifaceted nature of poverty across many units of analysis. There is the community, the household and the individual to consider. Even on each unit of analysis, poverty is not manifest in every fact of life, but must be understood without covering 'all aspects of disadvantage' (p.109). there are clusters of disadvantage which may interlock but tend to characterize the form of poverty within each household. These clusters may include vulnerability, dearth of power, isolation and physical weakness among others. when intertwined, they form a deprivation trap which suggests that poverty may be the result of at least twenty causal linkages. Beyond the familial and household environment, poverty may be entwined into the social rites and obligations faced by communities. Ceremonies and events such as weddings and funerals as well as emergencies may have a deleterious effect on households leading to a slide into poverty. The insights in this section have been elaborated further in sustainable livelihoods frameworks (Krantz, 2001; Ellis & Freeman, 2005; Scoones, 2009). Power has implications for who is capable of bargaining and what they bargain for. Among poor rural folk, power dynamics often mean that the poorest are in the weakest position to negotiate lucrative outcomes for themselves. This is also the case for the disabled, physically weak and destitute.

On the matter of the practical action, Chambers noted that whereas theory informs social scientists and allows for some to assume dogmatic positions, human behavior is however not deterministic. In this sense, people who are at the centre of the poverty discourse and the poverty industry are not rooted in unitary theoretical prisms but often respond to various stimuli in various ways. The rigidity which theory assumes is at odds with the flexibility which their existence demands. This perspective by Chambers draws out the classical sociological contrast pitting agency versus structure. While economic forces and structures of knowledge may have an overbearing influence on people, decisions still must be made at the individual level. As such, people maintain agency over their lives and not theoretical constructs. Given the intimacy of third world citizens to poverty and its causes, the question then becomes, 'what is to be done' – to borrow from Marxist/Leninist thinking. The answer proffered to this question is assuming courage and to confront basic beliefs, challenging personal values and exercise of the imagination (p.194). The corollary is that a set of moral questions emerges which pits various sets of beliefs and mores against local mores and beliefs. As an example, Chambers draws on the complexity of the statement 'the poorer people are the less they *should* be paid'. Importantly for the development practitioner and scholar, the changes are not expected solely from foreign outsiders but from the local outsiders who are part of an elite class comprising of agriculture officers, teachers, doctors and so forth.

An additional set of remedies includes avoiding the biases mentioned in earlier sections as well as adopting Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA). We will not comment much on the former but shall hasten to emphasize that RRA has since been succeeded by a host of alternative approaches to rural development such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA). Perhaps the most striking action which Chambers points out is a complete reversal in learning. It is this reversal which captures the essence of 'putting the first last', that is, putting the knowledge systems and approaches of the poor as foremost positions instead of 'expert' knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and so forth. Reversals are recommended in formal and informal learning platforms where curricula as well as interactions are all deemed fair ground for transformation. The elitist, snobbish and often racist mindset which portrays the poorest as lazy, ignorance, devoid of worthy insights and knowledge requires change such that those with power withdraw from the center and recognize that they have much to learn from the poor.

Mechanisms for such learning include joint R&D, learning by working as well as simulation games among others.

Research Site and Methodology

Sivomo ward is in the Nkayi District which is in Matabeleland North Province. The geographic location not only situates the area within Zimbabwe's administrative regions, but gives context to the agro-ecological context. Zimbabwe has traditionally been classified as an escarpment comprising of five agro-ecological regions which are distinguished by rainfall volumes, average temperatures and soil types. Matabeleland North province is generally characterized by low annual rainfall. The mean annual runoff in Nkayi mirrors that of other dry and arid regions where between 17–70 mm which translates to river flows especially in Nkayi and Lupane that are seasonal and often dry in the period June to November every year (Hoko, 2005). The political and administrative structure of the district is like other districts in Zimbabwe. This means that the district is demarcated into wards (30 in total) which in turn comprise of numerous villages (156 villages) within them (NkayiRDC, n.d.). There is one growth point in the district, which is commonly referred to as Nkayi Business Centre located in Ward 29. According to the 2012 census, the total population in the district amounted to 109, 371 people with an average household size of 5.1 persons (ZimStat, 2011). Ward 18 is commonly alternatively identified as Sivomoward. Fanison rural health centre provides the major conventional health services provision in the ward. However, due to religious and traditional practice, less conventional remedies are resorted to such as faith healing and traditional medicine/healing. Major schools in the area include Sivomo, Mkhalandoda and Nkuba and this infrastructural portfolio serves a total population-from the 2012 census-of 2 953 in 553 households (ZimStat, 2011). In addition to the health and education facilities are a craft centerⁱ and voluntary counselling and testing centersⁱⁱ which the government has assumed stewardship of. It is in this setting that a mixed methods study was conducted.

The discussion contained here is part of a broader two-year study (2016-2017) with wider themes whose interim findings have been discussed elsewhere (Zikhali, 2017; Zikhali & Zikhali, 2017). Findings reported here relate to the theme of rural development and are presented from focus group discussions (FGDs), observations and interviews with participants. The purposively sampled participants in the study can be classified into three key groups, the elite, rural elite and the rural poor. The elite are participants which Chambers would most likely ascribe the tag rural tourists, that is, urban-based senior officers ($n=2$) in government departments and Non-Governmental Organizations ($n=3$). The rural elite ($n=20$) comprised of rural-based officials such as schoolteachers, nurses and AGRITEX officials, the Chief Executive Officer of the rural district council and field officers from the NGOs operating in the area. The rural poor comprised of purposively sampled community members from Sivomo. Sivomo is sub-divided into eight villages. Four of these villages were randomly selected and from the sample, four households were selected. The selection of the four households entailed caution to include at least one household, which was situated either close to a road or close to a place where commercial activity was conducted. As such, at least four households met the spatial criteria.

Rural Development in Sivomo: Findings and Discussion

Chikwanha-Dzenga (1999) opines that wrong assumptions misinformed the Zimbabwe government's immediate post-independence approach where development challenges were construed as within the capacity of local government institutions. This misnomer resulted in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assuming the primary mantle of development agents/facilitators in rural areas. A diminished role of the state posed a myriad of challenges, particularly in the sphere of governance (Hammar, 2008). The raft of challenges ensued despite the state having adopted an Intensive Rural Development Areas policy, albeit with feeble energy expended to its implementation. The oft-cited indicator of the

success in this policy are growth centers or as they are colloquially identified in Zimbabwe, growth points. Nkayi is one of more than fifty centers, which were earmarked for growth as a rural center.

Perceiving Poverty

Much like other areas in Zimbabwe, poverty is rife in Nkayi in general and Sivomo in particular. The reasons for the poverty can be explained as follows:

All the three development plans formulated and 'partly' implemented in Zimbabwe did not pay attention to poverty alleviation in rural areas. The assumption was that the benefits of any national development strategy embarked on would inevitably trickle down to the poor in the periphery. This oversight could have occurred because of the concern with correcting the racial imbalances in all segments of the society. Poverty was thus not perceived as a national problem (Chikwanha-Dzenga 1999, p.44).

The result of the negligence over the years is that 13,837 households in Nkayi district were deemed food poor whilst about 969 were non-food poor, making for a food poverty prevalence rate of 66% in 2016 (UNICEF, World Bank & ZimStats, 2016). Sivomo ward had a prevalence rate of 61.1% over the same period and our findings reflect a similar pattern, albeit not only confined to food poverty but asset poverty. The households in the study generally mirrored the descriptions in reports such as the survey conducted by UNICEF, World Bank and ZimStats. A description is laid out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Description of Sampled Households

Sample Description	
Number of HH	16
Gender Split	Male=45%; Female=55%
Average Age	43Yrs
Average HH size	5
Age Distribution	"0-18"=31; "19-29"=15; "30-39"=18; "40-49"=7; "+50"=9

In assessing material poverty, the approach was to employ a method which incorporated income/expenditure poverty measurements as well as people's capabilities after Sen (1999). Such an approach is not entirely foolproof given the difficulty in assigning consumption values to household members (Atkinson, 1992). However, for the purposes of getting a snapshot of a household's position, the approach was adopted. Table 2 below shows the data from the areas scrutinized. The intertwined nature of income and expenditure is evident in some of the dimensions which interchangeably play the role of income-generators as well as expenditure-drivers. Such is the case with livestock, which -depending on the form of livestock- is used as a store of value to be dispensed in future periods of strain much like the insurance markets mechanism identified by Stark and Bloom (1985).

Complementing Table 2 data are observations made during transect walks as well as in meetings between officials and community members as well as one meeting between community members and their traditional leaders. There is one secondary road which cuts through Sivomo ward and connected to it are generally poorer-conditioned connector roads to various places including the rural health center. Meetings amongst community members and either one of the two elite groups tended to be held at a site such as one of the local schools or at the rural health center. The implications are very reminiscent of Chambers' observations on rural tourists who do not stray into the interior of locales. The implication was

obvious particularly for those resided in places far removed from transport routes. It is such people who must travel the longest distances to attend meetings. The average distance travelled as reported by household heads was 5.7 kilometres with the farthest distance being 10 kilometres and the closest less than a kilometre. Is there any correlation between distance traveled and (1) income and, (2) expenditure? Tests for correlation between household income and distance ($r = -.553$ (two tailed), $p < .05$) and household expenditure and distance ($r = -.487$ (two tailed), $p < .05$) reveal a strong negative correlation across the two. The test results suggest that as one moves away from the main road networks, one is unlikely to encounter marked entrenchment of income poverty. There is a plausible explanation for this. Sivomo is characterized by markedly low incomes and as such, would reflect widespread income poverty regardless of the spatial location of a household. This is not to suggest that Chambers’ observation about better off households being located closer to roads is invalid; instead, the ubiquitous presence of poverty masks some nuances such as those observed by Chambers.

Table 2: Household Income and Expenditure Figures in Sivomo

Description	Total Monthly Expenditure					Income					
	Apr	Aug	Dec	Average Total Monthly Spend	Average Household Spend	Description	Apr	Aug	Dec	Average Total Monthly Income	Average Household Spend
Food	\$ 299.20	\$ 440.00	\$ 404.80	\$ 381.33	\$ 23.83	Beer Brewing	\$ 36.80	\$ 72.00	\$ 67.20	\$ 58.67	\$ 3.67
Clothing	\$ 83.20	\$ 51.20	\$ 211.20	\$ 115.20	\$ 7.20	Gold Panning	\$ 48.00	\$ 118.40	\$ 83.20	\$ 83.20	\$ 5.20
School	\$ 203.20	\$ 132.80	\$ 192.00	\$ 176.00	\$ 11.00	HH Enterprises	\$ 51.20	\$ 56.00	\$ 54.40	\$ 53.87	\$ 3.37
Health	\$ 54.40	\$ 115.20	\$ 145.60	\$ 105.07	\$ 6.57	Vegetables	\$ 27.20	\$ 17.60	\$ 25.60	\$ 23.47	\$ 1.47
Emergency	\$ 20.80	\$ 33.60	\$ 299.20	\$ 117.87	\$ 7.37	Farm Produce	\$67.20	\$19.20	\$ 19.20	\$ 35.20	\$ 2.20
Communal Proj	\$ 33.60	\$ 36.80	\$ 35.20	\$ 35.20	\$ 2.20	Livestock	\$ 27.20	\$ 54.40	\$ 19.20	\$ 33.60	\$ 2.10
Travel	\$ 81.60	\$ 38.40	\$ 148.80	\$89.60	\$ 5.60	Remittances	\$ 196.80	\$ 244.80	\$ 227.20	\$ 222.93	\$ 13.93
Farm Inputs	\$ 188.80	\$ 217.60	\$ 99.20	\$ 168.53	\$ 10.53						
Farm Assets	\$ 323.20	\$ 118.40	\$ 36.80	\$ 159.47	\$ 9.97						
Livestock	\$ 163.20	\$ 134.40	\$ 156.80	\$ 151.47	\$ 9.47						

Both incomes and expenditure were incorporated capturing a snapshot of household positions at three equally interspersed points in the year. The points are significant when construed in terms of the agricultural season. The time around April marks the late end of the harvest season and is therefore generally characterized by food availability for those who have good fortunes off their farms. The period around August is one where vulnerability is setting in and often leads into a time of immense food strain for many households until late November and December when rains begin to fall, and farmers engage in tilling and tending to crops. As such, expenditures, particularly on food tend to follow the seasonal patterns. To gain a grasp of the income poverty within the households, we compare the average household depend as well as the average household income against the food poverty datum line for Matabeleland North which was \$167.82 in December 2016. Average total household spend was \$93.74 while average total household income was \$ 31.94. These nominal figures highlight the dire circumstances of households in Sivomo without peering beyond the personal circumstances of members when incomes and spending are distributed.

Whose Knowledge?

The second thematic area which was identified for scrutiny in the paper pertains to what Chambers identifies as ‘whose knowledge’. Data on this dimension was gathered in gatherings and meetings held between various compositions of the aforementioned participants. As already observed, knowledge deployed is revealing in terms of the power relations at

play. The observations were then complemented by insights drawn from interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with elite actors while focus group discussions were held twice throughout the study with community members. Two key issues emerge from the data gathered:

- Elite actors have justifications -both ideological and methodological- for deploying the interventions which community members participate in.
- Community members are not powerless and docile recipients of technology, but have devised methods of embracing technologies without compromising their own forms of knowledge.

The first insight relates to who dispenses of knowledge and who consumes or adopts it. Formal education through the school system is valued across Zimbabwe. Being steeped in western values and knowledge systems, there is little doubt that much of what is instilled to young people/learners is knowledge as mass-produced by the academic elite. In so far as informal education is concerned, there is a split between western and traditional knowledge systems. Western systems are exhibited in training programs related to such aspects as farming methods and health practices. The justification by the elite is either based on methodological premises or on ideological ones. The methodological narrative traces the way putatively 'contrasting' forms of knowledge are (re)produced. Traditional knowledge is deemed inchoate since it has not been subjected to rigorous scientific review. On the other hand, the knowledge which elites churn out is deemed worthy of adoption due to the various processes it undergoes to verify its usefulness. A second related strand used in the methodological narrative is the approach which the elite through their organizations deploy to have communities engaged. Informal and formal interviews are furnished with a healthy dosage of buzzwords and fuzz words (Cornwall, 2007) such as 'buy-in', 'participation', 'inclusion', 'sustainable' and so forth. It is argued that through deploying these tools, the interventions which communities are beseeched to partake in are more credible and legitimate compared to those imposed in the name of tradition. In this sense, the elite maintain a hold on power albeit with the often-false impression that communities are a part of the solution-seeking intervention.

The second issue relates to the fact that community members do not exhibit signs of powerlessness. Chambers almost portrays a picture where the knowledge relations render the poor apathetic if not helpless. Observations in Sivomo suggest that a more nuanced interplay of relations is underfoot. The case of Dlodlo, a former civil servant who has now commits his energies to farming is instructive in this regard. Dlodlo is part of a group of farmers who participate in a conservation agriculture (CA) program funded and facilitated by an international NGO. Although he adheres to the principles stated in CA, he insists on modifying his approach to suit the household needs in his home. For instance, on the aspect of mulching, he indicates that poor grazing lands compel him to use the waste from previous crops as fodder for his herd of cattle instead of leaving it to serve as cover on the soil. The modified CA is then altered once more by adding animal manure on the soil – an apparent act of restitution for the removed soil cover. In such ways, farmers are not beholden to the dictates of the elite-instilled 'expert knowledge'.

Integrated Rural Poverty

Table 2 above depicts the income situation among select households in Sivomo. However, Chambers does not confine his conception of rural poverty in the realm of income economics alone. Instead, his conception mirrors much of what has been written by Scoones (2009) and other scholars in the livelihoods field. Poverty is multidimensional, often a result of numerous factors at play and seldom readily deconstructed to identify immediate causation. The study noted the

various manifestations of poverty amongst households in the sample. Many lacked material resources which could be put to productive use. However, the analysis cannot be restricted to households alone. There was a case for infrastructure and need for a social support structure. Infrastructure -schools, hospital, commercial zones- is largely dilapidated and in need of renovation or outright replacement. The same applies with a social support structure which is increasingly getting thin.

Migration to Zimbabwe's urban centers as well as to South Africa has led to a massive depletion of mostly young, employable people from the rural areas. Nkayi is among the areas which have been hard hit by this phenomenon which is dated as a rite of passage (Mlambo, 2010) for young men. However, with new waves of migration in Zimbabwe (Crush, et al., 2012), young men and women have now migrate in droves. The burden of supporting the young as well as offering them material support daily falls on the elderly who are mostly overburdened by responsibility and work. When the burden is compounded by the disruption on families caused by HIV/AIDS, the situation is evidently dire. Sivomo is no exception in this vicious circle. The causes and manifestations of poverty are not simply related to income, but touch on various issues which relate to health, service delivery, infrastructure and elements which impinge on what Sen (1999) would identify as people's 'functionings'. Access to reliable markets is made difficult by poor road networks. Participating in community activities for very young people is virtually impossible as culture and tradition often imposes restrictions on who can participate either based on age, or gender or both. As a result, the ability to participate in certain development processes for a subsection of the Sivomo community is curtailed.

Practical Action

Given the technologies which the elite promote and the realities which rural folk encounter, there are many possible scenarios which may play out. People may wholly adopt the technology, adopt with reservations or reject it. The reasons as outlined by Chambers are due to a confrontation between dogmatic theory and the complex, fluid reality of the poor. On this count, all stakeholders in Sivomo were invited to openly engage on this matter in an interview. The community members also discussed the matter as part of an FGD. Theory and practice are often at odds due to the time lag which exists between testing and proving a technology and meeting the problem in its current form. Agricultural experts noted for example that although some interventions were theoretically robust, they were however compromised by delay in adoption such that when finally implemented, conditions in the field would have altered and therefore required modified or completely different solutions. The challenge of implementing conservation agriculture (CA) was a case in point. CA has been compromised by delayed rainfall patterns which now characterize much of the Zimbabwean escarpment. Because of the rainfall patterns, dry spells are longer which in turn means that debris lying on the fields is left accessible to livestock for longer. In a region where grazing lands are scarce, this often means that the debris is fed to livestock, thereby compromising CA. However, when the technology was initially introduced, rainfall patterns were still in sync with the norm and such dynamics were not at play.

The idea in discussing these matters was not to identify challenges, but to solicit perspectives which could be identified as possible solutions. In this regard, both elites and locals were invited to proffer solutions on various issues raised. The broad consensus appears to have been that technology and local knowledge ought to be fused such that the dual systems of knowledge complemented one another. This is nothing new especially given that Chambers had suggested much the same. What remained uncertain was how the power relations of this hybrid knowledge structure would be constructed. It is unfortunate that on this matter, the elite -especially in fields such as agriculture and science- proved the least likely to compromise. Some local knowledge was either dismissed as an anachronism or labelled a myth. Seldom did

they take locally produced knowledge as wholly plausible. It is in areas such as health that a confluence appears to have been identified, presumably because numerous ailments are treated in traditional and spiritual platforms. However, even here there was skepticism when a disease such as HIV/AIDS, Cholera and Malaria were discussed; health practitioners leaning towards western science and discrediting local remedies. The picture is therefore mixed and not particularly convincing with respect to finding a consensually accepted remedy.

CONCLUSIONS

More than three decades ago, Robert Chambers published a timely piece which served as an audit of the development thinker and practitioner's landscape. In addition, he offered numerous recommendations on various themes which compromise effective understanding and solving of the poverty problem. While not being as outlandish in style and ethos as Jeffrey Sach's 'The end of poverty', it does offer a raft of solutions to be employed by academics, elite actors and common people alike. This paper has employed a Chamberian lens to the plight and experiences of people in Sivomo, a ward in the Nkayi district in Zimbabwe. Hinged on a mixed methods approach, the study reveals that there is a strong negative correlation between household income and distance to major transport routes ($r = -.553$ (two tailed), $p < .05$) as well as between household expenditure and distance ($r = -.487$ (two tailed), $p < .05$). These correlations suggest that the observation by Chambers does not apply to households in Sivomo. Such an observation is plausible given the broad prevalence of poverty in the area under study, that is, the poor are both close to and far off the main transport arteries. There are parallels between Chambers' recognition of competing knowledge streams and those identified in Sivomo. Western knowledge is given the dominant role in the production of new knowledge often at the expense of local and/or traditional knowledge. Such power dynamics tend to obfuscate an understanding of the various manifestations of poverty in the area because the conventional and the popular conception of poverty is income based. Yet there are more nuanced causes and manifestations of poverty in Sivomo which relate to societal and cultural factors. Migration, poor infrastructure, collapsing social support all coalesce to form a mixture which both causes and reveals integrated poverty in the area. In coming up with solutions to the challenges, combined efforts involving elites and communities are idealized. However, some experts are often at odds with the knowledge of the locals. The result is not determining a solution, but jousting over who exerts more influence in the locale. The discussion by Chambers compels us to relook the approaches assumed in rural development and the question whether three decades onwards, our approaches as academics, as policymakers and as communities have changed for the better or we still grapple with the same problems. The discussion situated in Sivomo suggests that changes in some aspects have been made, but more effort is required in such areas as knowledge production.

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