A multi-sphere project assessment framework for livelihood projects in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: **Incapacitation due to low commitment levels, limited stakeholder participation and the adhoc manner in which assessments are done defeat the purpose for which the practice and process was instituted, "to judge the direction, progress and performance of programs and projects." This scenario undermines the noble benefits and value that the assessment practice brings to the design, planning and implementation of programs. Thus, the need for a multi-sphere assessment framework tended towards stakeholder commitment, inclusion and participation becomes apparent. This study assesses the need for a multi-sphere assessment framework for livelihood projects in Zimbabwe, by interrogating the participants' experiences, and perceptions, on the assessment practice, and the ideal components of the new framework. Data for this study were collected through, desktop review, focus group discussion and questionnaires, limited to non-probability purposive, and conveniently selected 85 participants from Bulilima, Gwanda, Mangwe and Umzingwane districts of Zimbabwe. These participants comprised of district development coordinators (DDCs), Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Rural District Council (RDC) chief executive officers, councilors, traditional leaders (chiefs), NGO managers, and heads of schools. These participants were significant to the study, in that they brought depth to this study due the number of years of involvement in livelihood projects. The study found assessment to be a popular practice, that is variedly understood across domains and disciplines, but accorded little priority, done in an ad hoc manner, and districts lacking uniform assessments frameworks to guide all stakeholders. Hence, the existence of a parallel assessment regimes in the districts, and high incapacitation levels due to lack of political will and commitment. Therefore, the study recommends the strategic lobbying of all stakeholders to commit towards the embracement of the multi-sphere assessment framework, through the mobilization of political systems and institutions, to formulate pro assessment policies and allocation of resources. Taking this route may be critical in addressing commitment related incapacitation challenges and help stakeholders change their perception on assessment, resulting in a radical shift from an ad hoc approach to a proactive one that embraces inclusivity and participation. Furthermore, the proposed radical approach will foster confidence, participation, inclusivity, equity, accountability, transparency, networks, trust, and a mindset change, leading to new innovations in the assessment practice. The study further recommends, the making of capacity-building, training, and education the prime focus, to promote correct understanding, all stakeholder commitment to the assessment practice, and significantly contribute to the expansion of assessment knowledge. Therefore, study findings offer implications in terms of highlighting the salience of establishing the multi-sphere assessment framework that promotes inter-stakeholder collaboration.**

Key words: **Multi-sphere; Assessment; assessment framework; livelihood; Zimbabwe.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Despite the assessment practice's popularity across various disciplines and domains, it is variedly understood, and not well supported by stakeholders. Hence, its susceptibility to various challenges such as incapacitation, owing to lack of political will, exclusion of, and non-participation of all key stakeholders in all the assessment processes. Consequently, this undermines its purpose, of being a basic accountability requirement, an intricate social and technical fabric to judge project direction, progress and performance of a program (Ngwenya, 2021). Despite these positives, assessment remains clouded with confusion and still presents a myth or at best an illusion to most stakeholders (Sayce & Norrish, 2006). Therefore, the confusion and myth that clutter the assessment practice, limit its ability to be fully supported by all stakeholders and to fully achieve its purpose. Hence, the need for an all-encompassing, multi-sphere assessment framework that is owned and generally understood by all stakeholders. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to uncover stakeholders' views on assessment, ideal components of a multi-sphere assessment framework, its guiding principles, and its application thereof, that could mutually contribute toward solving assessment challenges in Zimbabwe and beyond. Informed largely by secondary and field-based evidence from Bulilima, Gwanda, Mangwe and Umzingwane districts of Zimbabwe, this study presents an ideal multi-sphere assessment (See Figure, 1) to improve programme planning and implementation, guide and enhance the assessment processes and practices. In the context of this study, a multi-sphere assessment framework denotes an assessment framework with adaption flexibility to be used across various domains and disciplines. In the same vein, a multi-sphere assessment framework refers to a stakeholder promoted and supported framework that is built on participation and inclusivity, and having the propensity to be used transdisciplinary. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a multi-sphere assessment framework that pivots on participation and inclusivity, that most frameworks negate. This framework will provide an appropriate direction, structure, and rationale to improve the

assessment planning and facilitation processes. Furthermore, it endeavours to promote uniformity in the coordination of assessments and compliance with the international assessment guidelines and principles. The framework is envisaged to add value to the assessment practice through the integration and coordination of various activities across different stakeholders, disciplines, and sectors, taking advantage of the diversity that they bring along. The aspect of pooling, sharing, and harmonizing of resources (the expertise, experience, interest, material, and financial stamina) by all stakeholders will be achieved. For that reason, the multi-sphere framework will promote and enhance the ethos of inclusivity and participation amongst all stakeholders, inculcating an ethic of working together as a unit, a sense of programme ownership, diversity, and efficiency in the assessment practice, among other things. The findings and recommendations of the study thereof, will serve to improve and inform the design of new and effective assessment programs, as well motivate more research on the assessment practice.

II. ASSESSMENT THEORIES

The term, assessment has been widely used across disciplines to denote an organised and systematic way of investigating or judging the merit, worth or significance of the current and past initiatives (Scriven, 2007; Kahan, 2008). Similarly, it denotes the gathering of evidence to make inferences on progress towards specific goals and shortcomings (Farell *et al.,* 2002; Mingchu & Leon, 2005; Melvin & Garry, 2012). However, Li., Klein., Balmer., & Gusic, (2020) view assessment as a systematic collection of information, about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of a program, for learning purposes. Therefore, assessment is a systematic process of gathering evidence, to judge or understand the significance of an initiative to inform future programming. Assessments are done to investigate the effects of an intervention (Bamberger *et al.,* 2012), providing stakeholders with the platform to learn from experience, ensure accountability, transparency, deepen understanding, improve communication and learning to improve development outcomes (Austrian Development Agency, 2008; LeClair, 2015; United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2016). In the same vein, Mathimani *et al.* (2019) postulate that assessment feedback improves partnership development and performance amongst public or private agencies. Therefore, assessment provides stakeholders with effective and innovative platforms to view, develop, regulate, formulate, predict, and differentiate various processes and outcomes of interventions guided by assessment principles and standards.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), (2007) assessment principles and standards ensure compliance to the assessment practice. These assessment principles and standards bear reference to transparency, reliability, completeness and clarity of reports, utility, feasibility, propriety, and accuracy (Austrian Development Agency, 2008; Yarbrough, 2017). Meanwhile, assessments are built on two components, the processes, and outcomes. According to Lenzen et *al* (2018) process assessment, is the systematic assessment of intervention during the project cycle, mainly to interrogate its operations, activities, functions, performance, component parts, and resources. Abildgaard *et al.* (2016) posit that process assessment is ideal in collecting both qualitative and quantitative data, allowing for greater depth and flexibility in the investigation, providing a more robust analysis of the links between intervention processes and outcomes. Furthermore, Flemming *et al (*2018) add that process assessment verifies what the program is, and whether it is delivered as intended to its target recipients, its design, delivery, usefulness, the quality of services delivered to the consumer, and examining whether its implemented and operating as was planned. Conversely, Randall, Nielsen, & Gourmont, (2019) opine that process evaluation identifies factors in the design and delivery of interventions that are linked to their outcomes. Outcome evaluation assesses programme outcomes, program replications, impact on beneficiaries and sustainable value proposition (MBA Skool Team, 2019. Therefore, outcome assessment help stakeholders know how well the objectives of a programme were met, and how essential the prospect of program replication is or was. Deducting from the assertions above, the indication is that assessments that done mainly focus on process and outcomes negating key factors that negatively impact on the practice. For example, participation and inclusion of stakeholders. This justifies the need to for an all-inclusive multi-sphere assessment framework which takes on board all stakeholders. Multi-sphere means involving multiple spheres (WordBueno). In the context of this study spheres denote stakeholders from various disciplines and domains. The inclusion of various disciplines and domains can promote the pooling of resources, the ethic of working collectively towards one common shared goal. The section that follows focuses on the methodology adopted by this study.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study interrogated the assessment practice toward the design of a multi-sphere assessment framework to guide and enhance the assessment practices and processes. The interpretive constructivist paradigm guides the study. This paradigm was adopted for its systematic and subjectivity in describing life and giving meaning to human experiences on a phenomenon. (Patel and Patel, 2019). Thus, qualitative data were collected through desktop study, observation, and questionnaires to understand the assessment phenomenon. A desktop study was conducted to collect data from secondary sources such as government reports, scientific journal articles, and policy briefs to determine, ascertain and gain insight on the assessment practice. Meanwhile, empirical data were collected through fieldwork, and questionnaires, limited to non-probability purposive and conveniently selected participants from Bulilima, Gwanda, Mangwe and Umzingwane districts. These districts were selected for sharing similar characteristics in respect to social and cultural aspects, and their susceptibility to hazards, providing the

researcher with rich opportunities to observe and get the picture of the assessment closely. The study sample of 85 participants comprised of district development coordinators (DDCs), Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Rural District Council (RDC) chief executive officers, councillors, traditional leaders (chiefs), NGO managers, and heads of schools. These participants were pivotal to this study for the depth they brought into the study. For example, being leaders in decision-making institutions, institutional gatekeepers, and custodians of communities, knowledgeable and technical, and experienced in the implementation of development initiatives. Considering the amount of time needed to carry out interviews, code data, transcribe it and come up with emerging issues, it was determined that 85 participants were an appropriate sample, sufficient for the Central Limit Theorem (CLT) to hold (Ganti, 2021). Questionnaires and interviews were administered to get diverse opinions of participants on assessment practice, and the envisaged assessment framework The usage of various data collection methods served to triangulate empirical data to ensure the validity and robustness of data. Empirical data were analysed using QSR NVivo, a qualitative computer data analysis program. The researcher was able to establish order, structure, and meaning to mass collected data and to present it in a systematic manner (Archer, 2018). NVivo software, helped the researcher organize, classify, and arrange data to themes and patterns to provide insight into unstructured data. Therefore, this data analysis process ensured a coherent, consistent, holistic, and quality-focused approach that advances constructive research findings and deductions. Ethics standards were followed by explaining the purpose of the research and by giving participants the assurance that confidentiality would be maintained. As such, participants were assured that the information they provided would be used solely for academic purposes.

IV. SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

A total of 85 participants aged between 18 and 84 years participated in the study, while the average age of the study participants was 31 years. Gender representation in the study was 45% females and 55% males.

4.1 Conceptualisation of assessments

Interrogating participants' conceptualisation of the term helped distinguish and categorise their basic understanding and test uniformity levels to inform the study. The study found assessment to be a common exercise amongst participants in four districts, with sixty-six per cent (66%) of the participants having participated in the exercise, while 34% could neither confirm nor deny. Furthermore, the study found government functionaries displaying a good grasp of interpretation and understanding of the concepts. This could be attributed to many years of practice, experience, and higher educational qualifications in the field. Therefore, assessment is variedly understood across disciplines and levels of responsibility and viewed as analysis and diagnosis. In an interview one EMA officer had this to say: *"Assessment is an*

analysis done to check the livelihood programme's ability to meet the future needs of generations and also check livelihood options that are available and their ability to assist in the long run." The view above resonates with Liu, (2020)'s on sustainability, which emphasises the aspect of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Furthermore, the study found varied views on the purposes of assessments. These range from getting a full picture of food insecurity, determining support levels, gathering information, identifying gaps that exist in livelihoods, assessing the impact, and identifying vulnerable groups. The purposes given are inconsistent with those propounded by White (2009), Terrell (2012) and Brown (2012), "to identify the actual outcomes of a programme, to explore the how and why of the programme outcomes and to bring an understanding of the success or failure and provide direction for programme improvement". Therefore, there is a lack of uniformity in understanding the purpose of assessments. Hence the need to make capacity-building, training and education and stakeholder participation a permanent feature in Zimbabwe. This could promote a correct understanding and application of the terms, and commitment to the assessment, thereby significantly contributing to the expansion of the multi-sectoral knowledge of the practice.

4.2 Capacity to do assessments.

Table:1 indicates the assessment capacity levels of participants in the area under study.

Variable	No capacity	Little capacity	Have capacity
DDC	3%	11%	-
EMA	2%	13%	-
RDC CEO	2%	9%	-
NGO	-	-	38%
School Heads	4%	7%	-
Chiefs	3%	3%	-
Councilors	45%	1	-
Total %	18%	44%	-

Table 1 Capacity to do assessments

Empirical findings indicate that 38% of the participants had the capacity to carry out assessments, while 44% had little capacity and 18% had none. These findings indicate limited or weakened capacities of most stakeholders in the districts and strengthened capacities on the part of NGOs. In an interview one EMA officer had this to say: *"Financial resources are always limiting for assessments to be carried out regularly and also for monitoring to be done on implementation of plans".* Conversely, one NGO participant said: *"We have human resources, with the right expertise and experience, vehicles, gadgets and funding to carry out assessments".* Drawing from the above sentiments, the inference is that inadequate financial resources limit most stakeholder's capacities to acquire the necessary assessment resources. In this regard, limited resources are indicative of limited or lack of stakeholder support and commitment to the assessment agenda. Meanwhile, NGOs were well-resourced in terms of resources (expertise, funding, gadgets and vehicles) compared

to other stakeholders in the districts. Therefore, the above exposition attests to the existence of parallel assessment regimes that fragment and weakened assessment practice generally. This disintegrated approach defeats the whole purpose assessment and is in direct contradiction with the principles of inclusivity, participation, and reliability. This justifies the need of an all-encompassing assessment framework.

4.3 Apprehension of the assessment practice

The apprehension of the assessment practice by participants across the various districts covers a scattered range from disagreeing to strongly agree. In the light of the theoretic underpinnings clarified, there is strong support for the proactive implementation of livelihood assessments. About 83 per cent (83%) of participants strongly agree that assessment is a systematic way of gathering project evidence and significance to learn and improve delivery. In the same vein, 67 per cent, held the view that assessments are done to comply with donor and legislative requirements. Meanwhile, 50 per cent of participants viewed assessments as a proactive DR mechanism and a means to respond to disaster situations. The only concern was that assessments are driven by the need to comply with the donor and the legislative requirements. Therefore, the assessments' commitment, true value and outcomes may be questionable. Conversely, this view directly contradicts with assessment standards and principles of objectivity and independence, propounded in section 2 of this study. Therefore, the assessments done suffer compromised credibility. The following section explores assessment-related challenges that the assessment practice suffers.

4.4 Assessment-related challenges

Various assessment challenges were identified through interviews and focus group discussions. During an interview, one Agricultural extension officer had this to say: "*Yes, limited resources, poor network reception in certain areas pose as a great challenge to the assessment practice*". In the same vein one participant in Bulilima FGD said: "*Another big challenge is that there is also lack of feedback amongst stakeholders (they don't share information*". This idea was adopted as the district position. On the other hand, during FGD Umzingwane, they had this to say: "*Incapacitation, lack of commitment by stakeholders, falsification of data, poor platform for the dissemination of data and information. Researcher usually do not share their findings with the district*". Drawing from the assertions above, incapacitation in terms of resources and poor communication systems (poor network coverage, lack of a standardised feedback platform) threaten the existence of execution of assessments across the four districts. More so, poor communication systems posed as a big challenge especially in Gwanda and Umzingwane districts, while uncoordinated development partners, falsification of data, lack of locally generated assessment tools, staff mobility and turnover, lack of commitment by stakeholders, misunderstanding of assessments tools contribute to the list of assessment challenges. The

assumption is that the overarching assessment challenges emanate from the lack of political will and commitment, limited stakeholder participation, inclusivity, and duplication of effort by stakeholders. This scenario portrays a relaxed attitude vis-à-vis the assessment practice, its principles, standards and approaching the practice in an ad-hoc manner.

4.5 Ideal components of a multi-sphere framework

The participants in focus group discussions and interviews suggested an assessment framework that is built on three pillars namely: approaches, practices, and indicators. as the three major components for the multi-sphere assessment framework. The multi-sphere framework derives its name from its inclusivity thrust with stakeholders drawn from across various disciplines and domains, standing guided by the principles inclusion and participation.

4.5.1 Approaches

Approaches denote methods of doing something or dealing with a problem Longman (Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2020). In the context of this study, approaches denote the direction followed by the framework to achieve its purpose. The participants advocated for the approaches to pivot on inclusion, involvement, a mixture of competencies, freedom of access, capacity-building, clear stakeholder terms of reference, drive for feedback, coordinated planning, experience sharing, intolerance for discrimination, field-friendly techniques, adherence to practice and procedures and research orientation. The identified approaches were viewed to be critical in building the stakeholders' confidence, reduce criticism during collaborations, and build a culture of collective participation, accountability, consensus, and experience sharing platforms. As such, these platforms could be used to dispute, verify and validated facts (triangulation).

4.5.2 Practices and principles

The second component proposed framework bear reference to practices and principles, that will guide the realisation, selection process and appraisal of evaluation (Derbinski, & Reinhardt, 2017). Proposed practices are regard for expertise, valuing operation standards, pooling of resources, partnership synergising and integration, innovation, inclusivity, information sharing centralisation and documentation and resourcefulness. The credibility of the framework's practices can only be realised if it is guided by the assessment principles, such as transparency, independence, reliability, participation, openness, and integrity.

4.5.1 Indicators

The third and final proposed component of the framework are the indicators, that provide a signal that something exists or is true (UNAIDS, 2010). Therefore, indicators serve as performance gauges, as well as qualitative strategic guides to the requirements for striving towards assessment. In the context of this study, indicators are performance gauges that give guidance to the implementation assessment. The

proposed indicators bear reference to the establishment of governance structure, clear analysis of stakeholders and roles, equal representation, all stakeholder participation, sensitivity to various issues (gender, environment, and climate), relevancy, capacity development, documentation and archival of projects information. Therefore, processes and practices are expected to promote the use of field-friendly techniques, clearly stated frequency of the assessments, clearly stated project goals, and describe indicate the type of project, specify the period of assessment, identify assessment respondents, guiding questions and an assessment flow chart. The findings of the study ratify the deductions that argue in favour of a framework towards a multi-sphere assessment approach for Zimbabwe. Section 5 below puts together the proposed components of the envisaged multi-sphere assessment framework

V. A COMPREHENSIVE MULTI-SPHERE ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The multi-sphere assessment framework derives from the discussions and findings of the study. The guiding components of the assessment framework consists of approaches, practices and principles, and indicators, and the process. The process indicates the links between the variables of the new framework. Figure 1 gives a visual footprint of the component and processes that guide the multi-sphere assessment framework (Derived from Primary data).

Figure 1 A derived multi-sphere assessment framework
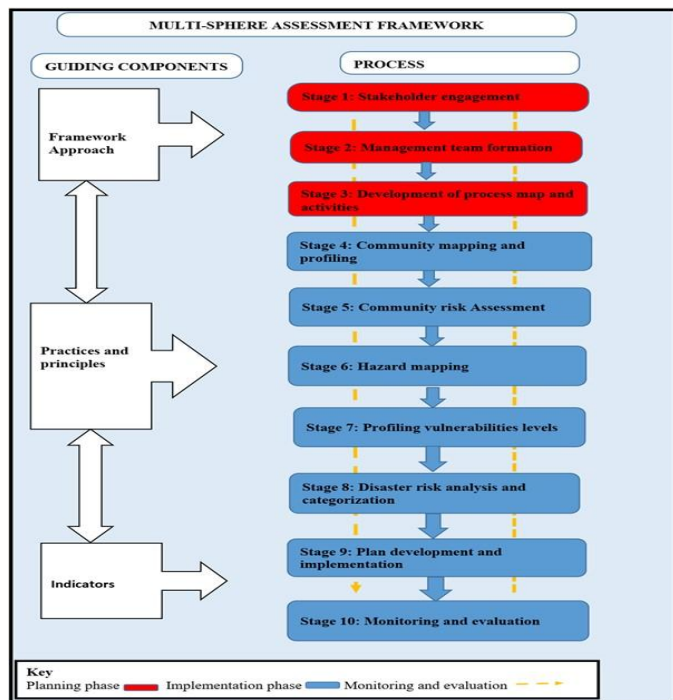
(Source: Primary Data)

The section below explain the process map of the comprehensive multi-sphere assessment framework.

VI. PROCESS MAP FOR FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION

A process map is presented to explains the logical sequence and links between activities of the multi-sphere assessment framework. The process map is in two components, the guiding components and the process. The guiding components address and prioritise the variables of the framework, the process component focuses on the planning and implementation aspect of the framework, showing how variables of the new framework link. The process map's numbering follows the sequence adopted in Figure.1. The section that follows explains the components guiding the framework.

6.1 Components guiding the framework

Approach, practices and principles, and indicators guide the multi-sphere framework.

6.1.1 Approach

The approach defines and guides the direction that the framework takes during its operation cycle in accordance to the assessment practices and principles.

6.1.2 Practices and principles

Practices, principles, and indicators are the cornerstones of this assessment framework. As such, they denote customary, habitual, regularly expected assessment procedures that are regarded as a standard which the framework will follow. Meanwhile, principles are values that guide, give credibility to assessment practice.

6.1.3 Indicators

Indicators communicate ideas, thoughts and values, measuring and calibrating progress towards assessment goals and also act as a practice measure or performance gauges, signalling the achievement of objectives, compliance with the framework's guiding approach, practices and principles.

6.2 Process

The process describes assessment practice and the relationships of various components of the assessment framework. Furthermore, the process explains the logical sequence and linkages between the activities of the assessment process of the framework. The assessment process consists of two components that describe the planning and implementation process of the assessment framework (See sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.3).

6.2.1 Planning phase

The planning process has three stages that explain the assessment framework implementation procedure. These stages bear reference to stakeholder engagement, management team formation and the development of the process map and related activities.

6.2.1.1 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement defines the engagement of stakeholders in various activities such as communication, goal setting, quality analysis reviews, or other program activities mainly to gain and maintain stakeholder buy-in for the program's objectives, benefts, and outcomes (Project management Institute, 2017).Prior to data collection, the researcher engaged the key stakeholders in the provincial and stakeholders, the Provincial Coordinator, Chiefs, RDC CEOs and Headmasters. Therefore, multi-stakeholder engagement and involvement is key to the successful execution of assessment programmes. Hence, the need to make it a priority. The different values stakeholders hold must be considered to ensure that their unique perspectives are understood. In this stage, stakeholders describe the programme's core components and elements, ability to make changes, development stages and how it fits into the larger organisational and community environment. Programme objectives, plans and resources are formulated at this stage in alignment with the legal and regulatory frameworks of Zimbabwe. Therefore, stakeholder engagement is critical in that it initiates the assessment process, identifies, and prioritises risks and formulates DRR, finance and the resources plan for the framework.

6.2.1.2 Formation of the management team

The all-inclusive team is drawn from diverse expertise, mainly to drive the assessment activity or process, and give it strategic guidance. motivates the development of the process map and activities of the assessment framework. Therefore, a fairly constituted team drawn from diverse expertise motivates stakeholders to engage in assessment activities. Overall, the management team provides the necessary expertise and competencies needed to fully execute the assessment process.

6.2.1.3 Development of the process map activities

A jointly developed process map and activities are key to the success of sustainable livelihood assessment activities as they give direction to the process. The management team sets assessment goals and objectives, sets up governance structures, and clearly define the terms of reference for programme teams and other committees. Furthermore, the management team sets up communication platforms and protocols and allocates resources (finance, logistics, human, infrastructure, and so forth) for the assessment process. The availability of financial resources makes it possible for various stakeholders to engage in assessment activities. In pursuit of the same agenda, the management team develops the contingency, knowledge development plans, and standard operating procedures to guide the assessment criteria for various programmes.

6.2.2 Implementation phase

The implementation phase describes how plans are into action to accomplish the strategic objectives and goals of the framework. The multi-sphere framework draws from DRR assessment practices namely: community mapping, community risk assessment, hazard mapping, profiling vulnerability levels, disaster risk assessment and categorisation, knowledge development, and M&E (Wisner *et al.,* 2012; Izumi *et al.,* 2019). Therefore, these should be seen as the inherent elements that must form an integral part of the day-to-day focus of all stakeholders. The success of assessing these DRR factors depends on the influence that they have on each other and the adherence to the components that guide the framework.

6.2.2.1 Community mapping and profiling

Community mapping and profiling relate to the act of defining and mapping out community and the environment profile. This is done by way of gathering data, information and scoping the disaster risk profiles in databases. Community risk profiles are developed through the analysis of community needs, infrastructure, critical facilities, and resources. Community mapping and profiling motivate community risk assessment, while community risks profile information can be used for programming livelihood projects and assessing the impact of the implemented projects. More so, they can be used as a barometer for detecting livelihood outcome levels. For example, the status of food security levels by the community. Community mapping and profiling pave the way for another process, the community risk assessment.

6.2.2.2 Community risk assessment

Community risk assessment entails mobilization of communities, analysing their resources, vulnerability contexts, and identification of their roles and responsibilities. Assessment precedes risk analysis, a critical risk mapping exercise for identifying existent risk levels before or after the implementation of a project. Therefore, the mapping of existent risks in communities provide a baseline, as well as a benchmark for assessing the implemented project. The section that follows reviews the hazard mapping process.

6.2.2.3 Hazard mapping

Hazard mapping denote the identification of prevalent hazards in a given area, and determining their times of occurrence and why? Hazard mapping is done through field surveys, multi-hazard identification, risk mapping, prioritization, and profiling. The created risk profiles can be used for planning sustainable livelihood projects. Once the risk and livelihood profiles are determined, they must be constantly monitored and reassessed. Having mapped and profiled the risks and projects, it becomes imperative to profile the community's vulnerability levels.

6.2.2.4 Profiling vulnerability levels

Profiling community vulnerability brings into perspective the profiles of conditions that fuel vulnerabilities, and the periods when a vulnerability is extremely high. This process helps identify community vulnerability, vulnerable groups, and vulnerability patterns. Thus, it is a powerful and valuable planning tool to promote informed interventions. The section

that follows focuses on disaster risk assessment and categorisation.

6.2.2.5 *Disaster risk assessment and categorisation*

The disaster risk assessment and categorisation process entails the identification and categorisation of new emerging trends of risks and their subsequent comparison with historical data. This process rates group vulnerabilities, identify priority risks and profile high-risk levels. The actual assessment exercise is implemented only after the rating and prioritization of community risks. Therefore, this process provides planners with a full picture of actual trends of disaster risks that threaten the community's livelihoods. Based on this information, planning for and assessment of livelihood-related programmes can be improved and achieved.

6.2.2.6 *Assessment and implementation plan*

In this stage, the assessment plan is executed, turning the objectives and strategies of the framework into action plans. Knowledge development is the mainstay of this stage. Data is collected, analysed and findings are derived, followed by the review and validation of results through a cost-benefit analysis. To ensure the validity of the assessment results, independent external assessors are engaged to review and validate the assessment report. Stakeholders are debriefed on the findings and recommendations. Thereafter, the livelihood assessment is ratified and reports are shared through established communications platforms and protocols. Knowledge development can be incomplete without reviewing monitoring and evaluation (M&E).

6.2.2.7 *Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)*

M&E process is critical to the multi-sphere framework in that it provides ways of checking adherence to the components of the framework (Figure. 2), the outcome and the process. Furthermore, M&E ensures a continuous review of programme outcomes in relation to objectives throughout all the stages of the framework. It determines the cause and effect of the programme outcomes and the effectiveness of the programme. Periodic M&E exercises help detect anomalies and deviations in the implementation of sustainable livelihood programmes. Therefore, M&E offers a way to critically review outcomes, identify and detect early gaps, challenges, and problems encountered during the assessment cycle (planning and the implementation process). The identification and detection of gaps, challenges and problems prompt the modification, mending and upgrading of objectives and programme strategies. Thereafter, the programme is adapted to the changing environment and reports are compiled and shared with stakeholders through established communications platforms and protocols. Having prioritised the variables of the updated multi-sphere assessment framework and indicated the links, the merits of the adapted framework can be considered.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In brief, it is apparent from the discussions that took place in Bulilima, Gwanda, Mangwe, and Umzingwane that the need for multi-sphere assessment is paramount, regardless of practice's popularity transdisciplinary. Despite its popularity, assessment is variedly understood, accorded little priority, done in an ad hoc manner, and legging behind in terms of shared frameworks to guide the exercise. Contrariwise, these phenomena directly contribute to most of the assessment challenges, which continues to inhibit its full adoption and usage countrywide. Hence, the justification for the adoption of a multi-sphere assessment framework that mainstream participation, and inclusion through the involvement of all stakeholders. Second, the study found the stakeholders' capacities to do assessments to be tented towards incapacitation, compounded by the existence of parallel assessment regime, that weakens the assessment practice generally. The participants' appreciation of the assessment practice, ranged from disagree to strongly disagree, meanwhile, incapacitation and poor communication systems thwarted assessment efforts. In the same vein the study found assessment related challenges to emanate, from the lack of or low political will, commitment, and stakeholder engagement. Therefore. insights from empirical perspectives pointed to the need for a multi-stakeholder assessment framework, that serves as an integral component of assessment when the capacities of stakeholders are tenuous.

Based on the findings, and conclusions the study recommends: that the Government should push for the institutionalisation of the assessment practice; rigorous campaign for resources and long term commitment towards building and sustenance of stakeholders' assessment capabilities. More so, there is need to strategically lobby for all stakeholder commitment towards the embracement of the multi-sphere assessment framework, through the mobilization of political systems and institutions, to formulate pro assessment policies and allocation of resources. This could foster new partnerships and encourage the ethic of working together and participation. Therefore, taking this route may be critical in addressing commitment-related incapacitation challenges, the ad hoc approach to assessment. These recommendations will help stakeholders change their perception of assessment. In turn, this radical shift will foster confidence, participation, inclusivity, equity, accountability, transparency, networks, trust, and a mindset change leading to new innovations in the assessment practice.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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