

Tackling Poverty through Resilience in Rural Communities of Luapula Province of Zambia

Joseph Musonda (PhD), Yvonne Kasongo
Ministry of Education, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Rural Communities of Luapula Province of Zambia continue to experience economic and social shocks as a result of change in weather patterns, impact of COVID-19 pandemic, sticking to old agricultural practices, rapid depletion of natural resources and lack of extension services. Poverty levels are reported to be swinging between 76% and 82% and rural populations are the most affected. This study was conducted under the topic; Tackling Poverty through Resilience in Rural Communities of Luapula Province of Zambia. The general objective was to explore ways that will enhance community capacity to recover quickly from the poverty trap that they are found in. The study used the qualitative research method and primary data was collected through informal interviews with key respondents, checklist driven interviews, focus groups comprising village members both men and women, questionnaire survey, participant observation and activity within the farming communities and interviews with key actors that included ministry of agriculture food and fisheries officers, village leaders, line government ministry officials, commercial seed and fertilizer suppliers. Secondary data was collected through reports, leaflets and books. Data was analyzed qualitatively using themes. The study adopted the Social Capital Theory because it is necessary for strong social relationships, both internal and external to the community, to proceed. The findings of the study are that; poverty in rural areas of Luapula province is high and is exacerbated by unstable weather conditions, low literacy levels among community members, illnesses like malaria, COVID – 19 and malnutrition. Other causes are rapid depletion of natural resources. Both the community and government have not acted prudently towards poverty elimination and effective and sustainable utilization of natural resources which have perpetuated poverty especially in rural communities. Agriculture methods have not been improved upon and communities have continued to practice old traditional methods that have not increased production and yields. Further, the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) which is run by government has not adequately addressed the food insecurity in many homes as the support is usually delivered late or is characterized by challenges that affect farmers. On the other hand, fishing which is the main occupation for most people living near water bodies has been practiced in a very crude way thereby depleting fish stocks and rendering rivers and lakes swimming pools due to absence of fish in them. Agriculture extension services have declined drastically due to non-recruitment of new officers resulting in few officers in service. The number of the workforce continues to dwindle through retirements, death and resignations. In view of all these, communities have no capacity to recover from shocks that come as a result of adverse weather patterns, absence of human capital, faulty technological methods and inadequate external support. The study recommends that government should employ and deploy extension workers in rural communities, improve on early weather warnings, support innovative agriculture methods that increase yield and build capacity in communities to address their problems. External support in terms of finance, tangible and intangible resources are recipe for rural emancipation and growth.

Key words: Resilience, Early Weather Warning, Poverty trap, Capability, COVID-19 pandemic

INTRODUCTION

Luapula province is the seventh most populated province in Zambia with 1.2 million people (CSO, 2017). According to the Central Statistical Office, the province has the second highest rate of poverty with 81 out of every 100 people live

in poverty (CSO, 2018). The province contributes 2.8% to Zambia's total GDP and has the highest unemployment rate of 24.2% (CSO, 2017). The province also is the third lowest rate of family planning use and 40% of married women use a modern method of contraception, and one in five have an unmet need for family planning, fifth highest adolescent pregnancy rate in Zambia with one in four female adolescents (ages 15 to 19) have had a live birth (CSO, 2018). The province has a second national highest prevalence of disability among adults (ages 18 and older) at 13.7% (CSO, 2018). Twenty-six percent of employed youth work in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry (CSO, 2017). In the 2022 census, Luapula province recorded a total of 29.9 persons per square kilometer with 84.9% residing in rural areas (CSO, 2022).

Poverty is about not having enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing and shelter. However, poverty is more, much more than just not having enough money. The World Bank Organization describes poverty in this way:

“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time.

Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways. Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape. So poverty is a call to action — for the poor and the wealthy alike — a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities.”

A poverty trap is a self-perpetuating condition, in which an economy suffers from persistent underdevelopment, vicious circle of poverty, created by circular causation due to the presence of some external economies and/or strategic complementarities. According to British economist Paul Collier, the four types of poverty traps are **the conflict trap, the natural resource trap, being landlocked, and poor governance**. These “traps” are why the poorest countries remain poor and struggle to catch up with the developing world. There are several factors that cause poverty traps, they are **lack of capital, poor education system, poor infrastructure, and poor healthcare**. Economists argue that access to sufficient aid or capital is a key way to escape from poverty traps.

Rural poverty often stems from limited access to markets, education, quality infrastructure, employment opportunities, health, and financial products. Urban poverty is often marred by weak or hazardous living conditions related to sanitation, employment, and personal security (Hamel, 2020). The implication is that households and countries should be able to gradually work their way out of poverty, and failure to do so represents lack of effort. Poverty is also the result of poor fundamentals whether poor institutions and endowments at the country level, or low skills and abilities at the individual level. As a result, policy efforts need to change the underlying fundamentals that determine the steady state, which may be difficult and slow to do. Furthermore, poverty begets poverty, so that current poverty is itself a direct cause of poverty in the future. This notion is called a poverty trap, understood as self-reinforcing mechanisms whereby poor individuals or countries remain poor, whereas other countries or individuals with the same fundamentals but also the good fortune of starting out rich will stay that way. The idea of a poverty trap is the most compelling of the three explanations in terms of motivating policy, because it suggests that people and countries may not only be unable to climb out of poverty on their own, but also that much poverty is needless in the sense that a different equilibrium is possible, and that one-time policy efforts may have lasting effects.

How can we stop poverty then? Poverty can be halted by; eliminating poverty through equity. One of the main causes of poverty is inequality, reducing poverty with resilience, committing to climate change solutions and climate justice, eradicating poverty through education, halting poverty by ending hunger (and thirst), poverty alleviation through peace and cash solves poverty.

ENDOWMENTS OF THE PROVINCE

Luapula is one of the ten provinces of Zambia and lies in the northern part of the country sharing borders with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As per the 2022 Zambian census, the province had a population of 1,514,011, which represented a 52.6% change from the 2010 population (CSO, 2022). The province's major economic activity is agriculture and fishing, with sweet potato and cassava being the major crops. Around 40 per cent of Luapula is covered with water and there are a number of rivers and lakes. It has eight attractions in waterfalls, wildlife and cultural heritage. Major mineral deposits found in the province are manganese, lime, copper and precious metals (IMF, 2007). It boasts of the following waterfalls and lakes; Lumangwe Falls, Mumbuluma Falls, Mumbotuta Waterfalls, Kundabwika Waterfalls, Ntumbachushi Falls, Chilongo Waterfalls, Lake Bangweulu and Lake Mweru. On average, the province receives 1,200 mm of annual rainfall. The province is covered with soils that support agricultural activities and weather that supports growing of citrus fruits like oranges and lemons. Other crops that are favoured by the good weather pattern are avocados, guavas, paw paws, sugar canes and bananas.

POVERTY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF LUAPULA PROVINCE

Despite the endowments of natural and human resources, poverty is in many ways a rural phenomenon with poverty levels at 76.6 percent compared to 23.4 in urban areas. Female headed household are generally poorer than male headed households (CSO, 2015). The inequalities are also reflected in the poverty situation between different provinces, with Luapula having the highest poverty rates (Ibid). Poverty in rural areas has hardly changed at all over the last five years. Zambia's Human Development Index Value has increased from 0.422 in 1980 to 0.59 in 2014, placing the country in the medium human development range (UNO, 2016). Poverty cannot be understood in terms of a single indicator or measurement methodology. Consequently, this study takes a multidimensional view of poverty and draws upon a variety of information to analyze the situation faced by the poor in rural communities of zambia.

PERPETUATORS OF RURAL POVERTY IN LUAPULA PROVINCE

Despite all the endowments, the province continues to record high poverty levels (particularly in rural communities) that are precipitated by poor agricultural methods, dependence on traditional seeds, dependance on fishing despite diminishing fish stocks, lack of self-esteem and generally dependence on government alms. Malnutrition in children is also very high with child stunting at 45%, the second highest in the country (ZDHS, 2018). The presence of poverty at individual, household as well as community levels sends shocks in the lives of people resulting in poor health, low education attainment, social, economic and spiritual outcomes. A new phenomenon has risen in many communities perpetuated by charismatic religious leaders who regrettably manipulate people and siphon the little that they have through seed sowing, consultation fees and other ways. Many women in rural communities are illiterate meaning they can't read or write despite the availability of schools near their homes. A high percentage of illiteracy has been recorded among women in Samfya and Chembe districts of Luapula province. Further, a lot of girls drop off school in preference for home chores and early marriages. Many do not see their value beyond marriage and equally parents encourage such marriages despite government and some traditional leaders coming strongly against the practices. The negative attitude towards school is equally the same towards health. Generally, there is poor health seeking behaviour and many under five children die due to ignorance and poor health seeking behaviour by parents and care givers. Poor health in people is a recipe for under development.

The natural causes of change in weather patterns due to global warming and its effects and the new diseases like COVID – 19 have significantly contributed to food insecurity in households, morbidity and mortality in most rural communities.

The change in weather pattern has disrupted the way of life and brought about unusual pressure on the utilization of resources particularly trees and fish. The unexpected dry spells and flush floods all have brought in a new dimension of life. COVID 19 ravaged and disrupted the social fibre in societies and resulted in loss of life some of which were bread winners of families hence perpetuating poverty. Luapula province has not been an exception because year in and year out the province either receives more than normal rainfall (about 1400 mm of rains) exacerbating floods while some years the province receive very little rains resulting in insufficient production of food crops (CSO, 2015).

Government inability to recruit farm extension officers since 2000 has had severe adverse effects on the agriculture sector. The current situation is that one extension officer may cater for over 1,200 farmers. This is coupled with lack of transport for these workers to reach out to their farmers. In some cases, these officers use their own transport like bicycles or some farmers organize transport to visit their individual farms. Subsistence and emerging farmers who would have benefited from trained officers have not had that opportunity because of non-availability of such experts in their locations. Poor road networks leading to these communities widens the inequalities between rural and urban areas and contributes to the rural – urban migrations particularly with youths and adolescents leaving only old and unproductive people in rural communities (Megan et al, 2019).

Although the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) is available in many areas, it is characterized by poor management and selective distribution of the support. In some cases, this is used as a campaign tool to woo voters while in some cases the same farmers have been on the list for ages and have not graduated to leave room for new upcoming farmers to also benefit. Other clubs have their leadership register all the members of the family disadvantaging other community members. In other cases, the FISP has been abused by government workers where the support is sold on open market. On the other hand, beneficiaries also sell the inputs on open market due to late delivery and bad timings from the providers (Sitko et al. 2012).

RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF POVERTY

The term “resilience” originated in the 1970s in the field of ecology from the research of C.S. Holling, who defined resilience as “a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (Holling, 1973, p. 14). In short, resilience is best defined as “the ability of a system to absorb disturbances and still retain its basic function and structure” (Walker and Salt, 2006, p.1) and as “the capacity to change in order to maintain the same identity” (Folke et al., 2010). It is community capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. As noted earlier, Luapula has experienced shocks since 1991 and it has been easy for the people to recover quickly from such shocks. The growth of population of people over years resulted in rapid depletion of fish stocks a resource that was depended on by many people near the Luapula river and around lakes. Government efforts to restock rivers and lakes coupled with annual fish bans which usually start on 1st December to 31st March has had no significant change in the improvement of fish stocks as apart from the increase in the number of people depending on the fish stocks, fishermen continued to use wrong methods of fishing by employing mosquito nets, explosives and poisonous chemicals.

Both government and traditional leadership strides to police water bodies met with great resistance. The Ministry of agriculture and government partners’ efforts to train people to resort to keeping fish in fish ponds has not yielded any tangible results. In the area of agriculture, the rural areas of Luapula Province especially those away from water bodies are predominantly peasant farming areas with cassava as their main crop. Other crops that are grown include; millet, sorghum, maize, groundnuts, beans, pad rice, sweet potatoes and pumpkins. However, cassava is usually attacked by diseases which reduces the food security and incomes for households. On the other hand, there is ready market for agricultural crops in the neighboring

Congo D.R. which is never satisfied. The low production of crops and the insatiable appetite for selling the little that is produced by families, results in many households remaining food insecure and perpetuating nutrition deficiency particularly in children under five years thereby increasing the stunting, malnutrition, morbidity and mortality of children. According to the Zambia Demographic and Health Survey of 2018, Luapula Province ranks second highest at 45% in the country after Northern Province which was highest at 46% of malnutrition of under five children with rural areas having higher rates than urban areas (ZDHS, 2018).

Apart from these crops, Luapula Province is endowed with weather and soil patterns that support the growth of bananas, avocado peas, sugar canes and oranges. Despite the long stretch of the Luapula River which starts from Central Province through to the end of the province in Chiengwe, there is lack of utilization of water especially in support of growing crops like oranges which in most cases are forced to ripen early due to insufficient water during their growth.

It is interesting to note from this study that the people residing in rural areas of Luapula province and their households are perpetually entangled in difficult situations despite the many opportunities highlighted in this study. Most of the initiatives that have been initiated by international organizations in the province have been abandoned immediately after the end of such projects. Typical of these were the mushroom growing under AfriCare in upper plateau of Kawambwa district, the GTZ nutrition in the Plateau areas, AfriCare fish restocking and fish pond training in the valley areas of the province, Plan International developmental projects in communities.

STRATEGIES OF TACKLING RURAL COMMUNITY POVERTY

The fight against poverty calls for multi-dimensional approach because of its many faces. The broad definition of poverty used here can refer to three components – poverty of private resources, poverty of public goods and services, and poverty of relationships. Poverty of private resources refers to lack of access to both material assets and human capital—health, education, and skills. The poor also suffer from poverty of access to public goods and services like schools, roads, clean water and security. Finally, many of the poor suffer from poverty of social relations and networks. The very poor often belong to fewer social networks and informal systems of support; some are even isolated from their kinship networks and close family members. All three of these components should be taken into account to fully understand poverty in order to come up with ways of addressing poverty at micro and macro levels.

Climate change has and will continue to significantly impact rural communities around the world. In particular, as weather patterns become increasingly unpredictable, farmers struggle to support regular crop yields. Adverse weather conditions and other climate-related concerns contribute to unpredictability in terms of mechanization, pests and diseases, and market prices (IIRR, 2023). These factors threaten the livelihood of smallholder farmers around the world, and particularly in the global south.

Capacity building of community members

Capacity building is defined as a process by which individuals, organizations and the community at large liberate, create, strengthen, adapt and preserve capacity over time (LuxDev, 2019). The United Nations Development Group further define capacity development as “the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time,” (UNDG, 2009) in order to achieve development results. It further defines capacity as an ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully. Capacities can be grouped in three levels: individual, organizational and enabling environment, which altogether are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. The capacity building of community

members should be seen through the lenses of Human Centred Design approach in which consideration is taken on desirability – what people desire, and then feasibility meaning what is technically viable will be necessary. In all these considerations should be made towards culture, geographical location, endowment of areas and availability of sustainability mentors. Luapula is usually divided into the valley, the plateau and the arid areas which means that each of these have its own characteristic.

Prudent utilization of natural resources through clusters

Luapula province as stated earlier has geographical endowments and capabilities which should be nurtured if people can quickly respond to various shocks that they encounter particularly rural areas. There is also need to prudently utilize natural resources through clusters. Areas around lakes and rivers are dependent of the water bodies for survival but even then, lack of prudent use of or these river resources has perpetuated poverty at household and community levels. Identifying area comparative advantage can greatly enable communities emerge quickly from poverty shocks. The long river and its water bodies that passes through some of the districts has not been seen as a natural resource that could be used for agricultural, electricity as well as mining activities. Forming clusters of agriculture especially for citrus fruits where water from the Luapula river could be used for irrigation could improve the quality of fruits like oranges, lemons, avocado peas, sugar canes, bananas and winter maize. Therefore, clusters are seen to lead to improvement in the quality, quantity and specialization which will also increase the income and improve household security as well as human development.

1. External support

Outside support for rural area development and emancipation is very important and desirable. This is so because rural areas in Luapula province are characterized by low incomes at individual as well as community levels due to very little economic activities and lack of diversification. The study showed that without external support in form of financial, human resource and technology, rural areas will remain in the state they are for long time to come. Therefore, a rural solution can be a technology, such as a sustainable energy source, a financing scheme that gives rural people access to credit or savings, or a process that supports rural businesses, such as a training programme or a rural enterprise support centre. Public investment in agriculture and rural development is still vital and will be even more important as communities recover from the Covid-19 crisis. The principle of alignment with national priorities is a pillar of the global development effectiveness agenda and is linked to the concept of country ownership of development programmes. Respondents in the study expressed a strong preference for budget support and programme approaches that have longer timeframes and that are more flexible. In some cases, this preference for flexibility stems from a country's vulnerability to external shocks and crisis. Improvement of rural areas can be a safety net when there is a lack of job opportunities in cities due to depressed economic conditions. Further, rural transformation should be understood as a long-term, multidimensional process of change affecting the basic livelihoods characteristics of people in rural regions, taking into account their interaction with societal and global dynamics (Rauch et al, 2016).

Developing sustainable initiatives to tackle poverty

Initiatives to tackle rural poverty should be sustainable and homogenous. The communities in these areas should own their initiatives and champion their destiny in eliminating poverty from their households. The study findings point to the fact that poverty can be perpetuated if community members are left out in identification of the problem, finding solutions to the problem and charting the way forward. Important to consider is the improvement of human capabilities (JICA, 2011). One aspect of poverty in rural areas is the unsatisfactory health conditions of local people. Unhealthy and ill people cannot perform to the best of their capabilities nor make efforts to improve their living conditions. Therefore, the promotion of rural development necessitates the improvement of health conditions for local people. Usually, impoverished people tend to have insufficient nutrition, are not vaccinated, or live in unhealthy

conditions. On top of this, suitable medical treatment cannot be obtained in many rural areas due to a lack of sufficient public medical services. These inadequate medical facilities and lack of treatment in turn leads to other family members having to take care of the ill, lowering the productivity of the family as a whole.

According to JICA (2011), the improvement of educational standards is a very important element for income generation. However, the literacy levels for people in the rural areas of Luapula province especially females are critically low and yet, literacy skills enable local people to read. It has been noted that local people with literacy skills can acquire information their society needs. Moreover, as educational background is an important factor for obtaining a better job, highly educated people can be a resource and contribute to revamping communities.

Conservation of natural environment is a sure way of reducing natural disasters such as floods and desertification that seriously damage economic and social infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, cultivated lands, forests, and so on. Furthermore, because impoverished people in rural areas are most vulnerable to natural disasters, as cultivated land can be easily damaged from floods, erosion and sediment control as well as the conservation of the natural environment are important measures in reducing poverty.

People in poverty cannot help depriving natural resources and also, they easily worsen environment because of lack of financial and psychological ability to concentrate on environmental conservation. Their environmental aggravation then causes food shortages, worsening the poverty situation (JICA, 2011). The vicious circle of poverty and environmental aggravation must be ended. Strategies like reforestation and afforestation are cardinal initiatives that can reduce weather shocks likes floods and dry spells. Rural people are the main users of natural resources and the key persons for the conservation and sustainable use of the natural environment. For example, since it is difficult to promote conservation of forest resources to local people who require firewood, the promotion of effective forest-resource use and the combination of alternative techniques such as the use of biogas and cow manure are also required. Initiating alternative skills like mushroom growing, fish ponds and introduction of business skills and ventures like SILC were cited as innovations that would deter people from depleting natural resources like fish, trees for charcoal.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, community resilience and response to shocks should be tackled with concerted efforts of individuals, community, government and possible donors because the causes of poverty are multi-dimensional and the effects are usually adverse particularly to people living in rural areas of Luapula province. The poverty levels are high, poor nutrition for under five children has resulted in high levels of stunting as reported in the ZDHS of 2018 and high level of illiteracy especially for females. Therefore, an integrated Rural Development Approach which effectively combines multiple sectors and techniques from health care service, agricultural expansion, education, improvement of infrastructure to technical transfer, choosing specific regions and treating the local governments as counterparts is ideal in increasing the capabilities of individuals and communities quickly effectively respond to shocks that drive them into poverty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to foster community resilience and reduce poverty in rural areas of Luapula province the following should be done:

1. The government should build capacity in individuals and community members to manage and effectively utilize natural resources
2. The government through ministries of education and community development should establish adult education classes in communities to improve literacy levels of community members especially females.

3. The government and its partners should provide basic business training in the area of entrepreneurship for community members so that they become literate in business skills.
4. Government to facilitate community village banking initiatives like SILC for community financial emancipation.
5. The government should develop a long-term resilient plan in which issues of poverty shall be looked at holistically by considering economic, social and environmental aspects that contribute to poverty.

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