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The inevitable influence of Rural Development in the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals

Vittalis Makaza

B.Sc. Development Studies; M.Sc. Development Studies, Zimbabwe

6449 Granary 3, Harare - E: vitalismakaza@gmail.com - Cell: +263 771259449

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The paper will explore the view that the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals requires a strong investment in rural development. Rural development has become a burning issue over the past decades and the reason being that many people globally are resident in rural communities especially in most Sub-Saharan African countries. The quest for achievement of desired rural development has remained a critical concern of most countries in the contemporary world. This is succinct because, available statistics shows that about 80% of the population of most nations resides in rural areas (Nwagboso, 2012). The development of rural communities is the ultimate outcome of the transactions between physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural and institutional factors. Revitalizing rural regions is key to address the adverse impacts of rapid urbanization, potential trade wars, climate change and ever increasing rural-urban inequalities. Investments in rural areas should target and promote inclusive and sustainable outcomes in Agribusiness, Rural Education and ICTs, Energy for Rural Development, Rural health and Financial inclusion, to mention but a few.

Keywords: Rural, Development, Rural development, Sustainable development and Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs).

The paper will start by defining key terms, taking us through concepts that are key to rural development. A link between sustainable development goals and rural development is going to be explored to show a bond between the two. The concepts will include rural agribusiness, education and ICTs, energy, health and financial inclusion of the rural populace towards rural development. Rural projects and services if well implemented and achieved, they can contribute immensely towards fulfillment of sustainable development goals. The entry will also try to relate the impact of both the rural and urban development towards the contribution

of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) for economic growth. Lastly, the conclusion will be made which summarises the facts discussed in the whole paper.

The rural, beyond being defined as that which is not urban, is a contested space from a definitional standpoint. Rural can be taken to mean from or of open areas –those outside cities. Rural has a common strand of more frequently encountered with such nomenclature in public policy. Rural, as a word, is also endowed with other sorts of value. It is associated with agriculture and farming and people from outside city areas. Connections are made between people from rural areas and the land itself. While a contrasting relationship might be supposed between rural and urban, more properly, a continuum exists between the two as definitions of rural and agriculture are altered due to the forces of modern living and ultimately bear less resemblance to historical identities (Friedland, 2002). Nevertheless, rural areas have a rich history and identity of their own, even while they share some aspects in common with urban areas (Woods, 2011). Rural development, for purposes of this entry, encompasses efforts that are economic and social in nature, intended to encourage growth or expansion in areas outside cities.

Development was a term used, solely, for economic change, inclusive of the conditions that affect betterment. The concept of development later extended to its wider meaning to embrace ‘changes’ of political, social, cultural, technological, economic, and also the psychological frame of society (Kumar, 2004). In its current meaning ‘Development’ is used to express animated change for reaping utmost human potential. Technically, development is the name of a ‘Policy’ and its ‘Consequent programmes’, designed to bring about a desired change in social, economic, political, or technological spheres of life (Pasricha, 2000).

Anriquez and Stanoulis (2007) view rural development as a process of structural transformation characterised by diversification of the economy away from agriculture. This process is facilitated by rapid agricultural growth, at least initially, but leads ultimately to a significant decline in the share of agriculture to total employment and output and in the proportion of the rural population to total population. As a critical concept, Ollawa (2011) views rural development as the process of reorganization of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses and to promote individual and collective incentives to enable them to participate in the process of development.

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently quoted definition is from our Common Future, also known as the Brundtland Report: “is

development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". In addition, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice. The 17 goals are all interconnected, and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve them all by 2030.

Energy for rural development, water and sanitation are fundamental aspects of rural development. It is also linked to SDG 6 and 7 which states that all countries must ensure that people have access to clean water and sanitation, affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all by 2030. It is important to note that the two SDGs focus mainly on access to essential infrastructure and resources and they have a significant impact on the people's quality of life. More than one billion people lack access to clean water, according to the World Bank. Inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities can cause severe health problems (Duflo et al. 2012). For example, in Zimbabwe most people in rural areas have no access to clean water, hence they are forced to use unsafe water from open sources which are prone to waterborne diseases. In addition, most rural folks share one safe source of water for example, a borehole at a local school will be saving about fifty families covering about 10km radius. The prohibitive costs of extending infrastructure to informal settlements and rural communities deters much-needed investment (UN Human Settlements Program, 2011).

Adding on to the above, about 1.3 billion people lack access to electricity, including two-thirds of the entire population of sub-Saharan Africa, reports the International Energy Agency. Without access to modern energy, people are forced to rely on dangerous and inefficient energy sources, such as wood and charcoal, to meet their cooking and heating needs. According to some estimates, in Sri Lanka, one person dies every two days as the result of burn injuries associated with unsafe bottle lamps (Sunday Observer, 2001). The situation in Africa is disheartening where today the majority of the rural population still lacks a reliable grid for their energy needs. For example, in Southern Africa, it has been hard hit by shortage of electricity, people in urban areas are now shifting to solar energy which was mainly used in rural areas where there is no electricity. This also shows that there is need for innovative energy access technologies to bridge the gap in the economic disadvantages resulting from lack of energy access. Availability of energy can improve working conditions and provide greater access to education and health services, thereby increasing productivity and quality of life. Given its substantial benefits, electrification (along with access to other

sources of modern energy) has been identified as essential for fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Dinkelman, 2010).

Agribusiness is fundamental to rural development and it is one of the key industries in rural regions. Agribusiness is linked to second SDG which stresses on reducing hunger and promoting food security. Agroforestry is a collective name for land use systems and technologies where woody perennials (trees, shrubs, palms, bamboos, and so forth.) are deliberately used on the same Land-Management units as agricultural crops and or animals, in some form of spatial arrangement or temporal sequence (in Lundgren and Raintree, 1983). Agroforestry is an industry which can turn around the lives of many poor rural people if the government can lead the initiative. According to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), about 795 million people globally are undernourished, with most living in rural areas neglected by the financial system. A lack of access to credit and insurance prevents farmers from making investments that could increase crop yields and strengthen food security (FAO 2015). Agriculture support systems can enhance production, for example in Zimbabwe, the government established an agriculture bank to offer financial services and promote agriculture industry through issuance of credit schemes to farmers across the country.

In relation to the above, the Zimbabwean government also launched Command Agriculture which was an initiative to promote agriculture industry and enhancing food security in the country especially in the rural areas. Financial services can help farmers increase their production to meet the food needs of growing populations and also access to agricultural insurance can embolden farmers to make more and riskier investments, which can lead to increased earnings. Public-private partnerships can also help farmers in rural areas to have access to credit schemes which can help them to acquire agricultural inputs, which improve their production. In dry regions for example in Masvingo province, the government constructed Tokwe Mkosi dam which is going to benefit the rural populace around the area. Another initiative was done together with Rio Tinto Zimbabwe, Renco Mine where Tugwane dam was constructed and set up an irrigation scheme which benefited a number of families around. Today they are doing an all year round agricultural planting which boosted their production, hence reduce hunger and poverty and promote food security in the province.

Rural development is not entirely dissimilar from its urban counterpart. It deliberates on many of the same general issues that would affect development decisions in urban settings but employs a perspective that considers and values the unique context of the rural

environment. Education is considered a vital element in the development of a society, a system, and a country. Quality education is key towards the promotion of SDG 4 that advocate for quality education across the globe. It is important to note that a well-supported, easily accessible, education system is an efficient means to make people economically conscious, and thereby, make them actively participate in their economic prosperity and cultural development. Education also helps the masses in rural areas to be exposed to information and helps prevent the misinterpretation of information. It can also lead to many positive outcomes, such as an improved ability to understand policies, procedures, rights, legislation, duties, government schemes, available benefits, and protection laws. This will also contribute towards the fulfillment of SDG 16, which stresses on peace, justice and strong institutions.

The contemporary era is driven by the developments of Information and communication Technologies (ICTs) and the internet, which have considerably influenced patterns of working, living, socializing, producing, marketing, cooperating and interacting. The ICT has taken the world to another level, and the rural populace gained much from the initiative especially in the education sector. Nayak et al. (2010) identifies nine ways in which ICT can stimulate rural development and these are agriculture, education, climate change, livelihoods, economic development, health, and capacity development. The education system in rural areas needs the government and other private players to come on board and promote rural development through the ICTs. A typical example of the goodwill was shown by the former President, R.G Mugabe when he donated computers to most rural schools around the country. The initiative has benefited the rural student through connectivity to the world and it also ease the access to vital information.

Farmers on the other hand also use the internet to access important information pertaining farming activities which boost their production. Market research has been made easy for farmers through the internet since they can connect with other farmers globally, hence open new market avenues. Rural regions are often seen as regions with certain deficits in knowledge capacity that constrains efficient exploitation of the resources and the emergence of the Information and Knowledge Society and its power in gathering, processing, storing, retrieving and transmitting knowledge and information at a distance, seems to create new promising perspectives towards the future development of rural regions (Bruckmeier and Tovey, 2009).

Rural development cannot be achieved without mentioning the good health and well-being (SDG 3). It is key to both rural and urban development hence it contributed immensely towards national economic development. Policy makers in all countries, regardless of their level of economic development, struggle to achieve health equity and to meet the health needs of their populations, especially vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. For example, in Zimbabwe, the health delivery system is in dire situation especially in marginalised areas like the Lowveld area in Chiredzi and Binga area in Matabeleland North province. The state of the health infrastructure needs urgent attention and moreover, for the few which are there, they are difficult to access due to poor road networks and shortage of health care workers. The situation is especially dire in 57 countries where a critical shortage of trained health workers means an estimated one billion people have no access to essential health-care services (The World Health Report, 2006). The spread of the Corona virus was an awakening call in the health sector across the world. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is the world health board that governs the health system globally and today it is under immense pressure to fight the deadly Corona virus pandemic across the whole world where hundreds thousand of people are dying every day.

In addition to the above, it is also important to note that most health workers shun the rural areas and prefer to work in urban areas where there are better working conditions. However, this is causing the rural population to suffer because of lack of health care workers. It is vital for respective governments to put in place policies that also encourages healthcare workers prefer working in rural areas to promote rural development. For example, financial incentives encompass all additional benefits paid or provided to health workers to entice them to work in a remote or rural area. They include monetary bonuses-in-kind benefits [a free house or vehicle], and any other benefits that reduce the opportunity costs associated with working in the rural areas. (World Health Organisation Report, 2006). Moreover, the living conditions for rural health workers and their families should be improved for example, investment in infrastructure and services (electricity, schools, telecommunications, sanitation, safe water and financial services) and these factors have a significant influence on a health worker's decision to locate to and remain in rural areas, hence promoting rural health development.

The majority of the developing countries depend on donor fund to stimulate their developmental projects hence there is supposed to have financial inclusion for the rural populace for them to meet most of SDGs goals. Most low-income countries will require sustained and predictable external funding to implement the interventions, which is often

difficult to secure because donor's funding cycles typically span one to three years, which is an insufficient period of time for assessing measurable effects. A related issue is the fragmented funding of numerous small-scale or specific donor-driven initiatives, which, if not well integrated into the overall national health plan, can seriously disrupt the functioning of the health system (WHO, 2010). There is need of social, economic and political inclusion of the rural populace for the country to achieve rural health development. The Agriculture industry and other small industries in the rural areas suffers financial exclusion, hence there is no rural development to talk about. The establishment of Growth Points in Zimbabwe for example was a very good initiative to promote rural development but however, lack of policy implementation and consistence hinders rural development in Zimbabwe.

The government's financial policies especially in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole favour the urban development at the expense of the majority rural population. The financial exclusion of the rural people cause a setback in rural development and this is witnessed by the poor state of the rural road infrastructure, poor education system in rural areas where children are still walking more than seven or more kilometres to school, poor sanitation, no access to safe water, poor health facilities, to mention but a few. People in the rural areas have no access to financial loans especially farmers in the agricultural industries and this has caused a major setback in the agribusiness industry. Because of lack of collateral amongst the rural populace, it is difficult for financial service providers commit themselves to invest in rural areas, thus leaving the rural areas without any financial services. Financial inclusion of the rural sector of the economy will boost the rural industry and services, hence promote rural development at large.

However, it is important to note that for most countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, there is need to invest strongly in rural development. It is vital towards the change of lives of billions of people living in the rural areas and hence this will contribute towards the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Product (GNP) of a particular country. Well documented evidence also showed that rural development cannot only achieve Sustainable Development Goals alone without mentioning urban development but the combination of the two supported with sound social, political and economic policies makes an impact.

In a nutshell, the paper started by defining key terms, explored the need for governments to pay attention to energy, agribusiness, rural education and ICTs, rural health and financial

inclusion for rural development as a way to promote rural development. It was noted that energy is key to industries and services, agriculture was regarded as the most influential industry and a source of living for many in rural areas, rural education is vital to the general populace at all age groups together with ICTs which have brought connectivity and access to information across the globe, rural health was also regarded as key to rural development because healthy community is productive and lastly financial inclusion has been explained as one of the fundamental issues to sustain the implementation of developmental projects which are key to rural development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The need for consistent and sound financial policies and the combination of both rural and urban development were elaborated as key for any country to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.



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