IMPORTANCE OF UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AGRO-BASED POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES IN SMALLHOLDER FARMING AREAS IN NORTH-EASTERN ZIMBABWE

BY

THOMAS MUPETESI

(11585519)

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Supervisor: Prof J. Francis

Co-Supervisor: Dr M.J. Mudau

ABSTRACT

Since independence in 1980, both public and private initiated programmes have been introduced in Zimbabwe aiming to reduce poverty in smallholder farming communities. However, limited success has been realized. This highlights the need for finding lasting solutions to this challenge. The current study investigated how poverty could be tackled considering its linkages with social capital and gender within smallholder farming communities in Guruve District of Zimbabwe.

The study was carried out in all the 19 wards of the District. A total of 385 heads of households were randomly sampled. Focus group discussions and formal questionnaire surveys were conducted. Informational contents were summarised using the content analysis technique and hypotheses formulated. The Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data. Frequency tables and cross-tabulations were generated using SPSS. Using the SPSS-generated results, income poverty, human poverty index (HPI) and human development index (HDI) were calculated. The extent to which four primary social capital scales predicted the total mean monthly expenditure per capita (serving as a proxy measure of poverty) was determined using the multiple regression analysis technique.

This study revealed that the significant reduction in food poverty in Guruve District measured in terms of the food poverty line (FPL) was outweighed by the total consumption poverty line (TCPL), which worsened between 2003 and 2009. The low HDI (0.417) and high HPI (35.2 %) obtained in this study implied that Guruve District continued to lag far behind its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target. High mortality rates as reflected by the 50 % probability of not reaching 40 years of age (life expectancy) could have significantly contributed to the low HDI and high HPI.

Social capital significantly explained the variation in the household monthly expenditure per capita ($p < 0.05$). Informal structures dimensions which encompass the extent of networks people had with family, friends and neighbours were relatively more important than all the other predictors of social capital. Membership of organisations yielded significantly higher levels of social capital ($p < 0.05$) on aspects such as participation in local community activities and having friends in institutional networks. Females displayed significantly higher levels of social capital with respect to place attachment (in particular being proud to live in the community) ($p < 0.01$) and formal norms (taking into account trust in institutions without necessarily drawing support from them) ($p < 0.05$).

Given the fact that up-to-date statistics on poverty were lacking in Zimbabwe, this study provided insights into trends in poverty that are crucial for decision making, in particular targeting of development relief. The characterization of the nature of social capital (bonding social capital) prevalent in Guruve District is ground breaking particularly when the dearth of literature on this subject in Southern Africa is considered. Membership of organizations improved the social capital of individuals.

This study isolated the prevalent type of social capital existing among women in Guruve District. However, it was not clear what confined the women to the types of social capital observed in this study. Further empirical studies based on critical gender perspectives are needed to determine if such types of social capital did not perpetuate gender-based stereotypes and entrench social divisions as well as existing power relations in smallholder farming communities.