NGO projects and urban livelihood activities: Lessons from institutionalized urban gardens in Masvingo

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The study probes the nuances surrounding Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) initiated livelihoods projects in Masvingo urban. At the centre of this paper are concerns of local participation, sustainability, micro-level politics in donor research projects and the suitability of these initiatives. The study revealed that institutionalized urban gardens introduced in Masvingo by an international NGO failed to yield desired results due to a number of issues. Failure by the NGO to consider the urban political economy, the nature and type of beneficiaries serious affected the results of the project. Beneficiaries opted for other livelihood activities outside the urban due to the aforementioned issues. While the NGO project had its weaknesses, the beneficiaries had their part to play in undermining the projects, donor dependence syndrome, internal squabbles and insubordination partial weakened the project. Lack of co-ordination and cooperation between the NGO, government departments and the local municipalities sounded the death knell for the project. The paper questions the general approach taken by most scholars in studying livelihoods activities among urbanites, portraying them as individuals with lots of options at their disposal. To achieve its aims, the paper adopts a qualitative methodology, unstructured interviews, transect walks and observations were used to gather data. The study triangulated Scott’s Everyday forms of peasants’ resistance thesis and Long’s Interface analysis to make sense of the data gathered during fieldwork.

Keywords: livelihoods, urban gardens, NGO, poverty alleviation, donor dependence, vulnerability, interface analysis, subaltern resistance

INTRODUCTION

This study aimed at canvassing the effectiveness of bolstering urban livelihood activities in Masvingo through urban gardens spearheaded by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The paper examines factors that determine the success or failure of the project in Masvingo. This paper offers a good analysis of the project because it gives an assessment two years after the handing over of the initiative to the beneficiaries. As a way of propping up food security and livelihood, a French Non-Governmental Organization, herein referred to as ‘the NGO’, initiated 27 urban gardens manned by 720 beneficiaries as of July 2011. The major aim was to increase nutritional uptake by urban households and creating an avenue for the identified vulnerable households to earn money that could be used to obtain other necessities for the household. The project was launched in April of 2010 and the NGO handed over the gardens to the Masvingo local authority in July of 2011. The aim of this paper is to draw conclusion and lessons from the project so that such initiatives in future can be improved as this project serves as a learning curve.

Setting the background

The blatant economic deterioration in Zimbabwe over the past decade has pushed many people into the informal sector as opportunities and prospects from the mainstream economy dwindled. Poverty levels in Zimbabwe were so high that in the Human Development Report for 2010 ranked Zimbabwe at the bottom of the annual rankings. For the past one and half decade, the economic was pathetic, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) falling by a half in a decade, in 1998 it stood at...
US$574 while in 2009 it had halved to about US$284 (PRP, 2012). Unemployment rate escalated to over 80%, with the majority of people living under the poverty datum line (Human Development Report, 2008). Whilst unemployment levels soared, inflation rates followed the same trend, jumping from 49% in 2000 to 231,000,000% in 2008 (Mutam and Chazovachii, 2012). As Prickles (2004) notes such ‘violence of the economy’ made it impossible for households to sustain and maintain livelihood activities that guaranteed wellbeing. Apart from the economic meltdown, recurring droughts, poor harvests negatively affected agricultural output in most provinces in the country. Under such a scenario, the viability of most household livelihood activities was stifled. The last decade also witnessed the flourishing of the informal sector as many people were forced out of formal employment as firms either closed or downsized workers (Chingarande, 2009, Nhodo forthcoming). The informal sector has inherent problems such as police harassment, more working hours, lack of social security and unpredictable (Tallerman, 2012; Chingarande, 2009). It is against this background that the NGO aimed at bolstering livelihood activities through initiating urban gardens and promoting institutionalized urban farming.

Urban agriculture in Zimbabwe

The practice of agriculture in urban areas differs from its practice in urban areas. Like any other former colony, laws and regulations pertaining to the practice of urban agriculture in Zimbabwe is heavily based on colonial conceptualization of the city. British settlers established cities and urban centres that were meant for workers, waged employment was the major economic activity. Due to this, extensive agriculture was illegal in colonial cities. After independence, a number of scholars concur that ESAP led to the unprecedented increase in the number of urban tillers of land (Chingarande 1999, Chingarande 2009, Mbiiba 1995). Despite the existence of policies and laws that allow for the practice of urban agriculture ([Harare Combination Master Plans, Nyanga Declaration on Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture (2002)]), implementation and observance of such policies has remained a mere lip service from local governments. Since 1997, local municipalities across the country have been slashing maize plants on open spaces. A number of urban farmers have lost the maize plants to council and police in Harare suburbs and Bulawayo suburbs (see http://www.newsday.co.zw/2011/02/04/2011-02-04-maize-sla... and http://medlinkz.org/south-africa/Zimbabwe/33496-zimbabwean-urban-gardeners-outraged-as-authorities-cut-down-maize-crops.html). Recently, the city council in Masvingo slashed maize plants in Rujeko suburbs. Against such a background, institutionalized gardens were mostly likely to thrive because they are recognized by the municipality, hence crops grown would not be slashed.

Community gardens

Community and communal gardens are not new to Zimbabwe (Chazovachii et al., 2013a; Rukuni et al., 2006; Moyo and Tevera., 2000; Leach, 1990). For more than a decade, NGOs operating in rural areas have initiated community gardens to help local communities. As early as 2006, according to Chazovachii et al, (2013a) CARE Zimbabwe introduced community gardens as a mechanism to help rural areas achieve food security and sustaining livelihoods. Furthermore, these gardens incorporated Orphans and Vulnerable Children, the aged and those disabled. The project targeted the vulnerable in communities. The emergence of institutionalized community gardens in urban areas is a new phenomenon. Its institutionalization and support from the NGO presented a break off from previous haphazard off plot agriculture that was considered illegal. Despite its legality, urban agriculture in community gardens has failed achieve intended results, thus forcing the projects to die a natural death.

Livelihoods studies in urban areas

Chambers and Cornway, (1992) highlight that livelihoods comprise of the capabilities, assets (both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. In this paper livelihoods are conceptualized as the sum of ways in which households make ends meet from year to year, and how they survive (or fail to survive) through difficult times, (UNDP 2005). Livelihoods studies conducted in Zimbabwe over the past two decades have mainly focused on the small scale and informal activities that people adopted after the collapse of the economy. Urbanites engaged in various activities including but not limited to off plot urban agriculture (Chingarande, 2009; Mbiiba, 1995; Chaipa, 2001; Marongwe, 2003), cross border trading (Muzvidziwa, 2005) vending (Tallerman, 2012 in Kenya; Nhodo and Mafongoya, 2012; Nhodo forthcoming) and informal transport operators (Nhodo et al 2013). Chazovachii et al, (2013b) exposes the dynamics of firewood vending in Masvingo urban. Such small scale activities contributed heavily to the livelihoods and well-being of both the vendors and their families.

Research on the interface between local communities, livelihood activities and NGOs are common. Not all NGOs have yielded expected results in their projects. Petras, (1999) notes that NGOs programmes aim at preventative action rather that capacitating the locals and their communities. Petras, (1999) argues that the real causes of poverty are job losses and asymmetrical economic relation between the north and the south, yet
none of the NGOs seek to resolve these issues. NGOs help people solve the problem per se, (a consequence) rather than help them dismantle the structural causes (the root) of their plights. NGOs encourage and promote ‘survival strategies’ and kitchen soups not mass demonstration against neo-liberal policies prescribed by the International Monetary Fund that have heavily hurt economies in the global south. Vast studies by scholars such as James, (1985) and Norman, (1999) have exposed the weakness in bureaucratic state interventions as well as in NGO interventions programmes. Local communities’ narratives are often ignored rendering the project redundant due to conflicts between locals and the NGOs. Actors who initiate interventions wield a lot of power vis-à-vis the intended beneficiaries. Local people may seem poor, powerless and lack technical knowledge advocated by the NGO or government departments, but they have their own ways to counter and oppose projects that are imposed in a top-down matter. As studies by Scott, (1985) have demonstrated, ordinary people resort to ‘weapon of the masses’ to derail imposed projects, and Bourdillon, (1991) vividly highlights that urbanites may be “poor, harassed but [they are] very much alive” to an extent that they can reject projects that are not in line with their lived realities (emphasis mine).

In Gokwe South, Concern International, a NGO, introduced dhiga udye, literally meaning dig and allow yourself chance to harvest. This minimum tillage or basin tillage was a way of promoting conservation farming and improving food security in the area. Though noble, the project was met with resistance from the beneficiaries who parodied the project as dhiga uye (dig and die) (Nhodo et al., 2012). The project was established without a fully understanding of beneficiaries’ cultures, their general beliefs and social organization. Any project in dissonance with the aforementioned can neither survive nor can it succeed.

Some theoretical considerations on livelihoods studies

Mate (2010) raise important points with regards to livelihoods conceptualization. The use of ‘coping’, ‘survival’ and ‘strategies’ is an overstatement that conceals “the depth of despair to which people are pushed”. The use of these terms paints an optimistic picture yet the lived of individuals will be in a dire situation. Through capturing their struggles to eke out a living and capturing their pathetic conditions can act as a catalyst that brings urgent action and change. Morality and legitimacy of some livelihood activities is ignored, prostitution may illustrate the agency in females but at the same time does not add anything to human dignity or morality (Mate 2010). In a recent study, Nhodo, in this issues, shows agency of vendors at Chimusana who sell pirated compact disks, the legality of the activity is not examined in detail, the aim is merely to show how ‘actors’ can act in contradistinction to structural dictate. Livelihoods strategies such as commercial sex/prostitution, dealing in illegal items expose the actor to more danger and increase the vulnerability and risk factor of the actor. Such agency is dangerous and leads to human indignity rather than development. The ‘ontological security’ either deriving or guaranteed by such livelihood activities is short lived and easily reversed by catastrophic repercussion of ‘unintended consequences of intended action.’ Lastly, Rakodi, (2002) questions the use of the term ‘strategies’ when it come to the study of livelihoods. This gives a façade that the poor have a plethora of strategies at their disposal, yet this in not always the case.

Anthropologists and sociologists who study livelihood activities often adopt Structuration theory as the best theoretical framework for analysis, this has elevated Structuration into a dogma or a magical wand when it comes to understanding actors and livelihood activities as well as how these activities are structured. Because of this theoretical writ, studies on livelihoods adopt a cursory approach, merely show how people manage to overcome structural forces in their bid to eke out a living (see Nhodo forthcoming, Nhodo et al., 2013; Nhodo and Mafongoya, 2012; Muzvidziwa, 2005). The use of structuration conceptual framework homogenizes people as actors endowed with agency, yet reality on the ground shows otherwise (Scoones 2009, Siziba 2009). Such homogenization portrays people/actors as similar and one-dimensional when in fact they engage in conflicts and contestation amongst themselves and outsiders, actors have different degrees of power and rarely coordinate their efforts (Taru, 2009). Structuration and Merton’s Strain Theory have diverted scholars away from examining the nuances, the political economy and other vital issues on livelihoods. In order for research to influence policy and advocate action to improve people’s livelihoods, there is need to dismantle the emerging Giddens cult in social sciences. If people can overcome structural constrains, they can innovate and survive, and concomitantly there is no need for immediate actions to alleviate or intervention to assist them in their livelihood activities. If actors are rational, calculative and can survive, that is the essence of livelihood activities, their dire situation and lived reality is neglected, making it difficult to solicit intervention.

Statement of the problem

While most studies delving into agricultural-based livelihood activities have focused on resilience in rural areas (Nyamwanza, forthcoming in mid Sabi et al., 2012; Chazovachii et al., 2013; Alinovi et al., 2010), the increase in urban peasantry through community garden calls for attention. Masvingo the situation obtaining is
contrary to the above, institutionalized urban agriculture, furnished with borehole, and seems to be dying a natural death. Despite availability of water, people no longer engage in farming, the gardens seem abandoned regardless of their ability to sustain crop growing all year round. There is also need to unpack the adaptive (in) capacity of urban agriculture as an urban household livelihood strategy. Thus the major question this study sought to answer is why are people dissenting institutionalized gardens while the precarious off-plot farming in the vicinity continues to survive?

Objectives of the study

The study sought to:
- Examine the beneficiary selection and recruitment criteria
- Examine contributions of the gardens to household food security and livelihoods during the project life
- Examine factors that force people to abandon urban gardens

Methodology

The main aim of the study was not to generate copious statistical data about number of respondents, cross tabulation and percentages that can be generalized, but to increase insights and contextual understanding of how livelihoods initiated by NGOs are structured, the mind-set and forces that determine respondents’ actions. Insights into the aforementioned provide good ground for more research and inform future policies. As noted by Esposito and Murphy, (2000), narratives of reality are socially constructed, thus methods that allow storytelling, narratives, myths and presuppositions were adopted. Such methods give the subalterns an opportunity to voice their interpretation of realities, their location within them, how they negotiate, make decision and why (Wing, 2000). The nature of this study demanded a qualitative approach which is exploratory in nature and has the capacity to penetrate the frames of meanings within which actors operate, and allows an understanding of various reasons given by beneficiaries themselves. The study utilized unstructured interviews to elicit authentic accounts of subjective reasons given by respondents. These interviews were vital to capture reasons why people were dropping from the project. Secondary analysis of project documents were used to gather data of the project’s life and to establish some of the views that emerged during interviews. Monthly reports and monitoring and evaluation reports were utilized as secondary sources of gathering data.

Sampling design

The study adopted non-probability sampling as it did not aim to produce a statistically representative sample or draw statistical inference. Respondents were recruited using convenience and purposive sampling. These sampling technique were opted for because of the nature of respondents, beneficiaries were not easy to identify because only a handful visited the gardens. This posed a challenge as it took longer than expected to meet these beneficiaries. Lots of time was expended waiting for beneficiary to show up at the garden. Due to this, convenience sampling allowed for the selection of accessible respondents (Marshall, 1996). Purposive sampling was used as it enables the selection of cases that are typical of the population needed, in this study, beneficiaries of the project. Once initial respondents were identified, snowballing techniques was used to recruit other respondents who were selected into the project. This involved asking the first respondents to identify other respondents who fit the sampling requirements, in this case, beneficiaries. The study focused on a total of six (6) gardens, three in Runyararo West and three in Mucheke suburbs. A total of sixty beneficiaries (63) participated in the study out of one hundred and ninety six (196) total beneficiaries in the six selected gardens. Fieldwork was conducted from October 2012 to March 2013.

Conceptual frameworks

The nature of study at hand required theoretical triangulation. Norman Long’s Actor Oriented Approach and James Scott’s ideas on subaltern resistance are used to make sense of the data collected during fieldwork. As long (2003) notes “the notion of social interface offers a way of exploring and understanding the issues of diversity and conflict inherent in processes of external intervention.” Long and Villarreal (1994:43) note that the interface “typically occurs at points where different, and often conflicting, lifeworlds and social fields intersect. This is where multiple realities and social actors’ differences are played out.

The NGO, beneficiaries, extension workers and city council involved in the gardens created an interface where all these actors interacted.

Due to cultural diversity, social difference and varying degrees of power wielded by actors, the interface is inherently characterized by conflicts. Thus, the processes of development intervention by NGO may not be smooth. Interactions between beneficiaries and NGO representatives cultivate and encourage the development of intertwined relationships and internationalities between these actors. Although interface interactions create common interest among actors, these interactions have a propensity to generate conflict due to contradictory interests and lifeworlds (Long 1999). Clashes between
Table 1. Average Garden yields and household earnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of garden</th>
<th>Quantity harvested (kg)</th>
<th>Beneficiary households’ consumption (%)</th>
<th>Quantity sold (%)</th>
<th>Average household Income (USD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Francis Aphiri garden</td>
<td>1215,6</td>
<td>48,1</td>
<td>51,9</td>
<td>$ 13,76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisk A</td>
<td>2367,6</td>
<td>31,7</td>
<td>69,5</td>
<td>$ 33,09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisk B</td>
<td>1174,2</td>
<td>41,1</td>
<td>58,9</td>
<td>$ 15,99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mucheke stadium B</td>
<td>1904,4</td>
<td>63,2</td>
<td>36,8</td>
<td>$  9,55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runyararo clinic A</td>
<td>628,8</td>
<td>63,0</td>
<td>37,0</td>
<td>$  4,29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runyararo cemetery</td>
<td>1240,6</td>
<td>56,2</td>
<td>43,8</td>
<td>$  7,18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data used was derived from the NGO monthly report for May 2011

actors at interface are a result of opposing and contradicting cultural paradigms. The differences in actors emanate from differential patterns of socialisation, culture and lifeworlds and professionalization on the part of NGO staff, which often result in miscommunication or a clash of rationalities (Long 1999). Technical knowledge held by NGO staff and extension officers give them power over the beneficiaries, however, these beneficiaries have their own subaltern knowledge that oppose and contrast the technical knowledge.

Scott (1985) on the other hand offers insight into how people at the grassroots resist machination imposed by institutions or agencies. Ordinary people do not engage in violent and organized resistance, rather everyday forms of resistance are adopted to derail a project that is not in line with their lifeworlds. The actions by beneficiaries may be ‘heavy’ on the symbolic side by ‘light’ on the instrumental side. Beneficiaries can be transformed in resisters who employ what Scott (1985) terms ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’ or aptly what Scott terms ‘weapons of the weak’. These forms of resistance may be in form of disserting the project, foot dragging when executing tasks, sabotaging, false compliance or quietly pulling out of the project. In an urban setting thus there is need to establish everyday forms of urban peasantry resistance.

Presentation and Discussion of findings

In this section data is simultaneously presented and analysed using Long’s Interface analysis and Scott’s ‘weapons of the power’. However, there is need to note that the data below is interpreted with the caveats that the data is based on a non-random convenience sampling technique.

Livelihoods and food security during the projects’ heydays

Squarely a year after its launch, the gardens were yielding the intended objectives. In the six gardens under study, beneficiaries grew vegetables such covo, rape, spinach, tomatoes, cabbages, okra, sugar beans, butternut and maize. Even secondary analysis of project monitoring and evaluation documents show a thriving and promising initiatives. Beneficiaries managed to produce garden produces in surplus to the extent that some produce were sold, enabling involved households to earn money for the household. The garden strengthen food security for these households and also offered them dietary variety. Money that was previously channelled to procurement of vegetables was used on other household needs. The fact that households were earning money was enough to guarantee and enable these households to increase income, thus strengthening livelihoods. For the month of May 2011, for cite, the garden near Francis Aphiri Primary School in Runyararo West, some household managed to earn close to USD 40 plus vegetable for consumption. The diagrams below show production for May 2011.

Donor dependency syndrome

Despite such a promising picture portrayed above, during the fieldwork very few beneficiaries were still engaging in cultivation. The Runyararo cemetery garden was disserted, during fieldwork weeds were choking unattended crops. Even though borehole water was available, both vegetables and maize plants wilting because of lack of water and the scorching sun. The gains in terms livelihoods and food security of the households was reversed as the harvested have heavily lowered. The Francis Aphiri garden was still functioning but was more of a pale shadow of itself during the heydays. The extent and level of cultivation was low.

Most beneficiaries abandoned the gardens after the NGO’s withdrawal. The NGO had provided beneficiaries with starter packs needed, the basic idea was that after selling their produce they would continue farming and sustain their cultivation in the garden. However, this did not materialize as beneficiaries failed to continue. Most beneficiaries failed to take advantage of the water available to produce all year round. This raise question of...
capacity building in livelihood activities, the NGO either failed to equip the beneficiaries with the need technical know-how or wrong packaged its livelihood activities to the extent that they collapse after its withdrawal. After the NGO’s withdrawal, most beneficiary switched to rain fed production, producing only around November when the rains commences. The gardens have proved to be white elephants in most communities, but failure of the city council to provide water has served the face of the gardens as the boreholes now act as sources of water when there are shortages. Thus the beneficiaries and the community in general had their lifeworlds and belief systems that were not in congruence. For most urbanites, crop production is done during raining seasons rather than all year round.

Selection and Recruitment process

The NGO projects aimed at strengthening livelihood activities and food security for groups and categories of urbanites that were identified as vulnerable and poor by the NGO. House which consisted of Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), female and child headed households, households with chronically ill members, the elderly, Persons Living With AIDS (PLWA) and the poor were identified as the intended beneficiaries of the community garden projects. A number of respondents noted that:

Employees from Action Faim said the gardens were for people who are poor and sick but at times some well-of individuals were included

Despite the fact that the project aimed at most vulnerable groups in Masvingo, a close analysis shows the narrow conceptualization of vulnerability among urbanites. In a country that has over 80% of people unemployed and a growing informal sector points to fact that almost everyone in that society is vulnerable and susceptible to the vagaries of urban poverty (HDR 2008). As noted by some beneficiaries, some individuals who were not perceived by other beneficiaries were included in the project in varies gardens across Masvingo urban. This created latent conflict between the beneficiaries themselves as they viewed those considered ‘well-of’ as not bona fide beneficiaries of the project. Some beneficiaries developed an attitude towards the NGO for underhand dealing in beneficiary selection. Such reaction can cause beneficiaries to disown the project and starting employing ‘everyday forms of resistance’ such as sporadic destroying of crops belonging to ‘well-of’ beneficiaries. Some beneficiaries especially in Mucheke area confirmed that some crops were damaged or harvested during the night without the knowledge of the concerned farmers.

Urban gardens create an interface where various actors possessing varying degree of power and knowledge interact. Such an intersection creates a high volatile and conducive environment for conflict. The inclusion of ‘well-of’ in the gardens soured relations in most gardens in Mucheke. Beneficiaries as actors have their own criteria of viewing and assessing peoples who must be included in the project. Furthermore, the NGO as an actor possesses different knowledge systems and lifeworlds as those held by beneficiaries. This creates misunderstanding and friction between the NGO and beneficiaries. The NGO identified and recruited people who suited its criteria yet other beneficiaries using their own assessment felt some beneficiaries were not supposed to be selected. These ‘undeserving’ well-of beneficiaries were noted to be neither sick nor poor as some of them were employed and owned cars. There are different and often opposing lifeworlds and knowledge between actors involved. These contradictory and opposing knowledge systems and lifeworlds inherently create disgruntlement among actors leading to some beneficiaries sabotaging and logrolling the project. The interface, as Long (1999) aptly postulates, is an organised entity of interlocking relationships and intentionalities, thus is bound to create conflicts and contestation among actors involved.

A number of respondents noted that the recruiting and selection process was not as a lot of favouritism and nepotism dominated the process. A number of beneficiaries noted that some people who deserved to be included in the project were neglected during selection. With some respondents holding such thought, their participation in the project was marked by a lot of discontentment. Such an attitude is sufficient enough to trigger beneficiaries to engage in action that creates hurdles for others in the project. Cases of ignoring those beneficiaries, avoidance, failure to rally information regarding meetings and training to other beneficiaries, denying them access to tools and equipment was common. Their actions were not organized or premeditated, but such piecemeal ‘rioting’ and subaltern resistance was responsible for acerbic social relations that characterized most gardens. Scott (1985) notes that such unorganized ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’ are sufficient enough to ground a project.

Reading between the lines: Recruitment, Social stigma and livelihood activities

As illustrated above, the factors behind the failure of the projects partly rest on the misunderstanding that structured the recruitment and selection process. The recruitment process created an otherized category among residents in Masvingo locations. The gardens were meant for the poor, the chronically sick, OVC and PLWA. As a project that was situated in the wider society, non-beneficiaries played a role the overall outcome of the projects. Some beneficiaries dropped from the project due to social stigma that emanated from the recruitment
and selection criterion. If a beneficiary was known to be a member or seen participating in the gardens, such beneficiaries were regarded and identified as PLWA. These beneficiaries were stigmatized and otherized due to their involvement in the urban garden project. The gardens became more of a curse than a blessing for a number of beneficiaries. One beneficiary opined that:

Most residents think these gardens were created for people infected and affected by HIV and AIDS and anyone who is a member is seen as HIV positive...

Wrong and generalized conclusions and ill-informed standpoints portrayed by other residents acted as a deterrent for those residents who were selected to be member in the urban gardens. This otherization and labelling of participants negatively affected beneficiaries' ability to participate in their day to day activities in the gardens. Less time was invested in the garden as some beneficiaries avoided working during day times. Beneficiaries who feared the stigma and labelling associated with the gardens avoided going to the gardens, or resorted to working during the evening or early in the morning when less people would see them. This negatively affected livelihoods activities as people failed to fully take advantage of the available water to boost their activities. As a result the gardens were shunned by those who were supposed to benefit from them. Furthermore, the notion that the gardens were meant for (vanotambura) Literally those who struggle to eke out a living, that is the, ‘the poor’ also brought some form stigma. Among urbanites, it is very difficult to identify a poor household because very few people or household define and identify themselves as poor. Identifying and labelling particular individuals as poor depends more on the power that the definer or identifier possess. Urban gardens create an interface that has actors varying degrees of power. The NGO as an actor possess the power to label and identify some urbanites as poor to such an extent that they require intervention. Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes subjective, objective and cultural aspects. The imposition and use of such term ‘the poor’ must be done cautiously as soon people do not identify themselves as poor yet NGOs reckless identify them as thus. This creates conflicts in terms of definitional and identification of ‘the poor’, some beneficiaries were noted to be poor by the NGO yet some beneficiaries identified them as ‘well-of’. Difference in knowledge systems leads to difference in understanding of who ‘the poor are’ and ways to identify them. In the final analysis, NGOs due to their economic power and monopolization of scientific and technical knowledge impose their conceptualization of poverty of communities, disregarding local forms of knowledge and of being.

Redundant strategy in urban settings

The success of community gardens in rural areas as noted by Chazovachii et al (2013) was based on a number of reasons ranging from the context to the structure of the gardens. In urban areas the projects was not in congruence with the location and the urban political economy. The land allocated for the gardens was limited to such an extent that most beneficiaries did not get pieces of land similar to the one they had for off-plot agriculture. Respondents lamented over smaller portions of land they were allocated, one precisely noted: The allocated piece of land is similar even smaller to the one I cultivate around my yard at home, it is better to cultivate at home because of proximity...

The existence of large residential stands in Mucheke and Runyararo West proved a challenge for the project. The allocation of standardized pieces of land to beneficiaries was done without considering the context and the set up in towns. The allocation was done at the behest of the NGO without giving beneficiaries chance to determine or decide what they required or best suit them. A number of NGOs disregard beneficiaries lived realities and their situation because they are seen as lacking vital knowledge needed. Uniformity in activities (crops, process) was loathed by respondents. Respondents wanted control over the types of crops to grow rather than forced to grow particular crops at a specific time. Some noted that they had vegetables in their home gardens and were forced to grow some in the garden. To counter such domineering by the NGO, some beneficiaries simply withdrew or never seriously participated. The lack of power to decide and the monotonous nature was discouraging. Nhodo et al (2013) notes that dhiga udye programme failed to consider the situation and context within which farmers in realities are constructed, forcing the project to have lukewarm successes.

Urban gardens presented another dynamic. Rural community gardens flourished because most of the beneficiaries were united either by common leadership under a kraal head or a headman. Moreover, beneficiaries were united by kinship bonds that made it easy to organize them. In urban areas beneficiaries were not united by any form of relationship except their ‘vulnerability’ and situation as defined by the NGO. Due to this it was difficult to achieve group cohesion and make beneficiaries observe decision made by selected chairperson. Due to the transience of the created social relation, some beneficiaries were complacent to follow order issued out. Beneficiaries among themselves competed and tested the level of power that the selected leadership had. Case of complacent, rudeness, malingering and undermining the leadership were cited by a majority of respondents. Such micro-politics and power play between these individuals was not healthy for the projects. This study clearly showed that weapons of the weak are only deployed against external organizations, but can be used against local or grassroots leadership selected to stir a project. While the
individuals aimed at ‘fixing and punishing’ one another, they also endangered the project and threatened their livelihoods by destroying the basis.

**Labour intensive and gender insensitive mechanisms in the gardens**

Urban gardens were labour intensive in nature. Bush pumps drilled in these gardens were heavy for a number of beneficiaries. The type of the boreholes were a mismatch the type of beneficiaries selected. The project selected the terminally ill, OVC, elderly and PLWA but failed to install a watering system that were not taxing for such beneficiaries. The evaluation document attest that more than 83% of the beneficiaries were women. A number of interviewed female respondents noted that:

*The borehole is too heavy and in this garden it is located down the slope making it difficult to carry water while going up the slope.*

The garden presented a challenge for the women, children and the sick. Carrying water cans or digging with a child strapped at the back of the mother, or before going to school for children proves the gender insensitiveness of the project. Imposition of technology by the NGO without considering the nature of beneficiaries created this underutilization of the boreholes. Retrospectively, this explains why most crop remained seasonal and rain fed rather than perennial and irrigated. Beneficiaries may be vulnerable, poor but still they can engage in latent rituals of rebellion and everyday forms of resistance. Most NGO programmes are done with the donor in mind, they feel accountable more to the donor than the beneficiaries to an extent that they fail to modify or contextualize their projects. Their projects are rigid and often they are implemented according to funders’ terms of reference making it difficult for these project to suit the context. Picture of boreholes drilled, toilets erected and well fenced gardens are sufficient to open more floodgate of funds for the NGOs yet little has between achieved in building sustainable livelihoods for the locals (cf Petras 1999).

Apart from being labour intensive and time consuming, the project burdened most women by increasing the burden and chores they women would tackled in their everyday lives. A number of women complained that the borehole zonked out much of their energies to an extent that they failed to full partake in some of daily chores that include but not limited to cooking, sweeping the house, laundry and taking care of the sibling, especially those with toddlers. Some beneficiaries complained that the gardens affected some of their livelihoods strategies such as vending, knitting and garment making. In these activities one’s presence at the site of ‘business’ when clients come enhance ones chance of earning more money. Clients were lost while these women were at the gardens.

In urban areas there are other livelihoods activities that bring immediate income for the households and individuals involved (Nhodo forthcoming, Chazovachii et al., (2013b); Nhodo et al, (2013)). The availability of a coterie of these livelihood activities pulled people away from the gardens which were labour intensive and took long to realize the proceeds. The failure of beneficiaries to utilize the gardens all year round translates to delays in earning money. For these beneficiaries, delayed earnings exacerbates their vulnerability as most operate on the ‘from the hand to the mouth’ strategy.

**Lack of NGO-local government synergies**

The blame does not rest on the NGO alone but also on the city municipality which failure to take over and support the initiative. After withdrawal, the projects were left in the hands of local city council to manage but from the beneficiaries, the local authorities were not forthcoming. Furthermore, the extension services which supposed to be provide AGRITEX department was inadequate, forcing beneficiaries to abandon the project. Due to various reasons, actors (NGOs and government departments) do not share similar life worlds and viewpoints thus creating friction and lack of complementation in projects they meet at the interface.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

A cocktail of factors hindered the success of the urban gardens in bolstering livelihoods and food security in urban households. Projects create an interface where various actors meet, the differences in knowledge, power and culture among these actors have a heavy bearing on the project. The NGO, beneficiaries, local authorities failed to find a common ground to enable the project to remain sustainable due to their different prioritisations. These need to view beneficiaries as actors who have the power and will to push through projects, treating them as powerless, powerless they maybe but they wield unorganized power bases that have the capacity to derail a projects. Lastly there is need to formulate synergies among actors in development initiatives to that intended results can be achieved.

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