
By

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Research Article


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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper was to assess the contribution of river sand extraction to the livelihoods of the urban dwellers as well as the challenges which the extractors face in the activity. The paper was mainly grounded in qualitative methodology using such data gathering instruments as unstructured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and transect walks. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach was used as a conceptual framework to understand the livelihoods of the urban poor. The paper reviewed that there are a lot of factors that have forced the urban poor to rely on river sand extraction as a livelihood strategy among these are low uptake of labor by the formal employment sector, dollarization of the economy and negative impacts of international policies. The extractors reviewed that they have resorted to the environment or natural resource use as the only form of the natural capital which they have and this has helped them to meet the day to day needs of urban life such as rent, electricity, water bills, payment of school fees and to buy food at household level. The paper reviewed that although the urban dwellers have used the activity to meet their basic needs, the business has its own challenges as those alluded to by the extractors. The issue of accessibility and gaining entry into the farm as well as constraints by the highway police were cited as the major constraints to the activity. However it was interesting to note that the extractors have not only sat down and relax but rather have devised different ways for them to meet their needs and among these strategies are the issue of social networks with the police as well as the school authority at Gokomere High School. Conclusions were drawn that the local authorities must find ways to integrate the activity into the mainstream development process because it is proving to be of paramount importance to the development process.

Keywords: Livelihoods, informal economy, urbanization, dollarization, shocks, vulnerability, poverty, environment.

INTRODUCTION

The link between rural areas and urban areas in terms of livelihoods has been underestimated by many scholars on the belief that the two were not directly linked. There has been a tendency to link issue of livelihoods only to rural areas but as a result of the ever persistent poverty in the Sub Saharan African urban areas the debate of livelihoods has become a cause of concern with scholars focusing on different strategies of livelihoods and their contribution both at individual and household level. The urban poor have been affected both by internal (politics, corruption and urban mistrust by politicians) and external factors (international policies, globalization) and these have pushed them to the fringe of the development process and some are left out as a result of the economic based life in urban areas. This however has led many urban dwellers to resort to different forms of livelihoods; some which are on farm and some non- farm activities. As a result of the ever increasing poverty some have resorted to utilize peri urban resources to enhance their livelihoods and among these resources is river sand which is now on demand for purposes of construction in urban areas. This demand together with the persistent recurrent of poverty, loss of employment, changes in the economy (use of multicurrency) in Zimbabwe has forced some urban people to rely on resources which are close to rural areas for survival.

Literature review

According to Lanly (2002) most cities of the developing world are characterised by poor living standards, poor sanitation and service provision as well as congestion, overcrowding unemployment among numerous other
problems. Clearly, the livelihood opportunities offered by rural, peri-urban and urban areas are likely to be different from one another. While everywhere the livelihoods of the poor are diverse and complex, their content will vary according to the local opportunities available. Many authors suggest that livelihoods tend to be at their most complexes in urban areas, with households drawing on a wide variety of activities to capture income and other resources (Rakodi, 1999; Devas, 1999; Beall, 1997; Chambers, 1995). There is generally an explicit or implicit perception that livelihood strategies are household centred. (Moser, 1998; Beall and Kanji, 1999; Satterthwaite, 1997) and that each profile of social (household-individual) assets is distinctive (Friedman, 1996).

While it is clear that urban poverty is an extensive problem, differences in definitions and measures make the exact figures uncertain. World Bank estimates, for example, indicate that about a quarter of urban residents in developing countries are poor, while many national studies in Asia, Latin America and Africa indicate that more than half of their urban populations are living below poverty lines (UNCHS, 1996). Furthermore, factors such as poverty lines that are not weighted for higher living costs in urban areas and that fail to take account of non-income based aspects of poverty mean that poverty is frequently under-counted (Satterthwaite, 1999). Despite the uncertainty, large numbers of urban residents are clearly living in conditions of poverty and, in many countries (particularly sub-Saharan Africa) these numbers rose significantly during the economic restructuring of the 1980s (UNCHS, 1996). The livelihoods of the urban poor are defined in large part by the opportunities and constraints under which they are operating.

Livelihoods may incorporate paid jobs but these are only one element, and not necessarily the most important, of the web of functional relationships which together comprise a living (UNDP, 1997; ISSD, 1999). Other elements include social networks and a variety of institutions which provide household support and access to resources (de Haan, 1997; Dersham and Gzirishvili, 1998; Douglass, 1998). A livelihood therefore draws on the wealth, knowledge, skills and adaptive strategies of the poor (UNCHS, 1998). While sustainable livelihoods reflect the priorities of poor people it should be noted that there may be a difference between their short term, pragmatic survival-oriented priorities and longer term priorities which aim at the development of sustainable livelihoods. Further it recognises that the circumstances of the poor change constantly, and that they sustain themselves, despite precarious conditions, by employing a variety of assets (Sen, 1992; Rakodi, 1997; Beall and Kanji, 1999; Moser, 1996). It is therefore possible to improve their security, and thus contribute to the eradication of poverty, through a variety of wide ranging interventions which support their activities (Satterthwaite, 1997; Wrattem, 1995) rather than merely attempting to provide paid employment (Korten, 1994).

In most cases, cities are more culturally diverse, more socially fragmented, and less likely to be safer than rural areas. Furthermore, urban neighbourhoods contain a diversity of household types, which are often fluid in their structure, and income inequality is often at its most striking in cities. This social diversity is likely to create tensions and the need for different livelihood strategies from those practised in rural areas (Wrattem, 1995; Rakodi, 1993; Moser, 1996). Furthermore urban economies are characterised by a greater degree of commercialisation, and most basic goods such as food and accommodation must be bought or rented through the market. Poor urban men and women therefore need higher cash incomes to survive, unlike their rural counterparts who may rely more heavily on subsistence agriculture or payment in kind and who are more likely to have access to free or common property resources (Wrattem, 1995; Satterthwaite, 1997).

Another source of vulnerability for the urban poor relates to the linkages between specific cities and the global economy. Urban economies are part of a wider economic system and are affected by national and international macro policy (Douglass, 1998). Such policies and global forces frequently have mixed impacts on poor households and in particular on employment conditions (Elson, 1995 cited in Katepa-Kalala, 1997; Beall and Kanji, 1999; Moser, 1998). Previously, under policies of modernisation, formal employment was increased as a result of growth in the manufacturing industry in many countries. However, since the 1980s, policies of liberalisation and structural adjustment have affected employment in some areas. Losses of formal manufacturing jobs in some countries and sectors, as well as ‘down-sizing’ in the public sector have resulted in a large number of men and women looking for jobs in other areas such as part time services sector employment or the informal sector (Potter and Lloyd-Evans, 1998; UNCHS, 1996). This has increased the vulnerability of many poor men and women through loss of secure employment and its replacement with irregular or informal sources of income.

Furthermore, the distinction between urban and rural is not only blurred by the ties between the two types of area – blurring between the two categories also stems from the fact that the spatial relationship between cities and rural areas is not a static one. Urbanisation as a process can have profound effects on people’s livelihoods, particularly, as noted above, in peri-urban areas, which tend to be most affected by urban growth. The effects of urbanisation on people’s livelihoods are often unequally felt, benefiting some and increasing the vulnerability of others.

In Zimbabwe, the whole scenario of poverty and food insecurity was exacerbated by the collapse of larger scale commercial farming activities following the fast track reform programme of 2000 (Rukuni, 2002). Such governmental policy aiming for local indigenization, accelerated multiple problems including food insecurity,
unemployment and increased inflation rate. According to Clemens and Moss (2002) cited in Metcalf (2008) since 2000, Zimbabwe has been experiencing some amounts of shocks which has generated risks and shock such as drought, floods, economic and political crisis brought deep and sudden collapse in national input and shopping increased income poverty thus the livelihood situation in Zimbabwe has taken a turn for the worse.

In 2002, the Zimbabwean dollar was severely affected by inflation as result of severe droughts, which led to food shortages (Chakaodza, 2006). By this most companies both local and international companies closed down because it is said that the operation were not profitable as people have no money to purchase the goods and services provided by these companies, thus most people lost their jobs. By the mid 2005, the local currency had lost 99% of its value (Clemens and Moss 2005 in Metcalf, 2008), income in real terms had trembled by over 98 percent compare to the 1990 currency value. Unemployment, poverty and the cost of living had all skyrocketed to unprecedented levels (Gono, 2005). By the end of 2006, inflation was over1, 280 percent (Gono, 2005) and latest estimates put unemployment at 70 percent. As individuals, have agents according to Giddens in Ritzier (2008), the sought to come up with other ways to overcome such hardships. The victims of these stressful events devised coping strategies, in most cases are perceived as temporary reactions to transient setback. In the face of shock and stress, households forced to organize their labor and time to protect their consumption (de la Rocha and Grinspun, 2000 in Shoko and Veiga, 2004).

Africa's urban areas have been hard hit by declining economies and the resulting structural adjustment policies, the cost of which have been disproportionately felt by the urban poor. Life in the urban areas has become more expensive while employment in the formal sector has de-creased and real wages have not kept pace with prices or have even declined in absolute terms. Many urban households are facing a serious decline in their purchasing power. People have responded in various ways, most notably by diversifying their income sources. Poverty in urban areas is affected by a particular combination of factors which tend to produce a wide range of vulnerabilities. The most important vulnerability involves urban poor dwellers who are more immersed in the cash economy but earn incomes that are often erratic, unreliable and small (Smith, 1998). Most of the urban poor receive incomes that are too low to purchase what they need for long-term survival and they spend most of their household budgets on food (Mitlin, 1999). In 2008, the world food situation appeared to be in crisis, particularly in the developing world which is paralleled by high food prices and low food reserves.

As a result of these challenges many in urban areas have resorted to certain income generating activities to meet their day- to- day needs. Some have resorted to urban agriculture (Kutwa et al., 2010) as a panacea to the urban problems and some have resorted to cross border trade, street vending, some into firewood cutting and selling and some are venturing into small industries as a form of self empowerment. This implies that among the activities engaged in by the urban dwellers are both farm and non- farm activities. Chibisa and Sigauke (2008) state that, ‘post-2000 the informal sector had become the “lifeblood” of the nation.’ As a result, large sections of the population have been forced to engage in this sector because it has become a means of survival for many citizens, providing them with livelihoods.

Cities in most countries are now expanding mainly as a result of natural growth rather than immigration. Nevertheless the economic opportunities they present means that they continue to attract migrants from rural areas or less developed towns in search of work and the chance to improve their lives. Such migrants are likely to be younger, more adventurous and entrepreneurial than those who remain in their home areas (Harris, 1992; Drakakis Smith, 1996). However, as well as representing opportunities, the city also represents costs - housing, basic infrastructure and other needs, such as food and clothing, are more expensive and less accessible in urban areas, and many migrants experience the burdens as well as the rewards of the city life. The urban poor, whether or not they are migrants, survive through undertaking a variety of activities, which mainly take place in the informal sector. However, not all those working in the informal sector are poor, nor do all those working in the formal sector avoid poverty.

Murwendo (2011) revealed that most urban dwellers obtain building materials from the peri-urban zones. The common building materials acquired from these zones are pit sand, river sand and stones which are used for construction of houses. In Masvingo City construction is a major activity. Unemployed youths engage in poaching pit sand from peri-urban zones for sale in the suburb. The Natural Resources Bulletin (2004), asserts that over the years materials like pit sand collected in and around some urban areas like Chitungwiza and Masvingo are a lucrative business. Unemployed youths who engage in pit sand vending indicated that they obtain the pit sand from the peri-urban forests near the City. They also indicated that they supply pit sand to developers. River sand extraction is carried out along the Mucheke River and the Shagashe River. River sand extraction from these rivers has an environmental benefit of reducing the siltation of the two rivers. Other types of building materials found on the peri-urban zones of Masvingo City include tree branches, poles, timber, bark and grass. These products are used within the City limits and outside the City boundary. However Murwendo (2011) looked at the environmental impacts of river sand extraction whilst this research is mainly focusing on economic, environmental and livelihoods security at

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household level. A detailed analysis of the challenges faced by the urban poor, benefits driven from river sand extraction and the politics involved in extraction and transportation of river sand to designated areas were carried out.

**Research objectives**

To examine the challenges that has forced the urban dwellers to engage in river sand extraction as a livelihood strategy

To assess the contribution of proceeds from the activity to the livelihoods security of the extractors

To analyze the challenges which they face in the extraction and transportation of the river sand to designated areas.

**CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Sustainable Livelihoods Approach**

The term sustainable livelihoods relates to a wide set of issues which encompass much of the broader debate about the relationships between poverty and environment (Scoones, 2000). Chambers and Cornway (1980) state that livelihoods comprise of the capabilities, assets (both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with, and recover from, stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future. In an attempt to make a living, people use a variety of resources such as social networks, capital knowledge and markets to produce food and marketable commodities and to raise their incomes (Herbinck and Bourdillon, 2001). However when such resources are not available or when they are undermined people tend to go under stress and shock. This can be traced to Sen’s theory of entitlements, which postulates that the purpose of development is to improve human lives through expanding the range of things a person could do and be, for example, being healthy and well nourished, being knowledgeable and being able to participate in the life of the community. Development is thus about removing obstacles to what a person can do in life for example illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to income and employment opportunities, lack of civil and political freedoms (Zimbabwe Human Development Report, 2003). When linked to the issue of river sand extraction, it becomes imperative to understand the concept before one can delve into the lives of the urban people in detail. In this paper livelihoods will be 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). In the case of river sand extraction therefore, this framework will help to understand whether the activity is contributing to the betterment of the livelihoods of the urban dwellers in Masvingo or not and to evaluate the problems which these people are facing which can result in shock on the part of the people under study.

**METHODOLOGY**

Methodology is conceptualized by Begley (2008) as a body of methods used in a particular activity. It describes and analyses methods in a research. This research was grounded on qualitative methodology on the account of its efficacy in providing people’s own feelings from spoken words and observable phenomena on the implications faced by urban poor who engage in river sand extraction. Qualitative methodology, according to Palton (2002) is concerned with attempting to accurately describe, decode and interpret the occurring of phenomenon on their social contexts. Thus, in this case some contributions and constraints found in river sand extraction were clearly obtained through the involvement of the researcher at the places where the river sand was being extracted. Qualitative methodology describes problems from their contextual origin of those experiencing them. In this case, the people’s livelihoods were affected differently and with the use of qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to draw objective conclusions on whether river sand extraction as a livelihood strategy has positively or negatively affected urban people’s livelihoods. It is also flexible since it encompasses the use of unstructured response options as compared to quantitative methodology which are confined to documented literature.

In the study interviews, focus group discussions and transect walks were used to capture individual feelings on the kind of shocks which have affected them and how they have responded to such shocks as well as how they are using the proceeds from the activity.
RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dollarization, vulnerability and shocks

Vulnerability is characterized as insecurity in the well-being of individuals, households, and communities in the face of changes in their external environment. People move in and out of poverty and the concept of vulnerability captures the processes of change better than poverty line measurements. Vulnerability has two facets: an external side of shocks, seasonalities, and critical trends; and an internal side of defenselessness caused by lack of ability and means to cope with these. The vulnerability context includes i) shocks, e.g., conflict, illnesses, floods, storms, droughts, pests, diseases, ii) seasonalities, e.g., prices, and iii) employment opportunities critical trends, e.g., demographic, environmental, economic, governance, and technological trends (Serrat 2008).

The extractors noted that the use of multiple currencies in the Zimbabwean economy was a savior to some but a devil to others. They revealed that the dollarization of the economy led to some resorting to informal trade in order to earn out a living. The dollarization has witnessed a steady increase in the construction industry which relies on some materials from peri-urban areas. This has come as a savior to the extractors who said that they were lucky that although the dollarization of the economy affected some sectors, the construction sector has seen a sharp increase in the need for materials. It was also noted that the extractors engaged in the activity in order to recover from the shocks they experienced from the introduction of the multiple currency economy in 2009. The shock came in the sense that as a result of dollarization only the formally paid were now getting cash on a monthly basis whilst for the non formally employed the idea was to diversify livelihood strategies to meet the demands of the economy. It was noted that some of the extractors of river sand were formerly engaged in activities such as foreign currency exchange deals but as a result of the changes in the economy the activity was not at its peak since 2009. From this it can be deduced that people diversify livelihood strategies depending or suiting to the environment which is prevailing. After realizing the effects of dollarization the extractors decided to resort to river sand extraction to supply the booming construction sector. In a poor performing economy natural resource utilization becomes a key source of income generation for settlers and urban dwellers.

It is argued that in spite of its invisibility in the official statistics, most informal activities especially in Africa produce commodities that cannot be imported, substituted and are affordable to low income earners. Apart from yielding services to both high and low income earners, informal activities also provide useful business experience and improve the living standards for majority of the population in developing countries (Friedman, 1992). Lubell (1991) also notes the significance of the indigenous apprenticeship system in Africa which enhances human capital with minimal straining.

Poverty, environment and livelihoods security

The link between the environment and poverty has been a subject of debate for most scholars especially looking at how the environment or natural resources are linked to livelihoods enhancement. In this research it was established that the river sand extractors rely on river sand for their livelihoods. Most of the river sand extractors alluded to the fact that they cannot run away from the intricate relationship they have with their natural resources. Most of them alluded that poverty which has affected Zimbabwe since years back has forced them to extract river sand for them to meet their everyday needs such as food security at household level. In much of the developing world people are engaged in multiple activities rather than relying on a more limited range (e.g. one household member with full time paid employment) of livelihoods strategies to ensure their well being (UNDP, 1997). While such systems may incorporate paid employment this will not be the only, nor in many cases the most significant, strategy (Wratten, 1995; Chambers, 1995; Potter and Lloyd Evans, 1998; Korten, 1996). The more diverse and complex livelihood strategies become, the more they are likely to reduce vulnerability (Rakodi, 1997). They also said they extract river sand to sell to those who will be doing construction in both town and rural areas. It was interesting also to note that the extractors believed that since the environment was the only closer source of income generation for them they had nothing to look for except the environment. This also shows that development is closely linked to the environment in the sense that as a result of infrastructural development in Masvingo there is an increasing demand for construction resources which among them is river sand and pit sand. This shows that there is a close relationship between the environment and livelihood security. It is the environment on which the poor live and from which they draw their sustenance and it is important to see the links between environment, economy and society.

The extractors were urban dwellers who also noted that the activity has helped them to cater for the day- day running of the house in terms of buying of basics and payment of rentals. Life in urban areas has more to do with money than social ties in rural areas hence they said the only option to survive was for them to engage in the business to make sure they meet the demands of urban context in a dollarized economy. Most of the drivers of the trucks and extractors said they get paid depending on the number of loads done per day. Cities in most countries are
now expanding mainly as a result of natural growth rather than immigration. Nevertheless the economic opportunities they present means that they continue to attract migrants from rural areas or less developed towns in search of work and the chance to improve their lives. Such migrants are likely to be younger, more adventurous and entrepreneurial than those who remain in their home areas (Harris, 1992; Drakakis Smith, 1995). They alluded to the fact that they use the money to buy their basics as well as pay school fees for their children and relatives who some of them stay in town with them and some are in their rural homes. They cited the poor performing economy characterized by uncertainty of the GNU era where there was low uptake of labour in the labour market and low growth of industries and low investor confidence in the country’s economy. But however the extractors said they resorted to make use of natural resources found in peri-urban areas to help in the construction industry which they said is booming and the city is expanding. The Natural Resources Bulletin (2004) asserts that over the years materials like pit sand collected in and around some urban areas like Chitungwiza and Masvingo are a lucrative business. These natural resources have become their only source of income generation.

**Accessibility politics and challenges**

From the study it was noted that although the activity was working as a cushion for the informally employed, it was not without challenges. The challenges were coming from the issue of accessing the river sand because it is close to communal areas where the locals claim ownership as well as the school authorities at Gokomere High School because the river passes through the school farm. This brings forth the idea of conflicts found in resource ownership and utilization where everyone claims ownership. The locals are saying the river sand extractors are causing more harm than good and that they should not be allowed to utilize these resources because they belong to the locals. However in order to be safe in accessing the river sand the extractors get permission from the local school authorities and they are given an approval letter which they are supposed to use to gain access. It was revealed that if you do not have the letter of access from the school authorities it was difficult to extract the river sand hence issues of accessibility were marred by contradictions and conflicts. Chigumira (2010) also noted the fact that river sand extraction in Kadoma district was marred by conflicts in the sense that the people had to pay a certain amount of money to the headman for them to collect river sand to supply the booming construction industry in Kadoma. This however shows that there are always conflicts and contradictions in resource ownership and utilization especially peri-urban resources where there is no absolute owner of such resources.

The drivers also mentioned that sometimes they suffer constraints from highway patrol police who sometimes mount roadblocks between Gokomere and Masvingo town. However they revealed that since they have been long in the business they have established mutual relationships with the police officers and they escape without being fined. The paper noted that sometimes they use some form of bribes in order to escape the highway patrol police and this has helped them meet their daily needs for survival. This shows that human beings are calculative and reflexive, they think and device ways to circumvent constraints in order to meet their desired ends (livelihood security). All human beings are knowledgeable agents. That is to say, all social actors know a great deal about the conditions and consequences of what they do in their day-to-day lives. Such knowledge is not wholly propositional in character, nor is it incidental to their activities. Knowledgeability embedded in practical consciousness exhibits an extraordinary complexity. Actors are also ordinarily able discursively to describe what they do and their reasons for doing it. However, for the most part these faculties are geared to the flow of day-to-day conduct. The rationalization of conduct becomes the discursive offering of reasons only if individuals are asked by others why they acted as they did. Such questions are normally posed, of course, only if the activity concerned is in some way puzzling -- if it appears either to flout convention or to depart from the habitual modes of conduct of a particular person (Giddens, 1984). Thus although there are constraints in the business of river sand extraction and ferrying, these constraints are not only seen as external factors that have absolute control on individuals but rather these constraints are also acting as the informal sector is used to describe small scale, non-agricultural activities which provide a livelihood for people who make simple goods, such as chairs and handicrafts or who provide a range of basic services, like carrying water from a standpipe. Unlike those who work in factories, government offices or the larger commercial undertakings; informal activities are largely outside the countries’ legal and regulatory framework. Reasons to maintain informality are related to their marginal productivity, high initial capital investment and registration (that is often bureaucratic) required by the formal sector. At times, actors in the informal sector prefer to be clandestine so as to avoid taxes and government supervision (SLA) (Sida, 2004).

The 2008 crisis cause a great havoc in the economy of Zimbabwe causing an increase in the informal sector industry. It is argued that in spite of its invisibility in the official statistics, most informal activities especially in Africa produce commodities that cannot be imported, substituted and are affordable to low income earners. Apart from yielding services to both high and low income earners, informal activities also provide useful business experience and improve the living standards for majority of the population in developing countries (Friedman, 1992). From the
findings it can be seen that river sand as an informal activity has helped the urban poor to achieve livelihood security at household level.

CONCLUSION

The paper concluded that river sand extractors have resorted to the activity as a result of different shock and problems and these include the international policies, dollarization of the economy as well as a decline in labor uptake in the labor market. Conclusions were drawn however that although these factors were affecting the urban poor, they have resorted to river sand extraction as a livelihood strategy in order to improve their livelihoods. It was interesting to note that the extractors were using the money to meet the basic needs which are food, shelter, clothing as well as schooling for their children. Although the activity was seen as a panacea to the problems of the urban poor, it had challenges with regards to accessibility of the river sand as well as problems encountered in ferrying the river sand from Mucheke to urban areas. Though challenges were there the extractors said they had established social ties with the authorities and the highway patrol police. From the study it becomes clear that the activity has helped the urban poor to respond to their challenges thereby achieving livelihood security.

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