

The Role of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Poverty Reduction: A case of Zambézia Province

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Abstract

The principal objective of this study was to evaluate the role of NGOs on poverty reduction strategies. The study first examined issues of poverty in Mozambique attributing it to lack of basic components of life such as income, employment, high rate of illiteracy, poor infrastructure, mismanagement of public funds, bad governance, political instability, instability of the governments and its programs. This study adopted the interpretative qualitative paradigm because the philosophy guiding this research sought to understand the phenomena being studied, poverty reduction strategies through the participants own experiences, views and suggestions. A combination of methods was used to generate data from the informants; interviews and focus group discussions, to provide the desired trustworthiness and triangulation of data sources. The findings reveal that despite the existence of NGOs the reduction of poverty has been minimal and it was found that Zambézia Province has experienced poor environments in terms of infrastructure, poor education and skills, poor health and nutrition. The study concludes that the anti-poverty programs are well designed but do not reach their target groups for various reasons of which we highlight; corruption, poor governance and the inability of local authorities to implement the programs. The study recommends that poverty reduction programs must be properly addressed and more involvement of all stakeholders like local community, NGOs and sectors of civil society in order to make implementation easier and successful among others.

Key Words: Absolute Poverty; Indicators of Poverty; Relative poverty; The Human Development Index (HDI)

Introduction

Poverty is a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; being unable to meet social

and economic obligations. It means lack of gainful employment, skills for self-reliance, assets and self-esteem and having limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water, and sanitation; and consequently, has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities (Betiang, 2010:2).

Poverty reduction means all formal activities geared towards lowering the rate and prevalence of poverty in the country. Poverty reduction strategies are a position introduced in the many countries by the World Bank that is a development plan borne out of collaborative efforts of a broad range of stakeholders in poverty reduction. It is normally designed and implemented through the participation of all involved in one way or the other in poverty reduction and in other related issues (Royemomi, 2013:26). One of these stakeholders is the Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).

Aubrey Williams, the Commissioner responsible for cooperation with the World Bank (1990), defines NGOs as private and non-profit organizations that collaborate with the developing countries in order to alleviate their suffering, fight for the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services and seek community development.

NGOs are a modern phenomenon, born after the Second World War and that during the 70s had an evolution, from humanitarian NGOs to NGOs for Development (NGO). This means that they focused on humanitarian aid to refugees to a denunciation of poverty as consequence of the world economic order (Mauri, 2013: 8).

NGOs are non-profit institutions, independent from government, many of them having an activity of solidarity and cooperation with the poorest countries in the world. They promote actions and projects, together with the local people and organizations, thus contributing so that these countries are actors of their own development

(Mauri, 2013: 30). NGOs often create close links with grassroots organizations, and often do the role of intermediary between government and community providing technical advice or financial support.

It is believed that at the provincial, national and local level without the requirement of action of partners like NGOs, there will not be enough capacity for rapid poverty reduction. The NGO and the religious organizations have a very important role in combating poverty (Stewart, 2003). In Mozambique there is evidence of the role of NGOs and the faith based organisations.

Statement of the Problem

The incidence of poverty remains very high at over 50% in majority of the country's provinces with Zambézia topping the list with 70.5%. Mozambique has used many strategies in order to reduce poverty even accepting NGO's to be part of this program. However, poverty still remains very high. Therefore the problem being investigated is that despite a number of poverty reduction strategies implemented by Government of Mozambique, poverty still remains high, and the role played by NGO's in poverty reduction programs has not been well documented.

Purpose of the Study

The study aimed to examine the role of NGOs in poverty reduction in Zambézia Province, Mozambique.

Research Questions

The specific research questions of the study included inquiries into the following aspects:

- 1- How do the NGO's help reduce poverty in Zambézia Province?
- 2- What are the problems faced in the implementation of poverty reduction programs?
- 3- How do the challenges faced by NGOs in implementing poverty reduction strategies affect Zambézia Province?

Methodology

According to Merriam (1998), qualitative methods are more suitable for interpretative or critical perspective investigations. Qualitative research occupies a recognized place among the various possibilities of studying the phenomena that involve humans and their intricate social relations established in various environments. The researcher used the interpretive research paradigm that is

associated with the qualitative research methodology because the research sought to understand the phenomena of poverty reduction strategies through the participants' own experiences, views and suggestions.

In this case study the researcher used qualitative data generation tools of interviews and observations; the researcher chose the case study as the basic approach of examining the impact of poverty reduction strategies in Mozambique, Zambézia Province that has high level of poverty within real-life situation. Adopting the case study in this research helped the researcher to understand details of poverty reduction programs in Mozambique that would be difficult to convey with other methods.

A population is the total of all the individuals who have certain characteristics and are of interest to a researcher. The research is a case study of the central province of Mozambique namely Zambézia. Efforts were made to interview people across the three regions of Zambézia Province; Upper Zambézia, Central Zambézia and Lower.

Given the constraints of time and resources, three districts were selected in the above three geo-physical zones, selected as representative of the most prevalent groups of poor on the Zambézia Province where almost 80 per cent of the people live in rural areas (National Institute of Statistics-INE-Projeções; 2007-2040).

Data were gathered by participatory research methods: observation, interviews with the NGOs as well as households. All data generation were conducted by the researcher as the researcher was the main instrument of data generation. The researcher employed a variety of techniques to obtain the data. This multiple data generation approach provided a triangulation of data sources to validate data.

An interview is called personal when the interviewer asks the questions face-to-face with the interviewee. Personal interviews were conducted to Non-Government Organization (NGO) officers to obtain the information relating to poverty reduction strategies programs in Mozambique and Zambézia Province in particular. These interviews were carried out without a questionnaire, but based on interview guides prepared previously. The interviews were characterized by open-ended questions. In the evening, after the interviews, some notes were made to remember the information obtained during the day

The goal of the interview is to deeply explore the NGO's point of view on poverty and poverty reduction strategies. The researcher chose to conduct semi structured interviews after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the method. This method suits the research most appropriately and the researcher was able to generate data on the case through in-depth semi structured interviews consisting of few open ended questions which allow a two-way communication between the interviewer and interviewee and the interviewee would give unbiased opinions.

Analysis is the process that researcher uses to reduce data to a story and its interpretation. Data analysis is the process of reducing large amounts of generated data to make sense of them. Data analysis in this study was done immediately after the data had been generated, both while the researcher is still in the field, and later when the researcher is no longer in the field.

The process of analyzing qualitative data varies from one study to another, depending on how the researcher is guided by the research and appropriateness of the techniques for making sense of the data (Kauwachi; 2004: 113). Kauwachi (2004) argues that the purpose of analysis is to interpret and hence, convert the data into a story that describes the phenomenon or the participants' views using the emic perspective.

This study employed the inductive approach to data analysis. Inductive data analysis is the inverse of the deductive data analysis. Maykut and Morehouse (1994:126) state that in the deductive approach hypotheses are generated prior to beginning the study while the inductive data analysis is, therefore, based on the data itself after being processed. Inductive data analysis follows several steps that are editing, unitizing, categorizing and tabulating (Nasir, 1999:405-406). Data interpretation involves the process of explaining and giving meaning to data that have been already analysed. According to Chisaka (2001), interpretation of data is a way of trying to make sense of data, uncovering what analysis could not do. It also implies an in-depth analysis and trying to read between the lines as a face value interpretation may be superficial. Trying to find out what exactly is in the data, why it is important and what can be learned from it, is what the researcher did with the data obtained. In this study, the researcher connected findings to personal experiences.

Findings and Discussion:

Poverty Reduction Measures in Community

According to the data generated, there are three very important and major factors which will help reduce poverty in communities and most of these are supported by NGO's: Education, Giving out soft loans, Provision of Social Amenities

Education

NGO4 said,

“É pena que muitas pessoas não estudaram o suficiente. Nós não conseguimos dar-lhes emprego devido ao seu nível de ensino.”

This means, it's a pity most of them did not study enough. We can't even give them a job because of the level of education, they have.

The participants' responses show that education will go a long way in alleviating poverty in the community. This is possible through the fact that when educated, they will be able to get jobs as the study demonstrated earlier on and will, therefore, be more prepared to embark in any project to sustain families. One of the reasons is that there is a higher rate of unemployment in the rural areas than the urban areas. While a situation of unemployment may be considered a problem in its own right, it has been argued that the problem of unemployment lies most particularly in its correlation with poverty (Dewar & Watson, 1981: 10).

Education is an important dimension of the non-homogeneity of labor. High educational attainment may imply a greater set of employment opportunities and specifically in the rural context, a better awareness of the full potential of new agricultural technologies and associated agricultural practices (Katun, 2015:3). It is commonly observed that there is a strong correlation between poverty and lack of education in Africa.

Giving out soft loans

Participants also believe that with loans they will be able to do bigger projects. Fortunately there are some NGO's that provide loan to do projects as shown in Figure 1.1



Figure 1.1 Chicken Project

Source: Primary Data, 2015

Provision of Social Amenities

‘Há única maneira de reduzir pobreza, é de dar um valor a comunidade para investir’.

This means the only way to reduce poverty is to give the communities some money to invest. Some of the participants were of the view that the provision of social amenities to the rural areas is the only sure way of alleviating poverty in the community. Some NGO's have helped put up some social amenities as shown in figure 1.2 below.



Figure 1.2 Social Amenities In Rural Areas

Source: Primary Data, 2015

Consultation of NGOs by Government on Poverty Reductions Strategies

The NGOs were also asked if the government consults them when planning poverty reduction strategies and NGO 2 responded

"Os resultados não são visíveis porque não se envolve a nós como organizações não-governamentais que trabalham com comunidades para dar a nossa opinião sobre a forma como esses valores podem ser útil para uma população rural

onde a maioria deles são camponeses. Ademais esse valor não está orientado para a agricultura. "

Meaning ‘the results are not visible because we were not consulted as NGOs that work with communities to give our opinion on how these funds might be useful for a rural population where most of them are peasants. These funds are not oriented for agriculture.’

This response is worrying. NGOs as partners of the government in the fight against poverty have to be involved in the development of anti-poverty programs and then can appropriate these same programs and disseminate through the communities.

An interesting response was presented by NGO 3 when they said:

“A minha observação casual, creio que, desde a fase de concepção destes programas, eles não têm a intenção de beneficiar os pobres, que são o verdadeiro alvo ”.

Meaning ‘from my casual observation, I believe that, right from the stage of conception of these programs, they are not intended to benefit the poor who are the real target.’

It is also important that NGOs align their programs with the country's development policies so that there are no two items of agenda. This shows that a much closer relationship between the government and its partners is necessary.

As for poverty reduction in Malaysia the researcher observed that the NGOs have played important role to eradication of poverty. Abhayarature (2004:14) states that other than government programs, non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector implemented their own programs for the poor and the hardcore poor. With the support of private companies and NGO's the Malay government provided interest free small business loans to poor and hard core poor families. Poverty Reduction Policies in Malaysia report published by Canadian Center of Science and Education (2013:1) says since independence in 1957, Malaysia has successfully transformed itself from a poor country into a middle-income nation.

Social Objectives that influenced the Poverty Reduction Programmes

Several policy frameworks and programs have been launched in the country with a definite poverty reduction objective. Different objectives are

attributed by different people as the objectives that influence poverty reduction programs namely;

- To improve food production
- To create employment
- To improve vocational output/productivity
- Governmental social security obligation

Food Production

When asked what they thought was the reason behind putting in place poverty reduction programs, participants responded that it was to improve food production. This was especially coming from farmers who were benefitting from some subsidies in buying seeds and fertilizer for their farms as shown in figure 1.3 below.



Figure 1.3 Agriculture as Food Production

Source: Primary Data, 2015

Creation of Employment

On the other hand, other participants thought these programs were meant to create employment. This employment is not just for those who work in planning and controlling the programs but for those who benefit from the programs by getting a loan which they use to create projects which in the long run need people to work there and thus creating employment. Some of the programs work in the education sector and as the research indicated before, when education level improves, there is a higher possibility of employment. Fatima Mamudo said,

“Graças a Deus, tenho o meu certificado como professor. Com aumento de desemprego, não sei o que seria de me, se eu não tivesse o certificado”

Meaning, thank goodness, I have my diploma in teaching. With the rate of unemployment going up

like this, I wonder what would be of me if I didn't have it.

Improve Vocational Output/Productivity

Participants said they believed, the program was set up to improve vocational output/productivity.

Governmental Social Security Obligation

There are some participants who believe the poverty reduction program of government is the government's social security obligation to the citizen.

NGOs' Contribution to Poverty Reduction in Zambézia Province

To answer the third question on the challenges faced by NGO in implementing poverty reduction strategies, NGOs contributions to poverty reduction in Zambézia Province was analysed. When asked about their contribution to the poverty reduction in Zambézia Province, NGO1 had this to say:

“ONG em geral aqui na Zambézia preenche o vazio ou a fraqueza da representação do Estado em muitas comunidades. ONGs tomam iniciativas de género na prestação de serviços básicos, desenvolver infraestrutura tais como água e saneamento, preencher as lacunas na educação, saúde, assistência social e conservação ambiental. Algumas ONGs desenvolvem um relacionamento eficaz com as comunidades onde elas se baseiam e trabalham, de acordo com métodos participativos honestos.”

This means that 'NGOs in general here in Zambézia fill the vacuum or the weakness of state's representation in many communities. NGOs have taken initiatives providing basic services, develop infrastructure such as water and sanitation, and fill gaps in education, health, social welfare and environmental conservation. Some NGOs have developed an effective relationship with the communities where they are based and work in accordance with or involve the communities in almost all stages of planning, implementation and evaluation.

The researcher observed that financial resources of some of the local NGOs and of most international NGOs exceed that of the state in many districts. Apart from the effective and good relationship they create with the community, there is also transparency in the implementation of their programs which gives them great respect and autonomy in the communities.

The Problems that NGOs are facing in the Implementation of Poverty reduction Programmes in Mozambique

Despite the fact that NGOs are there to help any government, sometimes they face serious challenges that make their work very difficult to operationalize. NGOs are supposed to help and they do help in the poverty reduction through programs and whilst doing that they face some challenges. When asked what challenges they face, NGO4 mentioned that;

“Há uma falta de vontade nos líderes locais no apoio às ONG na luta contra a pobreza. Eles consideram as ONGs como rivais. Mas isso é falta de liderança. Muitas vezes eles exigem ONGs que lhes paguem subsídios como condição para colaborarem. Eles querem alguma vantagem individual nos programas locais na luta contra a pobreza.”

Meaning ‘There is a lot of unwillingness by local leaders in supporting NGOs to combat poverty. They consider NGOs as rivals. But this is lack of leadership skills. Often they want NGOs to pay ‘sweetener’ bribes to local leaders in order to collaborate. They also want some personal benefits from the use of programs to alleviate poverty.’

This answer indicates that there are selfish interests by some government officials. Mozambique’s legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance has encouraged many government officials to seek ways of sharing the national cake instead of helping bake it. Corruption has been practically institutionalized and poverty reduction programs have not been spared too.

Perceptions and opinions of participants on poverty reduction strategies by NGO.

Fifteen out of twenty five Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that work in Zambezia Province and operate under different names and under different guises were interviewed. These organizations help in two main ways, by mobilizing resources beyond the state budget and help the government’s programs along with their own. They also have the exceptional advantage of being close to the target populations and are able to respond flexibly to needs as they arise.

Conclusion

NGOs are also considered as a solution to poverty. NGOs are non-profit institutions, independent from government, many of them having an activity of

solidarity and cooperation with Mozambique. The NGOs are promoting actions and projects, together with the local people and organizations, thus contributing to the development of Zambezia Province. However the study concludes that NGOs face challenges such as lack of involvement in government plans for poverty reduction programmes which causes the failure for such programmes. The NGOs have a duty to contribute to the preparation of development plans and identifying problems and solutions to those problems which are then forwarded to the government authorities. It is concluded that the biggest challenge is that NGOs are not consulted nor neither do they take part in the decision making process in Zambezia Province. The study recommends that NGOs be involved in the design, implementation and control programs in which they are specialized or involved. It is also recommended that Public Policies of governance be inclusive of all stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of poverty reduction programs.

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