



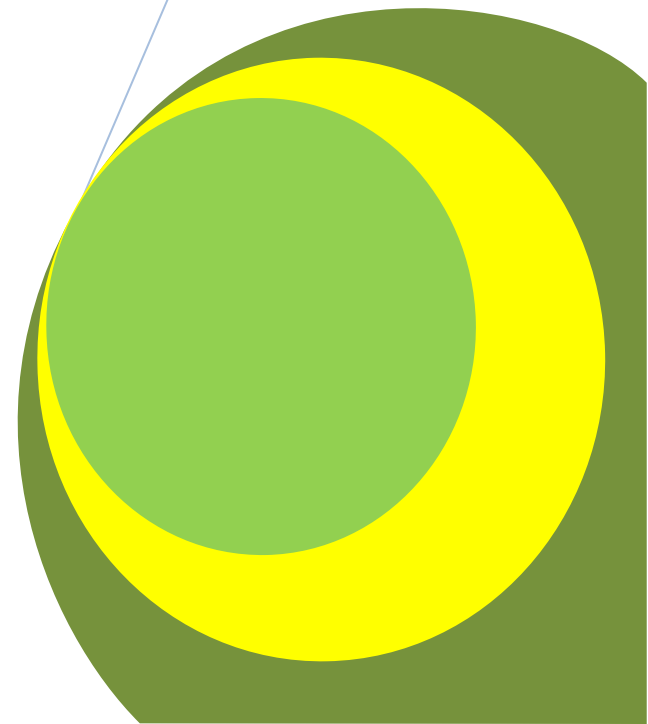
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The Farmer in the Yoke- Effects of Humanitarian Aid on Rural Farmers of Mberengwa Ward 17 (2005-2007) in Zimbabwe

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Research Article

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate the effects of donor aid on rural farmers of Mberengwa Ward 17 who received agricultural inputs between 2005 and 2007 and continue to depend on humanitarian aid. The research used a descriptive survey design on a purposive sample of 20 farmers and 5 donor agents. Data were collected using two different open-ended interview schedules for the rural farmers and for the donor agents. The data that were collected were presented using tables and were treated to qualitative analyses. The findings showed that the rural farmers had mixed perceptions of donors and aid. On one hand is a radical view that humanitarian aid is a form of compensation for the vices and plunder of resources by colonialists which is to be donated on a non-selective basis to all farmers. On the other hand, the perception is that only the deserving farmers must be assisted. Psychologically, the farmers have developed a dependency syndrome hence the 'farmer in the yoke' metaphor. Economically, the farmers are impoverished and vulnerable to food shortages. The research recommends that the donor community should conduct adult education programmes that accentuate the humanitarian face of donors and donor aid. It recommends that donor agents should bedrock such programmes in a 360 degrees- learner- involved cycle which should be conspicuous right from the concessionary discussion and planning stage, through to programme evaluation. By so doing, the programmes will heighten the farmers' ability to depend on themselves for problem solving and promote sustainability in food production. Consequently, the farmer will be 'unyoked' from donor dependency and hunger.

Keywords: donors, donor aid, perceptions, dependency, adult education, yoke.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Donor aid comes in different forms such as developmental assistance or humanitarian assistance. Generally, donor aid abundantly flows from foreign governments which are based in the North to the less developed countries (LDCs) to the South mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Mathosa, 2002; Todaro, 2003). The most conspicuous vehicle for its disbursement are the donor agencies such as Oxfam and CARE International.

The history of donor agencies globally can be traced to the post World War II Marshall Plan, when the United States of America (USA) transferred seventeen billion (\$17 billion) dollars over four years to help rebuild Europe (Gillis et al., 1987). Due to the success of the Marshall Plan, sympathizers and givers of donor aid have carried the notion that there is a positive correlation between aid and development anywhere in the world. Is this true of Mberengwa too or is it that farmers have become yoked to donor aid?

Turning to post-independent Zimbabwe, donor aid can be traced back to March 1981 when government convened the Zimbabwe Conference on Reconstruction and Development (ZIMCORD). This followed the realization that the newly independent country had limited resources for reconstruction projects. Against this background, the government appealed to the international community for donor aid. Ever since then, the donor community has become a permanent and a dominant feature of Zimbabwe's, rural landscape in the provision of humanitarian aid in areas such as food, agricultural inputs and health services.

Mberengwa district is in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe's natural regions four and five. The district generally experiences low and erratic rainfall which in turn impacts adversely on agricultural production especially of maize. It is this low food production that attracted donor agencies to be of service there. Accordingly, there were five agencies in the district engaged in crop farming services in 2005-2007, namely; World Vision; Action Faim; Lutheran Development Services (LDS); Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and CARE from which the respondents were

drawn. However, despite the food handouts and agricultural inputs to selected beneficiaries on an annual basis, the situation of a dire need for food due to poor agricultural yields has persisted.

It was this paradox of more inputs and low productivity which then prompted the research to investigate the impact of food aid in Mberengwa District Ward 17 of Zimbabwe.

Research Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- a) find out the perceptions of the rural farmers of donors and aid;
- b) establish the economic impact of donor agricultural inputs towards food production during period 2005-2007; and
- c) determine the psychological effect of aid on the beneficiaries.

Conceptual Framework

Concept of Donor Aid

Todaro (2003) says that donor aid is a flow of capital from developed countries to less developed countries (LDCs) that meets two criterions. The first criterion is that, aid should be for non-commercial benefits from the point of view of the donor; it is a donation. The second criterion is that the aid should be characterized by concessionary terms which means that there should be discussions at government- to- government level culminating in a bilateral agreement. As such, Rugumamu (1997) observes that aid is usually bilaterally administered meaning that aid is either from government to government or it is from a donor agency in the form of project aid or commodity aid for humanitarian assistance. This bilateral aid is dispersed through aid agencies like Oxfam and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). However, the research notes with regret that the beneficiaries at grassroots level are not involved at the concessionary stage in order for them to articulate their felt needs and concerns. Human beings feel committed to an activity that they have participated in planning or making it (Knowles, 1980).

Mathosa (2002) argues that the intents and purposes and achievements of the Marshall Plan of the post Second World War era have tended to strongly influence people towards a panegyric perception of aid. He cites the example of economists of the Marshall Plan epoch who believed that developing countries needed aid as a catalyst towards development. These economists also believed that the Marshall Plan was replicable in the developing world (Rugumamu *ibid*) of which Mberengwa district is a part. As it were, donor agencies have found the district a fertile ground to do business due to its infertility to feed itself. During the period 2005-2007, there were five donor agencies in the district in complementing government efforts in reducing the effects of the 'commonest calamity experienced in Southern Africa' which is drought (ZHDR, 2003). Chambers (1983) observes that NGOs are willing to help the poorest of the poor in rural areas. In Mberengwa, CARE and Action Faim were among the NGOs who supplied food and agricultural inputs such as seed and fertilizers, using adult education as the vehicle for promoting the change.

Perceptions of Africa's Beneficiaries of Donors and Aid

Rugumamu (1997, 47) states that;

'It is strongly believed in Africa that the continent has a historical right to a transfer of resources from developed countries. Industrialised countries should not overlook the fact that they are responsible for today's appalling conditions in Africa on account of slave trade, colonial exploitation and neo-colonial hemorrhaging of resources.'

Mathosa (2002) interprets this to mean that aid is regarded as a form of reparation which should be motivated not by the donors' charitable or humanitarian pulses or notions of mutual interest but by a sense of justice and above all guilt feelings. If this be so, then it could be said that beneficiaries possess radical perceptions on the matter. On the contrary, (Makumbe, 1996) posits that beneficiaries view donor agencies as their saviours even though one political party in Zimbabwe ferociously advances these radical views in a bid to discredit opposition parties during elections (Makumbe, 1996). Rugumamu (*ibid*) further states that beneficiaries should always get aid whether they ask for it or not. This perception of 'aid for all' is similar to what the researchers will term the ground 'theory of commonality' based on 'common purpose common resources'. The theory arises from the fact that colonialisation and oppression affected the rural communities as a unitary social grouping. The rural people courageously fought their 'common enemy' together; are now 'free' together and that 'together' they must receive the aid whenever donor aid is available. However, Mlambo (1997) observes that due to ESAP and the general economic meltdown, people now

look up to NGOs for survival suggesting that the relationship with donors should be regarded as one of close partnership and goodwill.

Nonetheless, Mpamhadzi (2001) points out that donor aid creates a colonial and neo-colonial culture of dependency.

The Impact of donor aid on beneficiaries

Two schools of thought dominate the debate on the effects and desirability of aid. The first one claims that donor aid is a part of the problem and not the solution. This view is shared by and the researchers will liken such a situation to that of being 'yoked', which is a psychological construct. This is what Mpamhadzi (ibid) alluded to as promoting a colonial and neo-colonial culture of dependency. Rugumamu (1997) states that donor aid encourages recipients to rely on donors than on themselves, to reject local solutions to local problems and to internalize the psychology of dependence. Rugumamu (ibid) further argues that the dependency culture eroded the self confidence, creativity and pride of citizens, where for instance, innovative indigenous knowledge systems are beckoning to be considered and probably the adult educators are blinkered such that they miss the opportunity when facilitating adult learning.

The second school of thought argues that donor aid is both necessary and desirable. Mathosa (2002) states that emergency food aid has remained the most effective solution to calamities like famine and drought. Beneficiaries of agricultural inputs, in some instances, have taken advantage of the inflow of resources to improve their livelihood and food security. As such, there are economic benefits accruing from using donor aid. What then is the situation of Mberengwa rural farmers who received donor aid in 2005-2007 even though King (1991) states that, while the overall effect of donor aid on economic growth is a debatable issue, the pervasive deepening of poverty in Africa is not contestable?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey design and interviewed a purposive sample of 20 donor aid beneficiaries and 5 donor agents, so as to get a balanced view of the phenomenon from 2005-2007. The open-ended interview schedules accorded the researchers the opportunity to increase both reliability and validity of the information by probing the respondents where necessary. Interviews were considered suitable for the semi- illiterate rural farmers who were able to seek clarification of questions from the interviewers. The use of the face-to-face interviews also enabled the researchers to deal with ethical issues relating to both confidentiality and anonymity which resulted in the full cooperation of the respondents. The information that was collected was then presented using tables and was subjected to qualitative data analysis. The data were described using inferential statistics.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Age Distribution of Rural Farmers

Table 1: Age distribution of rural farmers N=20

| Age | Below 20 years | 21-30 years | 31-40 years | 41-50 years | 51-60 years | 61-70 years | Total | Percentage |
|--------|----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|------------|
| Male | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 8 | 40 |
| Female | 0 | 0 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 60 |
| Total | 1 | 1 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 20 | 100 |

Table 1 above showed that 40% of respondents were males while 60% were females. The findings showed the general trend in the world in which more women than men participate in NGO humanitarian activities in rural areas because most men have migrated to towns in search of formal employment. The majority of the respondents (90%) were above 30 years indicating that these were mature people with dependents to fend for and as such needed to learn how to improve crop yields. The 61 + years age group (20%) was representative of adults who are mostly vulnerable due to age and who require support such as donor aid.

Marital Status of Rural Farmers

The findings showed that 45% of the rural farmers were widowed, while 30% were divorced which means that 75% of the respondents were in single parent households. These findings meant that donor aid was correctly targeted at the needy such as widows with the responsibility of looking after orphaned and vulnerable children. Data presentation and discussion addressed each of the objectives of the research as follows:

Objective 1: To find out the perceptions of the rural farmers of donors.

Perceptions of Rural Farmers of Donors N= 20

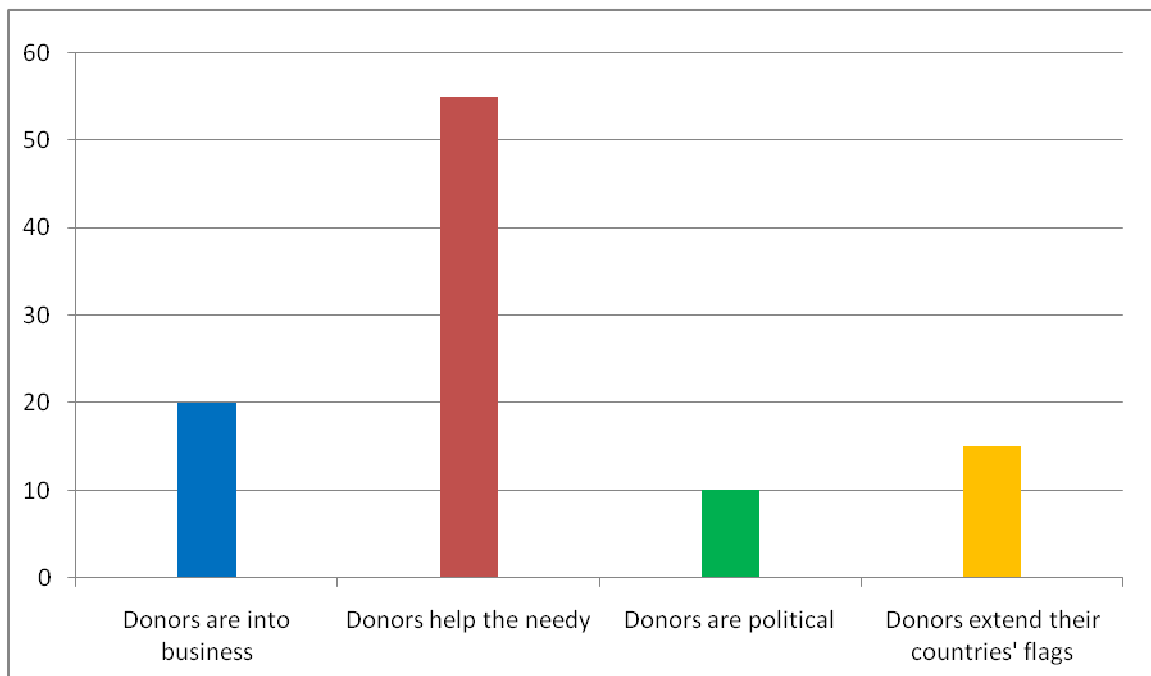


Figure 1

The data in Figure 1 shows that the majority (55%) felt that donor aid was targeted at the needy while 20% felt that donors were furthering their own business interests. Ten percent (10%) felt that donor aid was political in the sense that they (donors) meddled in the locals' governance affairs while the other 15% had the perception that donors were extending their countries' ideology and strategic interests (Mathosa,2002).

The findings showed that the majority of respondents (55%) felt that donor aid is for the needy and vulnerable members of the society while the remaining 45% had a feeling that donor aid had other connotations besides merely helping the needy; confirming the assertions by Chambers (1983) that the rural poor should not be perceived as ignorant and non-critical of foreign ideas and programmes.

Perceptions of the Respondents of Donors Aid

Table 2: Recipients' perceptions of donor aid N = 20

| Statement | Yes Frequency | % | No Frequency | % |
|---|---------------|----|--------------|----|
| Donors are obligated to help Zimbabweans | 15 | 75 | 5 | 25 |
| Donors should donate to all the rural farmers | 16 | 80 | 4 | 20 |

The findings from Table 2 above showed that 75% of the respondents were of the perception that donor aid was a non-negotiable right while 15% felt that it was a privilege. Rugumamu (1997: 47) states that;

'It is strongly believed in Africa that the continent has a historical right to a transfer of resources from developed countries ...'

Similarly, 80% felt that donor agencies should neither select who to give aid to nor who not to give it to, which confirms the ground theory on *'commonality'*. Everyone should be given donor aid regardless of status as noted by Rugumamu (1997), that people had internalized the fact that they should always get aid whether or not they asked for it. Some of the qualitative responses from the farmers were: 'we are the same in this area in everything that we do and no one should be left out; we never have enough of anything except poverty so give us all.'

Above all, in response to Objective 1, the farmers showed that their perceptions of donors and of donor's aid are mixed. This is demonstrated by the fact that 55% agree that humanitarian aid is essential in times of need but 80% of the respondents are of the view that all members of the community deserved to receive the donations, unreservedly. The 'give all' perception emanates from the mentality that in Africa donor aid is a right, a historical right towards resources that were plundered by the colonialists and were now to be returned in kind (Rugumamu, 1997).

Objective 2: To establish the economic impact of donor aid towards food production during period 2005-2007.

Table 3: Food security N=20

| Estimated Food Security Time | Year 2005 | | Year 2006 | | Year 2007 | |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | F | % | F | % | F | % |
| 0-3 months | 12 | 60 | 15 | 75 | 14 | 70 |
| 3-6 months | 5 | 25 | 3 | 15 | 3 | 15 |
| Over 6 months | 3 | 15 | 2 | 10 | 3 | 15 |
| TOTAL | 20 | 100 | 20 | 100 | 20 | 100 |

Table 3 above showed that after the harvest of 2005, the percentage of farmers who had food reserves up to a maximum of 3 months was 60% and by 2007 the number had risen to 70%. The percentage of farmers who had at least 6 months supply of food was 15% in 2005 and the figure had remained unchanged in 2007.

These findings bear testimony to the travesty of agricultural inputs which had failed to increase crop yields to levels that could sustain the lives of the majority of the farmers for longer than 6 months. This meant that the farmers were to experience food shortages. When the farmers were probed for reasons that could have led to this depressing state of continued low harvests, they responded as follows: 'growing maize is problematic in this region; small grains like millet are more suited to our region; the donors give us what they want to give us such as maize seed only; the donors do not consult us for our ideas; donors will then have to give us food handouts anyway'.

Responding to the same question the donor agents had this to say: 'farmers are not putting enough effort to compliment the efforts of the donor; the farmers need to supplement their handouts of seed and fertilizers so as to increase their harvests; the farmers are well aware that we shall provide them food in the future and as such have become dependent on us.'

The research found that the donors were prescriptive in their approach to dealing with adults since the farmers stated that the technologies they were being taught were both complicated and very new, such as the use of micro fertilizers. The farmers claimed that by tradition they grew small grains such as rapoko, millet and sorghum and the new technologies had emphasis on maize, which was not compatible with their soils and climatic conditions. Thus, the donors ignored indigenous knowledge of the farmers on issues of choice of crops, traditional soil enrichment technologies and climatic conditions of their local area. This is contrary to adult learning theory of andragogy which encourages tapping into the experience and expertise of adult learners (Knowles, 1980). Chambers (1983) observes that those who do not live in rural communities, like the donors, view the rural poor as improvidently lazy, fatalistic, ignorant, stupid and responsible for their poverty. The inference is that donors were bound to adopt a top-down- I know- what- they want- approach' to development. Freire (1972) strongly castigates this approach and describes it as 'dehumanizing.'

Psychological Impact of Donor Aid on Rural Farmers

The researchers considered it sensitive to ask the farmers directly whether or not they had developed a mindset of being dependent on donor aid. The researchers chose to get the farmers to indicate their anticipated sources of food in the face of low harvests. The findings showed that 70% of the respondents expected to get food aid from donors during times of food stress. Fifteen percent (15%) sought to survive from their own harvest, while the remaining 15% were to make purchases using cash from their own sources such as pension funds and assistance by their children who were in employment. The findings showed that the majority (70%) had indeed become donor dependent on donor aid. This indicates that farmers were now not only 'yoked' to donors for food but also by their own psychological state of lacking initiative, innovation and self confidence to solve their own problems. Adults, by nature, strive to become independent in the business of their lives (Knowles, 1980) but here are farmers who have been conditioned by the NGO system to be dependent on donors. Policy Alert (2002) observes that aid undermines ownership which is critical for sustainable development to take place.

On the other hand, the donor agents claimed that the rural farmers now lacked the initiative to uplift themselves from their current situation of haven to be transformed into beneficiaries. One donor agent put it bluntly that the farmers were indeed lazy and were now over reliant on aid.

CONCLUSIONS

The research concludes that rural farmers have mixed perceptions about donors and aid. They hold two perceptions of aid as a right that is to be enjoyed by all members of the community on a non-selective basis and the view that only the needy should receive aid. The aid has impacted psychologically on the farmers such that they have developed a distinct donor dependency syndrome. Economically, harvests have remained below the projected food security targets of food reserves that should sustain them to the next harvest. The farmer is in the 'yoke' of the donors and food shortage!

RECOMMENDATIONS

The research recommends that adult education programmes should be used to build knowledge bridges on perceptions about donors and aid. The use of qualified adult educators is recommended in order to motivate the rural farmers to fully engage them in creating means and ways of 'unyoking' themselves from the dependency syndrome and food shortages. For example, educating farmers to revert to the innovative use of indigenous knowledge systems such as soil traditional enrichment using rich anthill soils and small grains cultivation could instill cultural pride and raise agricultural productivity. It is recommended that the NGOs should adopt effective development approaches that are pragmatic towards improving communities. For example, donors need to listen to the local people and to follow their lead (Easterly, 2006). The research recommends a policy shift that will accommodate the beneficiaries at the concessionary discussions stage and to engage the services of trained facilitators who will involve the adult learners in the implementation of the programme plans right through to the evaluation stage.

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