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Servicing the Needs of Inflating Population at Growth Points in Zimbabwe? Spatio-Temporal and Economic Considerations

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Abstract: While growth points in Zimbabwe were created to become economically viable spatial entities, over time they have not so much grown as intended. Amid the urbanization thrust in the country, these places have grown and continue to grow demographically. Little studies, if any, in Zimbabwe, have been done to establish the possible future outcomes of this urbanization of small settlements. This present paper examines the implications of the multiplier effect at growth points in the country. The main question is: What is the likely future of the growth centres in the country and what new infrastructural and related assets need to be in place if chaotic urbanization is to characterize these places. By case studies we attempt to make a rapid assessment of the situation, basing on historical trends and developments with the aim of proposing future policy and practical alternatives.

Introduction

This paper examines urbanization in small settlements in Zimbabwe, with central focus being on the established growth points in the country, arguing how these have performed over the years in a bid to propose some practical alternatives to the obtaining situation and future picture of the places. It hinges on the fact that, urbanization in small rural centres will continue unabated. However, the major problem remains that this growth is more demographic than economic. A well-doing place, economically, will no doubt, have the capacity to be self-propagating hence

able to attract investment and holistic development which includes, infrastructure development. On the contrary, a place developing without the necessary infrastructure is a threat to healthy urbanization. The likelihood is that of a place becoming a slum. In this paper, we review a number of articles and documents in a bid to understand the growth points in Zimbabwe. We begin with a theoretical framework, before we examine the setting of growth points in Zimbabwe. After analyzing the history and criteria for growth points' establishment in the country, we make a rapid assessment of their performance by way of selected cases. We then proffer a prognosis of the likely future of these settlements. The whole debate is premised on the understanding that the vibrancy or non-vibrancy of any place stems from the demographic underpinnings of that area in terms of population numbers and threshold levels. Nevertheless, there are also a host of interplaying factors some cultural and institutional, others economic and political.

The Analytical Framework

Growth points can generally be defined as settlements (rural or urban) which central and local government consider have a potential for further development and hence need to be supported by further public and private sector investment (Wekwete, 1988). Growth pole theory was coined by Francois Perroux in 1950. Perroux's concern was the phenomenon of economic process of structural change that accompanies this phenomenon. Perroux envisaged this structural change in terms of the rise and fall of industry and the diffusion of the effects of these changing industries on others within the economy (Omuta, 1986). Indeed, Perroux's concern here was on economic space rather than geographical space as envisaged by Boudeville in 1966. In contrast with Perroux, Boudeville suggested that the set of dynamic industry might be firstly, spatially clustered, secondly linking this cluster to an urban area and thirdly by focusing in spill-over effects in the surrounding hinterland rather than in the economic sense. Be that as it may, in his words, Perroux said:

Growth does not appear everywhere at the same time, it manifests itself in points or poles of growth with variable intensities; it spreads by different channels and with variable terminal effects for the economy as a whole.

Thus a pole is identified as a point in abstract economic space to which centripetal forces are attracted and from which (in time) centrifugal forces emanate throughout the field of influence of activities constituting the pole (the field of a particular pole). One major factor influencing structural differentiation and therefore creating a pole is the propellant industry. These are simply industries with output growth rates higher than the national average but they do in their growth affect other industries and the total output of the economy. As a build up to Perroux's theory, Appalraju and Safier (1976) in Gore (1986) strengthen that the emergence of a new pole will depend on the establishment of one of more of five entrepreneurial innovations, namely, introduction of a new good or of a new quality of existing goods, introduction of a technology of production or commercialisation, the opening up of a new market area or reservoir of consumption, exploration of new source of supply of raw materials or manufactures, and/or, achievement of a new monopolistic position.

As pointed out by Appalraju and Safier (1976), "individual growth poles over time will become cumulatively more powerful engines of change, the dominating nodes from which developmental impulse spread. A series of leading sectors founded on major innovations will exploit all manner of scale economies and externalities and gradually reshape the productive relations of older and lesser poles around its own marketing and demand requirements". The foregoing view warrants a further discussion on the circular and cumulative causation process postulated by Myrdal in 1957. In his hypothesis, Myrdal tried to explain the duality of development from a developmental economics standpoint. He contends that developed regions tend to favour even more development due to their relatively high investment attraction power (Thirwall, 1972). Capital, labour and entrepreneurship tend to migrate to the developed regions. Thus the benefits of trade will continue to the host region (ibid;

131). The prospering of the host region occurs simultaneously with the decline and stagnation of the depressed region. Migration of human capital and entrepreneurs to more prospering region depresses the demand for goods and services and factors of production. In an attempt to give an explanation on the triumph of one region over another, one scholar simply sees this as only a 'gold rush fever,' that is a psychological effect where investment and entrepreneurship are simply attracted to the pole. Hirschman (1958) is of the view that polarisation effects can be offset through a deliberate policy intervention in the form of say a separate tax system and the right to protect certain activities. This he believes would then strengthen the 'trickling down' effects. Friedman's core periphery models (1966) prop up Hirschman's assertion in that with time the existing extreme polarisation characteristic will gradually be transformed into a multi-nuclear structure as favourable parts of the periphery are developed. Friedman, however, was not precise on how exactly the gradual transformation process will take place. Perhaps, Thirwall (1972) commenting on Hirschman's assertion was explicit when he suggested that the alternative is to wait for a natural end to the process of cumulative causation, which may be a long time coming.

Rationale and Criteria for Growth Points' Establishment in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the concept of growth poles, or growth points, was actually introduced before. Independence as part of a policy document, called "Integrated Rural Development Plan," that was introduced in 1978 (Manyanhaire et al, 2009). This plan designated ten growth centres in communal areas, namely Chisumbanje, Gutu, Jerera, Maphisa, Mataga, Murewa, Mushumbi, Nkayi, Sanyati, and Wedza. The prime objective behind the establishment of rural growth points was to even out the dualistic and polarised economies between the rural and urban areas created by the white settler regime. That is it was adopted as a regional planning policy aimed at correcting colonial imbalances through the provision of infrastructure to the disadvantaged communal sector.

The newly elected government sought to abolish dualism in the treatment of commercial and communal farmlands and to redress resource conflicts inherited from the colonial period (Moyo et al, 1991). Against this background several developmental plans were developed: the Transnational National Development Plan (TNDP), The First Five National Development Plan (FFYNDP), and the Second Five National Development Plan (SFYNDP). These documents generally guided development planning during the eighties. The main objectives of drawing up development plans was stated in the first government policy document, Growth with Equity (GWE), and that objective remains the same to date: to “to achieve sustainable high rate of economic growth and spell development in order to raise incomes and standards of living of the people” Zizwai et al, (1987). Out of the GWE came out the growth centre policy which ideally was supposed to be guided by theoretical underpinnings of the growth pole theory as enunciated by Perroux, Hirschman, Myrdal, Boudeville and other scholars who subscribed to the theory. It was hoped that through trickling down effects or spread effects the created economic nodes in the form of growth points would in the long run spur development into backward rural hinterlands. The whole process necessitated by a multiplier effect. The multiplier effect in this sense implies the expansion of economic activities driven by increased consumption.

Decentralization of administrative and planning functions by central Government to the local authorities is yet another strong reason for the establishment of growth points in Zimbabwe (Manyanhaire et al, 2009). Magunje growth point’s major locational factor for example can to a larger extent be attributed to decentralization reasons. In light of this, whilst acknowledging the role of planning in settlement and economic growth, it is important to view growth as a locally induced process that cannot be imposed from above (Semu, 2001). Whilst the reasons for declining of the growth centres

Since its inception 1981, the Growth Centre Policy has been characterised by a focus on the physical development of designated centres. Each of the 55 district council areas has a district centre which has a de-facto growth point status (growth point area). Through the Public Sector Investment Programme each of the centres has received a minimum of Z\$ 160 000 for infrastructural development (Wekwete, 1988). At local government level, local authorities in conjunction with the Department of Physical Planning have been preparing investment brochures for each of the growth centres (District) as information for potential investors. Efforts are also being made to provide housing and related services to attract existing firms to invest in the rural areas (ibid, 7).

In a more logical thought, one would question the basis for designating all the 55 district centres to be de-facto growth points. This sounds a geo-spatial criterion which was not in any way prescribed by the original proponents of the growth pole theory. Theoretically, the growth pole needed an identifiable resource base capable of stimulating specific production and marketing activities (Mutizwa-Mangiza and Helmsing 1991:188). Partly, this explains why some growth points stagnated whilst some which had sound economic bases are still thriving even up to date. In some instances however, it was a coincidental gift to have a district centre with sound economic activity usually a mine or an irrigation scheme. According to the Matabeleland South Provincial Development Plan (1991/2-1995/6) rural growth points were meant to fulfil a regional economic function and therefore should be located at approximately 40-60km from established urban centres. They should eventually grow up to be towns of a significant size. They form a continuous link with the present urban areas and rural settlements and are therefore normally located along routes (roads/rail) of national importance.

Some centres that had the potential to be designated as growth points were being denied this status. This was attributed to the national policy governing the establishment of growth centres which originally focused on communal lands

ignoring existing small towns in the commercial areas despite their viability. Exemplifying this case were Colleen Bawn and West Nicholson which are endowed with limestone and a cement manufacturing industry and cattle ranching, beef processing and canning industry respectively. But because geographically they lied outside the Communal Areas boundaries (former Tribal Trust Lands) they could not be granted growth point statuses. On another note some centres were granted the growth point status not basing on the availability of adequate resources, both physical and human to sustainably feed the growth pole, but on political expediency. The case of Sadza and Hauna Growth points support this argument. The latter had a vibrant economic base in the form of agricultural output and the former had a relatively weaker economic base but was granted the growth point status because influential politicians were from the area that shore up the establishment of the former.

Whilst the causes of the decline of these growth centres is do not constitute the thrust of this paper, it is critical to note that the methodology used on the designation of the growth centres in the country was in itself largely contradictory to the prescriptions of the growth pole theory. This is reflected in the general negative policy results. Most growth points in the country to date no longer deserve the title 'growth points' but perhaps 'government services points' as they are now existing because of a few government department services they are offering. As an epilogue to this section it can be concluded that the growth point policy in Zimbabwe has been successful in those growth points that had a sound and sustainable economic base. The opposite is true for those centres that were designated in breach to the theoretical promulgations of the growth pole theory; they faced operational challenges and have functionally disappeared.

A rapid assessment of how growth points have performed over the years

In Zimbabwe, the concept of growth points was first introduced before independence in 1978. After independence, the new government also subscribed to the concept

with the intention of reduce spatial inequalities and spatial development problems in general. Growth points are widely understood to denote settlements which are designated for economic and physical development. They can generally be defined as settlements (rural or urban) which central and local government consider have a potential for further development and hence need to be supported by further public and private sector investment (Wekwete, 1988). According to Conyers (2001), they are centres of economic activity, which are artificially created or stimulated in disadvantaged regions with the intention that they will eventually become natural centres of economic growth. In Zimbabwe, this strategy saw 55 rural districts being granted growth point status (Conyers, 2001), yet these poles have not satisfactorily brought about positive development as per the primary objective since serious development challenges are still evident in most, if not all rural districts.

Regarding the development gaps which were, and are still evident, the failure of growth point policy is linked to the way it was implemented. According to Zwizwai et al (1999), as part of the strategy to make the policy a success, the criteria were used to select a place and evaluate its potential for growth point. These included proximity to an area of elevated agricultural production; possession of a basic economic potential to jumpstart agro-industrial and industrial ventures; presence of a significant population in the surroundings to provide labour and a market; and accessibility relative to existing or newly planned sources of water supply, electricity, residential places and other infrastructure. Regrettably, the practical process of identifying growth points departed from the set criteria and was heavily influenced by political considerations (ibid), leading to failure by the strategy to produce expected outcomes. This has resulted to what are termed 'special problem' growth points to employ Friedmann's (1996) terms, and these included Mount Darwin, Lupane, Chipinge, Rushinga, Tsholotsho, UMP, Mudzi, and Mwenezi. These districts are in the hot, dry, and tsetse fly infested part of the country. Such areas, according to Zwizwai et al (1999), were turned into growth points but they were just far behind, requiring every type of initial investment in water, electricity,

telephone, housing, roads, waste disposal, administration, financial and postal services.

In Zimbabwe, some growth points have been categorized under the downward transition regions as coined by Friedmann (1996). These include among others Insiza, Mutasa, Chimanimani, Nyanga, Mberengwa, Shamva, Betibridge, Kariba, Chivi, Nkayi, and Bikita. These are essentially old established settlements whose predominantly rural economies are stagnant or in decline and have poor resource endowment. Obsolescence and overpopulation, relative to existing possibilities for development characterize these districts in Zimbabwe. On a promising but rare to come by picture, other districts fall under resource frontier regions which are zones of new settlement in which virgin territory is occupied and made productive. Examples under this scenario are Chiredzi and Hwange district. These stand a good chance of development if effective strategies are implemented to tap existing resources.

Furthermore, large scale industries located in the traditional economic hubs hardly moved to any of the growth point, with the exception of those located in close proximity to Harare, such as Ruwa and Juru as noted by Zwizwai et al (1999). The small-scale industrial projects that had been established in growth points include milling, oil processing, bakeries, fruit canning and soap making which was not big enough to steer anticipated growth. More contribution to ill-performance of growth point policy was fact the policy formulation was too centralized thereby excluding actors who mattered most, such as industrialists, entrepreneurs, local people and service recipients. Consequently, the crucial stakeholders who were sidelined during the crafting of the policy would not fully partake during the implementation process. Furthermore, the macro-economic environment, from the mid 1980s, had too many negative features such as inflation, budget deficit and escalating debt among others, to generate sufficient investments to finance all those needs (Zwizwai et al, 1999). Moreover, the time lost by government in putting up these investments

translated into the loss of investor patience and confidence (ibid), hence stagnation of the policy implementation process.

From a planning view point, the growth point issue was not cast as a “national plan,” but was made part of “national plans” and soon discontinued in some cases where there was little preparation to turn growth points into new agro-industrial, industrial and rural development poles (Manynhaire, 2009). Political situation in the country has to some extent affected the development pace in these designated growth points. For instance, Nharira has been a victim of political conflicts and favours, which led to the growth point status been given to low potential Sadza (Manynhaire, 2009). In growth points where farming was the main activity, the major economic trigger was hampered by the out migration of the commercial farmers following the fast track land reform program which took place during the year 2000.

The Future of Growth Points in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe’s socio-politico-economic landscape is very fluid. Most probably, it is not practical to craft long term plans which stretch up to the span of 60-70 years strictly being guided by the principles of synoptic ideal as applied in blueprint planning. In other words, with Zimbabwe’s situation, it is difficult to predict the likely hood of the future especially for a period of about 70 years from now. This means in such a lengthy time period, various social, political and economic development policies would have come and gone. This is justified by the piecemeal approach which has been used by the government since it attained independence where the portrayed picture is of trial and error approach. Examples of development policies which have been tried for the past 32 years since Zimbabwe got its independence include the following list:

- a) Growth with equity: an economic policy statement, 1981.
- b) Transitional national development plan, 1982/83-1984/85,
- c) First five-year national development plan, 1986-1990,

- d) Framework for economic reform, 1991-1995,
- e) Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation, 1996-2000
- f) Sustained economic growth- macroeconomic policy framework for 2005-2006
- g) Short Term Emergency Recovery Programme, 2009.
- h) Medium Term Plan) January 2010 – December 2015.

The multiplicity of these policies over a period of 32 years have dished out the possibility of coming up with a clear prediction of the performance of a development programme for about 70 years to come especially when the latter is more than the former even when doubled.

In a more practical sense, these policies tend towards the interests of the dominating political party's agenda, which is a system bound to temporal boundaries considering who wins or loses in a general but periodic country election. However, this will not paralyze the intent of long term prediction and planning regarding that current trends or precedence on similar matters (policy wise) can still be used to map out what the growth point policy in Zimbabwe could be in the coming 70 years. This will only take place when a lot of assuming is done. Assuming that ZANU PF, whose agenda is dominated by socialist economic development approach, continues to be in power for the coming 70 years and their political rhetoric is genuinely translated into action, to some reasonable extent, growth point policy could be revived. This revival would be coming from the fact that the party's political ideology sounds ideal but it on practical terms, any action will not be free from development deterrence which comprise of corruption, lack of resources, embezzlement of funds and political theft among others.

Moreover, assuming that MDC takes over the rule of the country, it may also mean that the party's ideology will dominate national policy formulation platform and it will also depend if its government will adopt old policies or not. MDC's 'political language' is dominated by terms such as democracy, human rights, rule of law and

independence of media, regime change and issues of good governance. This says little about socio-economic development aspect and approach as far as it ideology is concerned. This implies that under liquid political situations, development policies will also sway from direction to direction with politics as the determinant factor. In such a situation, it becomes difficult to predict how Zimbabwe's growth point will be in the next coming 70 years.

Discovery of diamonds in Chiyadzwa, Mutare district and in Dogwe, Tsholotsho district are opportunities which can be utilized effectively for development of these districts. If the deposits of these precious stones can sustain mining activity for the next coming 20 years, local people could have their socioeconomic status improved and level of economic development raised if those who do mining invest back to the society. This will mean growth points having natural resources endowments stand a good chance of development if they are benefited accordingly. The post dollarization era in Zimbabwe has seen revival of industries of which, interestingly, some have been relocating from other cities such as Bulawayo to Harare. The argument is that economic activity of Harare is vibrant; hence prospects of business gains are high. This implies that the worst industrial exodus should be expected in rural districts or growth points if they were ever there. In other words, the signal sent by the current trend is that for the next coming 70 years, the life of growth point policy will remain oblique if not further getting worse. This means that there is a lot that needs to be done regarding development of these poles so as to ensure persistency in adhering to policies and their implementation.

Some Practical and Policy Alternatives

The future economic development prospects of Zimbabwe's growth points are closely linked to the overall regeneration of the productive capacity of communal lands in the respective 55 districts. It is often said that it is not wise to throw away the baby with the bath water. As a starting point, considering the fact that growth point policy is a long forgotten initiative, it is suggested that central government, through

collaboration with other development agencies, should undertake a major evaluation exercise of all the rural growth points in order to be able to formulate revival strategies based on current resource inventories in order to do long term policy planning for future development. The future of most growth points lies increasingly in the solutions put forward for utilization of local natural resources through application of comparative advantage and agrarian and productive elements of the communal sector. If those having land are given ample and long enough government support in terms of subsidies and training, then growth points will prosper as marketing and production outlets. Stakeholders can utilize linkages existing between and within these development nodes including cities by applying the concept of comparative advantage with regard to resource endowments and level of economic and infrastructural development existing and in terms of types of goods produced at different places.

For those districts where agriculture performs well or is likely to thrive if enough support is given to farmers, establishment of seed grading and packing industries will be an appropriate move. The advantages of such an industry include an existing demand among all communal farmers for a variety of types of seed for their farming operations. According to Wekwete (1988), fruit and vegetable processing industries can be opted for in Eastern districts of the country where there is large scale organised fruit farming. The area has also a high agro-ecological potential, high rainfall and rich soils. Moreover, in areas where there is high production of oil seeds such as groundnuts, sunflowers and others, there is a possibility of developing small-oil processing plants which requires a guarantee of inputs from producers. In places like Beitbridge which is in Matabeleland South where there is pronounced beef production, construction of abattoirs and associated industries can be the best strategy of spearheading economic development. Also, this will have to take advantage of the proximate distance to the neighbouring South Africa where some of the beef can be exported.

As a strategy to industrialize growth points, there must be establishment of milling and other related industries such as processing of pig feeds, chicken feeds, and animal feeds which will be production-based as done by urban millers. Agro based industries including food processing industries and cotton processing maybe suitable for growth points such as Gokwe. Growth points in rural areas such as Nyika, Jerera and Matanga, where maize is intensively grown, may for example be suitable for establishment of agro based industries. The saw milling and furniture industries could flourish at growth points such as Tsholotsho in Mat North and Nyanga in the Eastern Highlands of the country where there are a lot of timber available. In fact, there is no need to wait for industries to relocate from town to these growth points. What should happen is local people should be encouraged and supported to embark onto these businesses. They should take advantage of the underway economic and indigenization policy being implemented by the government of Zimbabwe. According to Wekwete (1988), one such incentive to promote none farming activities such as micro-industries is a relatively low-wage rate for the small industries, to enable them to be competitive.

Regarding what has been happening on the ground, it is important to appreciate that not all centres could be viable growth points and therefore there is a need to identify existing potentials which should then determine appropriate policies to be developed and adopted. The 'blanket' approach would not serve a useful purpose given the differing potentials of the centres. On this regard, Wekwete (1988) suggests that future public sector investment should be geared to very specific targets and preferably to productive enterprises in specific growth points. Simply put, this means that rural policy must focus on a particular place, a concept termed by Blake, (2003) 'place-based development.' This means any strategy to revive rural areas must begin with the assets, aspirations, and challenges of the place to be developed. Linked to the issue of specific area development approach, policies must be holistic and comprehensive, focusing on the social, cultural and environmental well-being of the place as well as the economic. The local citizens will have to be

trained in how to recognize their weaknesses, their strengths, their opportunities, and the threats facing them and how to develop strategies to deal with each. Local communities will need much greater support from the educational system than they have received in the past. This is particularly true in the development of entrepreneurial education (Blake, 2003).

Given the multiplicity of development policies which have come and gone, probably without producing expected results, there is a need to tape the role of local authorities (specifically district councils for rural growth points) in the promotion and management of development in these designated centres (Wekwete, 1988). These local authorities must shift their roles as development agents which partner with the private sector to create business in their respective growth points. In Zimbabwe, there is a need for local authorities to renovate available facilities in the form of offices to attract new business, but it can also be a significant revenue earner. Local authorities must actively look for new investment and therefore need proactive planning. A strategy suitable for development of resource frontier regions is to reduce the physical isolation (Friedman, 1966) of these regions. This can be achieved through introduction of multiple communication linkages that will provide access to the rest of the world economy.

Conclusion and Lessons

The Growth Point Policy agenda in Zimbabwe has not been a completely hopeless case. Some of the centres have done very well in the last 30 or so years. The future success of the policy lies in revisiting the criteria for establishment of these centres and let 'common sense' override emotional and political decisions. Certain practical and policy options, if well streamlined and contextualised to each place have the potential in influencing positive development in the centres selected. Theoretically, the fact that urbanisation is synonymous with small to medium sized centres means the need for overhaul thinking in shaping these centres into viable units of human settlement in which infrastructure and service demand are seriously considered. In

this time and the time to come, small centres should not be underrated. Emphasis should be put in developing them to vibrant settlement entities. Agro-climatic and geological features of the regions where the centres are located, remain central as determinants of the economic base of the areas.

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