

**INSTITUTIONAL DECAY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION  
IN WARD 29 GUTU WEST, ZIMBABWE**

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**ABSTRACT**

The economic melt down that was experienced in Zimbabwe since 1997 culminated in the breakdown of nearly all systems that were responsible for the management of natural resources. Most of the institutions that were responsible for the management of resources were crippled. Its either because they were not able to retain qualified staff to man them or they were receiving paltry financial support from national government which all together combined to reduce their efficiency in carrying out their duties. The mal-functioning of these institutions resulted in rampant degradation of natural resources in these areas. The research, therefore, seeks to find out the impact of institutional degradation on the environment. The research utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in collecting data. Questionnaire was the main quantitative data collection tool utilized and semi-structured interviews and field observation constituted the qualitative methods. The research findings showed that institutional decay had resulted in untold environmental degradation and there is an urgent need to resuscitate these institutions for better management of natural resources.

Keywords: rural institutions, environmental management, sustainable development

**Background of the Study**

The land question in Zimbabwe was central to the struggle for independence, so the government embarked on land redistribution soon after independence to meet the needs and aspiration of the major cause of struggle. The major aim of the program was to address the skewed ownership of land that

characterized the colonial period (Caldwell, 1999; Mandaza, 1987; Moyo, 1994). This program was well planned with several national and international organizations supporting the program (Government of Zimbabwe, 2003). These organizations helped to establish institutions for environmental management. International organizations (such as European union, Danish International Development Agency - DANIDA, and Germany Technical Cooperation (GTZ) heavily supported the Department of Rural Department and where pouring a lot of money to run the resettlement programme in Zimbabwe. The ionization of relations between Zimbabwe and the international community in the late 1990s resulted in the disengagement between Zimbabwe and the international community. This resulted in folding of many operations sponsored by these organizations. In the resettlement area a lot was experienced because of this disengagement. The environment started to degenerate at unprecedented levels, where cutting down of tree, siltation of rivers, and overgrazing became permanent features of these areas. The production n the farms also reached record low and the economic development was in its down spiral.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The degeneration of institutions of environmental management caused widespread degradation of the environment. These institutions are financially crippled to the extent either that they were not able to perform their duties or they were failing to attract qualified personnel who could direct operation professionally. Some of the institution had totally folded because their funders had withdrawn their support. All this combined to create an institutional vacuum, and the worst thing that resulted was environmental degradation. Problems, such as rampant and wanton cutting down of trees, uncontrolled grazing, and harvesting of forest resources occurred. There is a greater likelihood that if the situation continues unabated, the area is fast running into a desert and had severe consequences on the livelihoods of people.

### **Justification of the Study**

The study will highlight importance of institutions of environmental management in sustainable management of the environment. This information will be useful to various organizations that are in the business of management of the environment and these include the government, non-governmental organizations, and the community. They will realize the need to resuscitate these institutions for better management of the environment. Farmers will also find this information handy as it will highlight their role in the whole equation of environmental management.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The broader aim of the study was to explore the impacts of institutional decay on the environment in ward 29 Gutu.

## **Specific Objectives**

- To identify institutions that were responsible for environmental management in resettlement schemes in ward 29
- To examine factors that crippled institutions of environmental management in the resettlement areas
- To assess the impact of institutional decay on the environment.

## **Research Methodology**

The research utilized a double pronged approach to data collection where both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were employed. Semi-structured interviews and field observations were the key qualitative methods employed. Interviews were carried with key informants such as government officers, non-governmental organization, and community leaders. Observations were done to assess the damages that were done in the field, observing issues such as siltation, farming practices, damages on grazing land and on the forest resources. Questionnaire was the only quantitative methods used and these were administered to the villagers collecting data on roles played by institutions of environmental management and the impact on the environment, which were as a result of institutional decay. Data was analyzed using SPSS and presented in tables and pie charts.

## **Discussion of Research Findings**

### *Demographic Profile of Respondents*

#### *Age-Sex*

The respondents were drawn across the gender divide and their ages ranged from 30yeras to slightly above 60 year. Females constituted the majority (60%) and they were dominating in all age groups. The 50-59 age group constituted the majority (53%), and of this, females constituted 30%. The 30-39 age groups constituted the least (6.7%) and they were all females. The group also consisted of a considerable

number of aged people (those 60 years and above). They constituted 23.3% and the majority were females. Table 1 (below) shows the age-sex profile of the respondents.

**Table 1: Age-Sex Profile of Respondents**

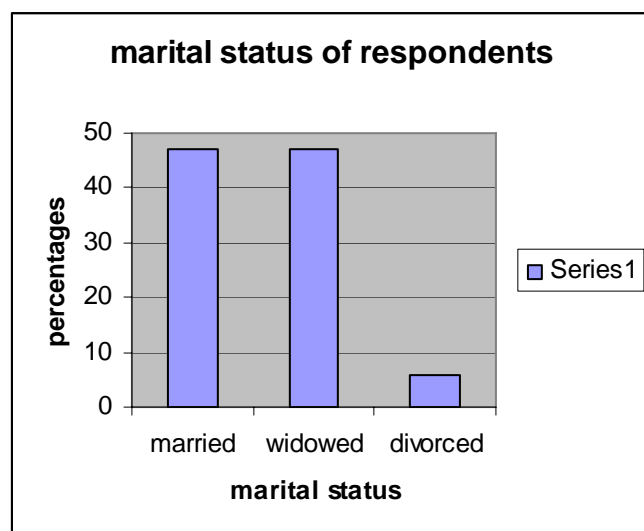
AGE GROUP	SEX		
	males	females	total
30-39	0	6.7	6.7
40-49	6.7	10	16.7
50-59	23.3	30	53.3
60 and above	0	13.3	100

Source: Survey 2009

### Marital Status of Respondents

Respondents were drawn from varying marital backgrounds which included married, divorced and widowed. The married and the widowed constituted a combined 94% with each group contributing an equal share. The divorced were the minority, constituting only 6%. The Figure 1 (below) shows the marital status of the respondents.

**Figure 1: Marital Status of Respondents**



Source: Survey 2009

The marital status of respondents showed that most of them were a vulnerable group (i.e. the widowed and the divorced). They constituted 53%. This shows a great need for institutions that can support them. Women in most African societies are regarded as to be disadvantaged group. They do not own resources and decision made concerning the use and access of these resources are usually made by their male counter-parts. This is despite them commanding the majority. There is therefore great need for institution that will teach and encourage them to participate in natural resource management. This support system should draw from all sectors and they should try to empower them to participate in natural resource management. These are the people who are close to the environment in their daily activities (Ellis, 2000). It, therefore, makes good sense to equip these people with skills that will enable them to carry out conservation activities.

### **Academic Profile**

The respondents were drawn from varying educational background, which ranged from those with elementary education to holders of tertiary education. Those with elementary education (primary) constituted the majority (71%), and those with junior certificates constituted 7% and those with Ordinary level certificates were 20%. Those with higher educational qualifications constituted a paltry 2%. This background shows that there is great need for institutions that could help these people to sustainably manage the environment. These institutions should try and build the resource base that will effectively manage the resources. This could be done by trying to educate these people on sustainable resource management and creating structures at local level that are responsible for managing natural resources. The fact that only 2% had acquired education that is above Ordinary level speaks volumes about the kind of human resource base that we have in the resettlement areas. There is need to teach these people on how to manage resource and the teachings should emphasize the important role that can be played by local people and their knowledge systems in resource management.

### **An Inventory of Institutions that were Responsible for Management of the Environment**

Resettlement program in Zimbabwe started at a very good pace with the support of both national and international organizations. They started at a very good footing with all the institutions needed for good management of the environment (Gore, 1992). The government managed to attract a lot of funding from international organizations. It was also actively involved in issues of environment (Bondi, 1995). These organizations managed to establish institutions that were responsible for proper management of

resources in the resettlement areas. One of the most important and central office that was established was that of the resettlement officer. This office was a creation of bilateral agreements between the government of Zimbabwe and the international organizations and most of the funds that run this office were from the international organizations. This office was the central office in the running of affairs in the resettlement schemes. They controlled the farming systems and management of resources. They conducted short course for the resettled farmers and they helped in development of curriculum needed by these farmers for proper management of rangeland and other resources. It was actually the heartbeat of resettlement areas people benefited immensely from these courses, as they were equipped with skills to manage their resources.

The government had various ministries involved in the resettlement program. The ministry of lands had also officer at ward level in the area and it complimented the resettlement officer in teaching and managing land resources. They also helped farmer's access credit facilities and this helped a lot in the provisioning of farm inputs and implements. People were getting seeds, fertilizers, and chemical to control pests. Those who did not have drought power were helped to get loans from financial institutions. This helped a lot as farmers were able to carry out farming profitably. Farmers were averaging 12 tones of maize per agricultural season from their 5 hectares of arable land and good farmers were managing as high as 15-18 tones and they managed to build good houses and buy farming implements such as scotch carts cultivators and ploughs. Good land husbandry was found to be key in the whole matrix of land reform; the ministry of lands was teaching crop and paddock rotation, donga reclamation, good farming practices, etc.

The ministry of Agriculture was also part of the team that had heavy presence in the resettlement schemes and its major role was to see that good agricultural practices were observed in these areas. It provided officers at ward level again and these officers were tasked to enforce good agricultural practices and they also teach measures that could improve their production. They provided lessons on how to grow various crops and how to protect them from various pests that could attack them This whole effort was aimed at coming up with an effective land reform program and could be credited for good management of resources in the area. The agricultural extension officers would make sure that these farmers stick to their allocated pieces of land. No one was allowed to extend his or her land without permission from these officers and they made sure that good conservations measures were

mandatory to any piece of farming land. These officers would carry out sporadic field visits to try and identify activities that were harming the environment and they could immediately order corrective measures to be effected as soon as possible. All this was in the spirit good environmental management.

Quasi- governmental organizations were also involved in the management of resources in the resettlement areas complimenting the government (Berger, 1993; Haris and Makiko, 2002). Organizations such as Rural District Council, Forestry Commission, and the District Development Fund carried out various activities aimed to conserve the environment. The Forest Commission was very instrumental in the management of forest resources. They were helping communities to establish community woodlots, and were very instrumental in curtailing harvesting and selling of forest resources. They played a very critical role in trying to control evasive species such as Lantana Camara. The Rural District Council was also another para-government organization that was providing administrative roles in the resettlement areas. It also provided social facilities such as water and sanitation, health and the elected councilor who represented the area in the council. The councilor was also responsible for taking environmental concerns of the area and submits them to the council sub-committee on environment. The District Development Fund concentrated on the provision of infrastructure such as schools, roads, boreholes, and clinics.

Non-governmental organizations also played a vital part in the management of the environment. As already alluded earlier, they funded a very important office that was responsible for the day-day running of the resettlement schemes, the resettlement officer. International organizations, such as European Union, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), and GTZ helped in funding the Department of Rural Development (DERUDE). DANIDA was mostly involved in the provision of infrastructure and services for resettled farmers. They also sponsored programs aimed at giving the farmers skills in the management of the environment. They also sponsored exchange programs with other schemes that were running good environmental management schemes. All this was aimed at preserving a sound environmental system that will continue to support the livelihoods of the people. The resettlement officer assigned in every ward and was responsible for overseeing the implementation and policing of the conservation strategies. They had powers to stop any activity they deem detrimental to the welfare of the people and the environment. Their decisions were binding and prompt. They also acted as enforcement agencies for various government statutes. The way they managed these areas

followed that of private ownership. They did not allow other people outside the scheme to have access to the resources of these areas. They tried to enforce required carrying capacity of the areas so as to avoid over- exploitation.

The community was also an important component in the management of environment. They were structured in such a way that they form local structures that form local environmental action program. They are a critical partner in the management of environment and are best placed to conserve their environment (Murphree, 1991). In every committee that was elected to run each village, it was mandatory for it to have one member who was responsible for environmental issues. This elected member was tasked to make random checks in the farm to check for areas that need attention in terms of remedial environmental activities. They also supervised rotation of paddocks and alert the rest of the villagers on what need to be done to prevent further environmental degradation. He/she would recommend further action to be taken by the resettlement officer if there appears to be a deviant person.

### **Institutional Decay and Environmental Degradation**

The souring of relations between Zimbabwe and the international community after the adoption of the fast track land reform witnessed the crumbling of all institution of environmental management and this was followed by a trail of destruction on the environment. The severing of relation saw the withdrawal of many funding institution in the country and all the donors, which were funding many activities in the resettlement areas, also followed suit. This severely crippled operations in the resettlement areas. The most notable effect was the closure of the office of the resettlement officer. As already alluded earlier this was the office that was responsible for day-day running of the operations in the resettlement areas. It was the management nerve-centre and could be credited for all the proper management of resettlement areas. This office was first transferred to the Rural District Council but the council had no budget to accommodate this extra responsibility. It was therefore abolished and it had serious ramifications on the affairs of the resettlement areas. There was no longer controlled access to the resources and the openness was now allowing members in the bordering communal areas to have unrestricted access to the formerly protected resources. They were now free to harvest forest resources such as fire wood, thatching grass, poles for construction. They could even use their grazing area and all this resulted in creating a strain in the resources. The removal of restrictive measures also came to be enjoyed even by the resettled farmers themselves as they also try to take advantage of this. They were also extending their pieces of land at



will. What remained a cause of concern is that they are just extending their fields without taking into consideration the environmental dangers that glaringly imminent. People just plough without putting simple conservation measures, like contour ridge to avoid soil erosion. Cultivation is done along water ways and disregarding the statutory 30 meters from the river banks. Some of the plots were as close to the river as 8 meters and this is causing serious siltation in local rivers. These rivers were formerly perennial but now they can not run for three months after the rain season.

Most of the government institutions are only there but they were no longer operational. The government had been suffering from severe budgetary constrain and it had been unable to fund operations of most of its ministries. The budget allocation could no longer allow them to fund most of the field operations. There were no funds to buy fuel or service operating vehicles. The whole district had no running government vehicle and officers were relying on public transport to carry out their duties. All those farmers who needed the services of these officers were supposed to provide transport and monies for their allowances. The agricultural extension officers used to have motor bikes that enabled them to make field visits but the new economic order could no longer enable them to use them mainly because all of them broke down and the government was not able to repair them so these people remained at their stations and this meant they could no longer do their field visits and they could also no longer provide those important lessons that they gave to the farmers. Officers remained at their stations and this resulted in them losing touch with what was happening in the field.

The net effect of this crippling situation was untold degradation of the environment. There was no one who was monitoring activities in these areas and no one was providing those important lessons. This created a vicious circle where poor farming could no longer produce enough to feed their families and they turn on the surrounding environment for their survival. The previously good farmers were only managing as low as 3-4 tones of maize and the average ones and those below average were no longer able to produce enough to feed themselves. They were now producing as low as 0.05 tones of maize a produce that can only take them for only three months. These people were now resorting to environmentally damaging activities such as stream bank cultivation such as fire wood, thatching grass and charcoal. There was no longer proper management of range land in the area because there was no longer rotation of paddocks and no longer rehabilitation of erosion damaged areas. Veldt fires were now

a common thing destroying a lot of species. Evasive species such as Lantana Camara were no longer controlled and all these are good receipts for environmental disaster.

The community played a very important role in the management of the environment. They were the ones who developed local action plans to fight against environmental degradation. These local action plans were very important because they were crafted to address environmental problems as seen by the local people. This was done through the village committees, which mandatorily had an environmental person. This person was supposed to initiate remedial actions aimed at arresting environmental ills. They were responsible for management of rangeland, initiated donga reclamation and control evasive species such as Lantana Camara. These institutions had died a natural death and are no longer in existence. One of the leading reasons for their death was that institutions of the government that used to work hand in hand with them were longer functioning. The government officer was their pillars for enforcement of most of the regulations. The whole situation was flawed because the local people were not empowered to make binding decisions at local level and had structured that enforced them.

## **Conclusions**

There were so many institutions that were responsible for good management of the environment in the resettlement areas and these included governments (quasi-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations) and community-based institutions. They all used to work in a harmonious situation for the collective good of the environment. Environmental plans were coordinated effectively from the local level to the district level. They were well supported financially by various governmental and none governmental organizations. All these efforts were done with the intension of coming up a land reform that was equipped for good management of the environment. There were various factors that led to the degeneration of these institutions and the resultant degradation of the environment. The government supported institutions suffered severe financial problem that were a direct result of the economic melt down that was experienced in the country and this crippled operations of the government throughout the country. These institutions could not fully support financially all their operations. The quasi- governmental organization also experienced the same situation because Rural District Councils and the Forest Commission could no longer afford t carry out their operations. They used to prepare seedlings for both exotic and indigenous trees but all these activities were shelved because of financial constrain. Some of the institutions folded mainly because some of the supporting institution especially

those supported by the government. The results of this institutional decay were untold environmental degradation which includes poor management of the pastures, siltation of rivers and uncontrolled cutting down of trees. There is no longer good farming practices and this increasingly leading to farmers resorting to the environment for survival and this was damaging the environment.

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