

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE GROWTH CENTRE STRATEGY: PERSPECTIVES FOR REENGINEERING THE CONCEPT IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Growth points (GPs), growth poles (GPs), small towns (STs) or growth centres (GCs) as they are variously named in literature are defined as centres with strong resource base that can initiate a cumulative causation process that culminate in continuous and sustainable development. This paper reviews the definition of the concept and provides a critique of the constraints to the development of growth centres. It is the premise of this theoretical paper that it is possible to reengineer the strategy with a view to achieve sustainable development at these growth poles. Despite its widespread application most of the growth poles have never been successful because of natural-soico-economic complex of factors that have not been adequately conceptualized by the responsible governments.

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework for this papers centres on four major aspects. Firstly, the introduction and the meaning of the growth centre as perceived from a simple linguistic perspective and as derived by regional planners and theorists of the quantitative approaches. The paper also to gives a more simplified and operational definition relevant to Zimbabwe. In the second and third sections the paper addresses the limitations of the growth centre strategy and the strategies adopted to propel growth respectively. The last component focuses on the possibility for reengineering the concept in the Zimbabwean context. The concept of reengineering in this paper implies modification of planning and implementation of the model based on synthesis of the positives of the traditional theoretical thinking on the development of growth points. It is the premise of this paper that established planning protocols are correct but have to be modified in an incrementalist fashion to capture the current dimensions in social planning. Thus, the use of the term reengineering assumes the existence of an array of practical and theoretical planning philosophy from which improvements can be made in the context of sustainable development.

The term growth point (GP) means increasing in size both in number of facilities, building and services provided at an identified centre. Thus, once a centre has been established there should be an observable change in spatial structure and pattern. One would assume that the spatio-temporal expansion is development. It quickly reminds one of the links between growth and development. Whilst the word growth implies expansion development implies quantitative growth and the quality of growth introduced to the selected centres. Thus, these terms are commonly used interchangeably in rural planning.

A theoretical tracking of the concept of growth centres links it to a Frenchman, François Perroux who proposed the Growth Centre Theory in 1958. His ideas were a synthesis of the fusion of the various central place and core periphery theories that took centre stage about the same time. The core is the centre of development. It is characterized by an increase in economic activities and development of the spatial structure, a process known as morphogenesis. The initial triggers include; water supply raw materials, energy and a threshold population size capable of consuming services and goods. Some of the centres developed due to a 'Historical accident' which triggered the cumulative causation process. Cumulative in this sense means accumulation of wealth in a geographic space with a multiplier effect. The multiplier effect in this sense implies the expansion of economic activities driven by increased consumption. These features were supposed to be manifested at the identified points of growth. The general weaknesses of the theories as reflected in literature are over simplification of the development process as a linear process with discernible stages of development. It assumes rapid spatial expansion in terms of the built up area and has limited reference to the qualitative development aspects. The cyclic natures of depressions, crisis and booms that characterize capitalist economies have not been explored. In this context, the African capitalist economy is more defective as compared to the developed world and most likely to experience severe shocks in the case of an economic crisis of the current proportions in Zimbabwe.

The growth pole strategy was also perceived as a vehicle to reduce rural urban disparities and to better understand the interdependences between the development zones (Douglass, 1998). The growth pole needed an identifiable resource base capable of stimulating specific production and marketing activities (Mutizwa-Mangiza and Helmsing 1991:188). Growth centres were also historically viewed as central places at the bottom end of the central place hierarchy which contributed directly to the basic economic and social needs of agricultural producers. In performing this function growth poles concentrate on the provision of infrastructure, collecting and marketing of agricultural inputs, basic agro-processing facilities, social services and low order consumer goods. There are a variety of definitions but the focus of this paper is the development points established for the purpose of propelling growth. Definitions are quite illusive and are very much determined by professional inclinations. The controversies surrounding the explanation of this term in literature are identified with the regional-economic-planning matrix. Thus, recognising this inherent limitation this paper used the terms poles, centres, small towns, rural towns or generally as service centres interchangeably.

The discussion on definitions of the growth pole and literature review identified five key factors as influencing growth at these centres. Firstly, there should be a proven economic base, which can sustain growth through exploitation of local natural resources. Raw materials like minerals whose exploitation might trigger a chain reaction as more economic activities move in to take advantage of the natural resource base (Manyanhaire, Mhishi, Svotwa and Sithole, 2009). This gives space to a second characteristic of the existence of high potential for the development of substantial forward and backward linkages with the surrounding hinterlands. A third factor has to do with the availability of adequate resources, both physical and human to sustainably feed the growth pole. These centres also have the potential to facilitate the process of industrial decentralisation by providing alternative but viable investment opportunities. Lastly, they are established in places where there is already some potential for economic growth and the role of government being to stimulate and support this potential until the process of economic growth becomes sustainable and equitable.

The regional planning perspectives advances Perroux's definition of growth point through viewing the growth centre concept as a strategy to reduce regional inequalities between core regions and their peripheries (Conyers, 2000). Perroux's resource based theory was euro centric in essence and found roots in the developing world through the influence of capitalism. The overall assumption is that new investment concentrated at deliberately chosen areas stood a better chance of achieving agglomeration economies and would end up attracting small scale industrial concerns (Secher, 1982:151). There is reason to believe that growth poles and can stimulate growth if reengineered to suit current realities.

From the Zimbabwean government planning perspective the term GP is more of a generic term for selective urban intervention in the rural sector. Wekwete (1988) describes the concept of growth point in a more precise way:

“The term 'growth point' is widely used in Zimbabwe to denote settlements which are earmarked or designated for economic and physical development. The terminology is often confusing because of the wide range of settlements to which it is applied — ranging from small rural centres to settlements the size of Chitungwiza. This wide application also results in policy problems, particularly in terms of incentives required to attract investment and the support which central Government has to give. 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. In the immediate post-independence era (post-1980) the focus of the growth centre policy was on rural areas. The centres (points) were identified in the communal areas and would receive public sector investment to improve physical and social infrastructure. This investment estimated at \$60 million between 1983/4-1985/6 would be directed at the following: water reticulation, internal roads, sewage-, electricity and other community services. The main focus was on physical development which was perceived as a basis on which private and other public capital would be attracted to the centres. In an effort to redress the imbalanced nature of the colonial economy, the development of settlements (District Centres, Rural Service Centres 'and business centres) was seen as providing important foci for locating investment. Their development would improve the image or attractiveness of the communal areas, as potential investment areas.”

The definition provided by Wekwete for growth points in Zimbabwe singles out the state as the major planning agent. Thus, with the powers vested in it through local authorities intervenes and directs the development process with a view to remove regional disparities. The 'growth point' strategy was adopted in the late 1970s by the colonial government and strengthened in the early 1980s by the post-colonial government with a view to eclipse the dual economy and brings a larger population component into the cash economy (Secher, 1982:153). During the pre-independent period the thrust was to reduce inequalities between communal and urban areas. The strategy was part of a broader initiative to reduce rural urban disparities. A report by the Zimbabwe Institute of Public Administration and Management (ZIPAM, 1992) suggests that growth poles are a 'necessity' in rural development because they (GPs) are a rural development strategy for underprivileged areas. They were developed to improve the quality of life through improved access to services by both the urban and rural people (Escobar, 1995). This policy has been practiced in several countries but most of the growth poles have never been successful because of different factors overlooked by the responsible governments (Dixon, 1990).

Examples of GPs in Zimbabwe include; Magunje, Murambinda, Murombedzi, Sadza, Chisumbanje, Gutu, Jerera, Maphisa, Sanyati, Mataga, Murehwa, Mushumbi, Mukayi, Hauna, Nyika, Hwedza, Checheche and Domboshawa. Additional centres were created in all districts as GPs or District Service Centres (DSC). This was meant to spread economic justice to marginalized areas through pursuing a policy of 'growth with equity'. Areas with high population concentration and potential for accelerated economic development were identified. GPs had to be self-sustaining and were to be consumer convenience centres for purchasing goods, centres for higher order public and private services, linkage to national markets, production supply and support centres, agro-and resource processing centres, non-agricultural employment for rural labour and centres of information and knowledge (De Jong, 1988). The preceding debate discussed the concept of growth giving the general characteristics of the concept as applied at global and local level. In the Zimbabwean context these centres are manifesting a declining trend and the application of the concept of growth may be questionable although potential for growth is high.

REVIEW OF LIMITATIONS TO THE GROWTH CENTRE STRATEGY

The intrinsic principle underlining this concept is the idea of starting a cumulative process leading to a general growth and development (Conyers, 2001:221). However, this did not materialise in most of the developing countries. In steady the points have become centres of characteristic decline in business and morals. They are characterised by massive closure of business and continuous depopulation as mainly the agricultural base in the case of Zimbabwe crumbles under the current economic crises linked to the controversial Land Reform programme. The reverse of cumulative causation process is taking place at these centres through desegregation of the business complex and the fast setting of 'ghost town' characteristics. There is progressive economic decline whose spread effects aggravate the magnitude and extent of poverty among the rural population. The enthusiasm that characterised the initial stage of the adoption of the strategy has vanished and even the protagonists of the strategy are not at liberty to talk about the strategy. What has really gone wrong with the strategy? A bad carpenter will always blame his tools and not his skills to perform the job. However, there is hope if the strategy reengineered to suit the present realities in development planning and policy imperatives.

While resource based theorists argue that the trigger for economic growth lies in the basis of the presence of the exploitable natural resource, the advocates of decentralisation in most developing countries seem to ignore this essential ingredient for growth. Most centres designated for growth poles do not have the requisite potential or strong human resource base from where to ignite the processes of cumulative causation and subsequent growth. Thus, the decisions concerning these small towns continue to be controlled from central government. The frustration associated with the facilitation of the actual planning, designing and execution of plans are a national issue where the politics of the ruling elite take centre stage. Whilst of decentralisation and empowerment took centre stage in the last decade or so the benefits of such innovative planning approaches have not been realised in the African context. A number of reasons have proffered lack of capacity and the need to build capacity for local councils planning. Resources have been mobilised by international donors towards capacity building for most rural councils in Africa. The surprising trend however, in Zimbabwe, is an apparent continued lack of capacity among most district councils. Thus, the state of a growth point reflects the nature of disarray within the planning system making it difficult to achieve the elusive Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and sustainability. It must be

recognized that the growth centre strategy has practical limitations, but does provide an organized framework for establishing planning rural development. The implementation of the strategy has faced a plethora of constraints.

The growth centre strategy had limited success across the world and has failed to be the panacea for rural development. The practical limitations in literature include failure to take off, failure to control out migration, limited investment, underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of security of tenure of properties at these centres, limited funding options and on the whole economic crisis. This section covers some of the limitations as identified in literature and at visited centres at in Zimbabwe.

In South America, the strategy was generally considered as ineffective, inappropriate and useless to the extent of being rejected by most countries. The countries, in South America that rejected the model had earlier in the 1960s adopted the strategy with great enthusiasm and incorporated it into their sub national regional planning at a pace that was surprisingly rapid. Three nations, Chile, Bolivia and Colombia that had developed detailed national plans for growth centre based on concentrated decentralisation abandoned and returned to other bases of regional planning (Conroy, 1973). This shift in approach raised new questions about the applicability of the strategy in developing economies. The strategy though having good elements for planning rural development seems to have suffered the vicious criticism of the economic and planning theory that developed during the 1950s and the 1960s as influenced by the quantitative revolution. Mathematical and statistical approach to development centralised at national level with limited active participation of the people affected by these development plans. From a geographical perspective the 1970s is characterised as the decade of the critical revolution. That is criticisms of the shortcomings of the quantitative revolution and the adoption of a more humanistic approach in spatial and temporal studies. This rapid paradigm shift as planners rushed for the fashionable (envogue) popular participation planning approaches could have overshadowed an otherwise plausible rural development strategy. This could be the reason why in Zimbabwe it took effect much latter in the 1970s and the 1980s. The strategy led to the creation of a large number of small urban centres most of which were not necessarily viable, thus wasting a lot of money, they lacked public funding and they simply failed to spread the intended development to their hinterlands.

Swanvelder (1987:19) observed that by extending infrastructure and stimulating economic development and job creation, these regional centres would curtail rural-urban migration. This view of the strategy was applied to South Africa where growth points were established in the national states themselves after 1969. Examples include Babelegi in Bophuthatswana, Isethebe in KwaZulu-Natal, Gcuwa in Transkei and Dimbaza in Ciskei. However, fewer employment opportunities were created in these states as GCs failed to make significant contribution to the improvement of conditions in the peripheries of these states (Swanvelder, 1987:20). It is worth noting that as the populations of the older established towns continued to multiply due to combined effects of net immigration and natural increase, stiff competition for services with emerging cores adversely impacted on growth prospects for the newly emerging peripheral cores.

The investors' attitudes continue to favour established settlements at the expense of the smaller growth poles. The chief reason being that the investor goes where he or she expects a positive cost benefit analysis and minimal risk to business.

Thus, as long as development grants and government attention continues to deliberately target already established towns and cities, reducing regional inequalities will remain a pipe dream. In Zambia, imbalances were in three forms, income, socio-economic opportunities and population levels. These were tied to the colonial segregatory policy, which resulted in imbalances in spatial development. Development was concentrated along the copper belt and was propelled by mining activities and associated downstream effects. These became the economic heart of Zambia. It resulted in a difference in per capita income between rural and urban dwellers. Rural dwellers had no land and relied on subsistence farming and family members who were urban wage earners (as all the good land had been taken by whites). The Copper Belt and Line of Rail thus became areas of attraction for development due to their economic nature, accounting for 88.8% of Zambia's national income in 1964, while the rest of the territory contributed only 11, 2 % (Fair, 1983). This created sharp rural urban disparities and reinforced economic despair.

The scenario discussed above demands an urgent policy shift, which deliberately encourages the revival of economic activities at these growth points through government interventionist measures. However, shifting allegiance is constrained due to lack of flexibility by central governments or by agencies funding some of the projects as well as sluggishness in adapting these centres to the continuously changing global environment. Though there are real benefits that have been realised in some cases like new work in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy the country towns and areas that benefit are usually those which are situated fairly close to the large cities, have good transport links and have some specific attraction or spectacular scenery. Remote isolated and less interesting rural areas and country towns are still caught in the downward spiral of depopulation and decline (Swanvelder, 1987:237).

Most growth points across Sub-Saharan Africa show a contrasting picture as most growth centres were just chosen ahead of others without either a natural resource base to exploit or an initial locational advantage, thus the high prevalence of decline in both service provision and economic growth. Swanvelder (1987:233) notes with deep concern the over reliance on agriculture in the periphery and the consequences thereof when it begins to decline. Most of the growth poles initially depend on the expenditure by the farmers for their existence. If this is reduced, the towns decline. Schools, medical services and retailers receive less support and suffer the consequences. Employment opportunities decrease and people are forced to migrate to larger towns and cities. As a result country towns begin to lose population to the bigger towns thereby reducing the local market for products, leading further to downsizing of operations or even closure of shops, banks and other supporting services.

In agro-based economies, any major decline in the agricultural sector directly impacts on the performance of growth points whose existence rests on their interaction with farmers from peripheries. Given the vulnerability the agriculture sector has found itself in over the past two or so decades induced by perennial droughts and other natural disasters such as cyclones over Southern Africa, less spending power by farmers could offer a clue to the gradual decline in fortunes for most growth points. Van der Merwe (1982) cited in Swanvelder (1987) points out that in South Africa, between 1970 and 1980 nearly 100 or 36,5% of approximately 270 small towns with population of less than 2000 experienced a decline in numbers. Country towns or growth points that have escaped the process of decline were mostly those with a more favourable situation with

respect to roads, large cities, natural resources or the coast. The scenario has not changed much and there is need to work with the existing forces in the political economy to unleash energies, to create opportunities, to remove barriers to entry, to coordinate initiatives and to provide appropriate backup (Dewar, 1986 and Dewar, 1984). However, it has not always been that where the government intervenes development becomes sustainable but other hosts of factors come into play.

The symptoms of decline and decay are seen in many small country towns in Southern Africa, unemployment, economic stagnation, few or no new investments low property prices abandoned or neglected houses, many elderly people, few young man, half empty schools, poor services, poor roads and closed shops. Musampa (2006) summarizes the degree of decay of growth points in South Africa with a case study of Butterworth in the former Transkei under apartheid. Common threads that can be picked from literature point as objectives the selection of a growth centre possessing attributes such as proximity to higher order central place (East London for Butterworth) and the formation and assurance of a package of incentives to expedite sustainable development. However, the programme has run into serious problems and in reference to the closure of industrial establishments, former president Nelson Mandela said that there exists a dire need for concessions to be adhered to in order to retain existing industry and continue to attract investments to peripheral areas. At the time this statement was made most of the incentives had been phased out resulting in escalated factory closures.

As for the desperate economic situation, most developing countries find themselves in an inherent traditionalism as the chief factor negatively impacting on efforts at economic development (Hosier, 1986:34). The complete dosage of this traditionalism has to do with lack of innovation, lack of entrepreneurship as well as low investment rates. One of the major components of this dosage is lack of skilled manpower and educated personnel to work in the propulsive industries, which are central to the process of cumulative causation. It could be simply lack of derive and personal motivation among potential investors and the local politicians. Higgins and Savoie (1988:378) pointed out that in Colombia variations in the level of education were the main cause of income inequalities. Consequently, there was a tendency for regions or GCs with relatively low levels of education to have a relatively higher incidence of poverty. The relationship between education and regional development depended not only on the level but the type of education. It is imperative to note that investors are attracted to regions or centres where a significant proportion of the population has the specific skills, which they happen to require. Most GPs are adversely affected by brain drain of skilled personnel to established towns. The skills factor inhibits growth, because the development of a growth centre depends to a considerable extent on the existence of a core of people who have appropriate entrepreneurial skills, the ambition to achieve that much more than other people and the imagination or vision to identify the new income earning opportunities which will enable them to do so (Conyers 2001:139 and Manyanhaire, Mhishi,. Sivotwa and Sithole, 2009). It implies then that even if a growth point is located in an area with an initial locational advantage like a strong natural resource base, the ability to turn that advantage into economic growth requires technical know how which in most cases is critically lacking at most GCs, hence the decline characterising most of them.

Inadequate financial resources and administrative capacities are key constraints to economic growth. Due to lack of adequate financial resources and administrative manpower, local governments are unable to provide adequate housing, services and infrastructure needs of the growing rural immigrants (Swanvelder, 1987:76). They have failed to realise growth because of

the failure on the part of government to divert resources and the poor conditions to investors at these growth centres, for example poor skills, poor market and sparse populations, all work against economic development. The net effect of decentralisation measures have been the imposition of planning restrictions on the creation of new industries or the expansion of existing ones in areas that are already developed. As a result growth continues to flourish in older and established towns at the expense of upcoming regional cores.

The strategy had mixed fortunes in Zimbabwe. In the 1980's growth points resulted in improved quality of life because of the provision of basic social amenities. During the same period business people rushed to establish business units expecting a rapid cumulative causation process. There was better provision of shelter, agricultural diversification, employment creation, and reduction in rural-urban migration and better utilization of resources. However, these successes were only temporary because the responsible government poorly implemented the growth point strategy.

A major criticism is that the government of Zimbabwe was over ambitious in designating more than 50 centres as GPs and promoting their development through inexperienced institutions. The fundamental reasons for failure included the master plan mentality in planning for these GPs, which disregarded local differences like the arid conditions in which some centres are located. Thus, to date only a few centres are still in existence because they are on good soils for example Sanyati (Cleaver, 1990). Furthermore the strategies were based on inappropriate western concepts and experiences and not the beneficiaries' experiences. The advice and financial assistance was foreign based thus limited to the availability of foreign experts and donor funding. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) funded by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank resulted in the reduction of government expenditure leading to the reduction of government incentives, relocation of businesses to the urban areas and decline in rural development. The contentious issue that we have to address in Zimbabwe to stop the decay at these centres has to do not with how far we failed but to adopt corrective measures in a reengineering process that aims to rekindle the development process.

STRATEGIES TO STIMULATE GROWTH AT RURAL TOWNS

A common strategy to stimulate economic growth in emerging core areas has been the decentralization of key government industries, services and activities away from the congested larger urban cores to emerging country towns. In support to this overall strategy infrastructural development has been viewed as key to social and economic well being of these rural centres (Hammond 1985:266 and Wekwete, 1988). These include the installation of electricity, construction of roads, reticulation of water, postal services and communication systems as well as entertainment centres and buildings for services. The building of new factories and trading estates has in certain undeveloped regions provided the impetus for cumulative causation to take place, and the multiplier effect operating so that an initial injection of capital and industrial construction leads inevitably to growth of a manufacturing agglomeration at growth points. Other governments have provided a host of incentives like tax rebates, borrowing powers for local authorities and support to individual investments aimed to promote growth at these centres. A critical dimension to the issue of investment in rural areas has been the lack of title deeds particularly in Zimbabwe as business operators are given long-term leases. The lack of title limits the borrowing powers by the owners and thus stagnation, decline or decay of most facilities. Entitlement gives security of tenure and provides opportunities for creative

business entrepreneurship and if tied to the philosophy of popular participation positive results can be derived. However, we should not overemphasize the centrality of this fact as some established centres where owners have title are also characterized by a general decline of business.

Stagnation and decline of growth points can be reversed through accommodating the surplus population of the larger metropolitan centres “the overspill effect” and by decisive planning and action, on the part of authorities and other organisations. The encouragement of a larger population at these centres could improve the market size and hence stimulate the productive sector. Furthermore, action must be taken to stimulate development using local solutions than to entirely rely on external linkages. Both long and short-term incentives must be used to lure investors to country towns or growth poles. For instance, removal costs are reimbursed to industrialists who moved their factories to regional development points from the metropolis. Establish regional development advisory committees with recognised representative bodies in the different regions, and advise the central government on specific development problems and strategies to combat the problem.

Bradford and Kent (1987:161) contented the need for a thriving economic activity, akin to a spring board from where take off becomes possible. This process of growth in a given area must be fuelled. Migrant potential entrepreneurs and capital are then attracted from less advanced surrounding areas. The decentralisation of plans from the major towns is further stimulus to growth. This occurs as demand in the periphery expands and as land costs and congestion increase in the major towns. More branch plants, which are reopened, have ties outside the growth centre and are often the first to close in a depression. This argument may explain the frequent closures of medium to large firms at GPs in most developing countries. They further point out that even when firms have relocated, the multiplier effect has often been found to be much less than expected due to the firms’ external ties, which are difficult to dislodge.

In Tanzania a radical development strategy aimed at achieving uniform levels of development as part of a self-reliant socialist society envisioned by the former President Julius Nyerere was adopted. A high priority has been to rationalise service provision so that services are concentrated in key settlements. By concentrating services in fewer locations service threshold can be maintained and the benefits of economies of scale reaped. Investment in transport infrastructure has been another common strategy but there are concerns that improvements in accessibility can be double edged. They make rural settlements and the countryside more accessible, but they also make it easier for people and businesses to leave. In Zimbabwe the ministry of Local Government and Urban Development is actively promoting self-reliance and innovation among local councils to ensure that service delivery improves countrywide through charging economic rates. The rates previously charged for services were a constraint to growth as they were not economically viable. The latest adoption of a multiple currency economy by the inclusive government of Zimbabwe in 2009 has actually helping local authorities to charge realistic rates, leases and licences. However, a worrying dimension to this has been the failure by business owners at these centres to open their shops as they fail to raise the money wanted to operate a business.

In the developed world, many governments in establishing GC policies have adopted Friedman’s model and theoretical ideas.

They have become aware of regional imbalances and for political, social and arguably economic reasons have sought to reduce it. These policies have involved investment in selected small towns in the periphery, which would, attract growth industries, so setting the cumulative causation process. According to Bradford and Kent (1987:176) incentives were offered to attract industries to the periphery, while industrial expansion was often discouraged in the major core area. By concentrating investment in these mini cores, it was hoped that via spread effects, the surrounding area would benefit. Spread effects are crucial to the success of these policies. Thus, the core periphery ideas have been applied at regional and sub-regional scales. A good example of such policy is the French regional planning objective of creating metro poles disequilibria to act as counter magnets to Paris. Lyon, St Etienne and Grenoble are such urban areas in the Rhones-Alpes Region.

Two major trends appear from the application of the growth centre strategies in both developed and developing countries. Firstly, by attempting spatial redistribution of real incomes, it is possible that the overall growth of the country is hindered. This is so because the restrictions on expansion in the metropolitan cores may mean that new growth industries are never established. The country is consequently robbed of its seedbed of new industry and innovations. It is worth noting that policies of redistribution or minimising regional imbalances may therefore be more appropriate to develop. Indeed it may be argued that regional imbalances are necessary for to economic takeoff. In trying to promote development governments have invested in place rather than people. Aid is channelled towards establishment of an attractive infrastructure without giving due regard to the need for a proper skills base, to exploit opportunities in the new core. Furthermore, infrastructure is provided and industries are attracted to the poorer areas, rather than investment being made in training the people and assisting them to move to areas of greater potential.

PERSPECTIVES FOR REENGINEERING THE STRATEGY AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR ZIMBABWE

From the above discussion it is clear that the growth centre strategy has received wide publicity over a long period of time from the time the concept was coined by Perroux in the 1950s. Pursuant to this governments across the globe have tried to implement the strategy with mixed results. Whilst in the developed world there has been over concentration of resources at growth centres resulting in realistic growth the third world scenario particularly in Africa has been disappointing. The so-called Rural Growth Centres were mere community service centres (Mlia and Kaluwa, 1990). They failed to stimulate economic growth due mainly to the poor location of the centres. Initially, those firms and leading industries, which would lead to rural economy transformation, were favoured. The growth points are not linked to any leading industries or firms but are simple rural service centres with a number of facilities being provided at a focal point. The word “growth” has actually been dropped from the term in acknowledgement of their limited success.

In the context of Zimbabwe, the impact of economic development has been equally disappointing. Significant economic growth occurred only in a few of the growth points, located in areas where agricultural output was expanding rapidly, thus creating a market for secondary goods and services. The others remained as no more than small service centres consisting only of government offices and a few shops. Although the lack of an economic base has been cited as the main reason for low investment levels at most growth points, other factors have also been involved. These include lack of title deeds and financial incentives for instance, tax concessions. While tax concessions have been given at some point it tended to favour existing

towns than the new growth points. The main reason for the overall lack of progress was that the combined effects of local, national and international power structures and relationships reinforced inherited inequalities, which were deeply entrenched.

The growth points have not generated adequate employment opportunities as there was lack of investment in large scale industries owing to a number of social, economic and environmental factors. The idea of attracting investors into new areas has to be properly planned and the necessary resources allocated to these endeavours. Another dimension to the resistance to change has to do with the circumstances under these growth points were created during the colonial period in Zimbabwe. They were perceived as towns for the black people whilst the established ones were reserved for meaningful white large scale industrial investment. This has seen the influx of people into urban areas coming from the entire geographical expanse of the rural sector including from these growth points. The 'bright lights theory' seems also to be a powerful driver in the complex migration process that has virtually paralysed production in the rural sector. This depopulation of the rural sector has reduced the market for the growth pole. The postcolonial government policy has compounded this problem through investments guidelines that favoured the established cities particularly the capital or the primate city, Harare, as it should be appropriately called in Zimbabwe. Development planning was grossly unbalanced in terms of financial resources allocation and infrastructural development in general.

The wider development complex of spatial planning often raises the dichotomy of the related top-down versus bottom up approaches. Whilst part of the failure of the growth centre strategy can be associated in terms of criticisms to the top down approaches the reality of planning is that both approaches need integration so that balanced planning is achieved. That is the 'convergence theory', where the rejected ideas are scrutinised, analysed and criticised and reconstructed with properly reengineered planning terminology that suits the current social and business mentality. Dynamism is what is important at this level, moving more towards contingency measures in rural development planning with an overall objective to achieve quality. The bottom up approach seems to capture the principle of subsidiarity and the root to achieve sustainability. Using the lowest structures of society in planning is not an easy task as these lower structures of society are an amorphous entity in terms of planning that needs reconstruction and direction. They have to be actively involved in identifying factors that constrain development but it has to be known that the issue of participatory planning has a limit where the general public ends and where the technocrats in land use planning start. The idea of fusing the public demands into a workable national growth centre planning demands the abilities of personnel that has been adequately trained in popular planning approaches. There is potential for improvement if the adjustments that are done to the existing planning policies capture broad based ideas of the beneficiaries of the growth pole policy. On the contrary too much talk about capacity building through conferences and seminars without the physical translation of these discussions to allocation of resources and consequently the necessary attraction of businesses to growth points will only worsen regional inequalities.

Experts in local government and rural and urban planning in Zimbabwe believe the strategy can be revitalized to ensure sustainability in decentralizing investment development. Independent Zimbabwe inherited a highly centralized system of government founded and built upon racist lines. Over the past two decades there has been a series of legislative enactments, directives and pronouncements that created structures and procedures facilitating the devolution of responsibility and

decentralization of investment development to GPs. If well-managed growth points have demonstrated the potential to become commercially viable places that can create a lot of employment opportunities for people in rural areas. Although development in some of the growth points has slowed down due to the prevailing economic conditions the potential of growth points as areas of investment development cannot be over emphasized. It's time to act through sorting out the garbage that we have created in rural development. Where has the sanity of informed and people centred rural planning gone? It's time to reengineer the growth centre strategy.

The action can be in the form of a series of strategies to stimulate economic growth both at public policy and community action level. Incentives in form of concessions in tax had impact to certain extent. It could be extended to investment assistance given to local business persons who have their hearts in the rural settings. This may go a long way addressing the issue of depopulation. The modernization of the existing community cultures will go a long towards improving economic development at the designated centres. This process of modernization could include the reorganization of rural settlements towards planned villages. One major factor of decline could be linked to the spatial distribution of the population in relation to the location of the growth poles. Thus, the depopulation of the areas surrounding these growth points and the placement of the population into planned residential zones may be the long term solution to promote growth.

Some of the growth points in Zimbabwe already boast of thriving businesses from which twining of rural towns can be done with towns elsewhere in the world. Thus, the government can make special arrangement for use of franchises and partnerships in business at identified areas. This could be enhanced through providing business start-up finance that is distributed through a transparent process in which would be business persons are actively involved and make critical decisions. Development plans and financial support must be depoliticized if the desired results are to be achieved. All hope is not lost for the strategy of growth poles in Zimbabwe. This paper challenges the academics and planners to revisit their attitudes towards growth poles.

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