

Growth Points or Declining Points?

A Case of Magunje Growth Point in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe

By

I.O. Manyanhaire, B. Mhishi, E. Svotwa and N. Sithole

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the constraints to the development of Magunje Growth Point in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. Pre-tested research instruments, which included a questionnaire, key informant interviews, field observations, and document reviews were used to collect data from sampled respondents. The survey covered residents from the high density and low-density area of the growth point. The major locational factors and constraints identified were the enabling policy of decentralization, farming, accessibility, lack of investment, small population, lack of funding, and low revenue base. Other problems included lack of title deeds, decline in farming activities, dominance of the commercial space by a few individuals, lack of participatory planning, as well as general decline in economic performance at national level. Solutions to these constraints are embedded in a proactive national and local development strategy that maximizes on the opportunities provided by the local resource base rather than the sterile top down modernization approach of regional planning. Critical to the idea of growth points is the need to diffuse the tension between decentralization and centralization through deliberate allocation of resources and the empowerment of the local people.

Key Words: Growth pole, Constraints, Centralization, Decentralization, Stagnation, Locational factors

INTRODUCTION

Growth points 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 (Conyers, 2001; Helmsing, 1986; Carr 1997; Perroux, 1958). They are centres of expanding industries, which trigger a chain reaction of production and promotion of associated services with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of life. It is envisaged that by declaring promising and resource-endowed centres as growth points, the cumulative causation process would kick-start the process of economic development, whose spread effects would activate the quality of life in the periphery (Carr, 1997; Perroux, 1958). In so doing it would attract investment and favourable government treatment, which would lead to both cumulative growth in economic activity and high population growth. Some growth poles have continued to prosper long after the initial stimulation factor gone through multiplier effects associated with a growing centre (Carr, 1997).

For a growth point to become viable and sustainable there should be the right mix of policy and planning. A successful growth point planning strategy captures the wide base of the social and economic dynamics, as well as a clear plan to maximize the utilization of the resource base available to propel growth. This would then mean that for growth points to become viable and sustainable, other factors must be at play, like innovation or identification of new resources, in conjunction with favourable government policy support. The concept attracted much enthusiasm among business people at independence in most African countries, but has since taken the back stage in economic development policy, especially rural development. A number of constraints can be singled out to explain the state of growth points, particularly in Zimbabwe. What potential is there for these centres to continue to grow as they are supposed to do? Is there any future about these centres in Zimbabwe, or they are remnants of the ills of the post-independent state planning mechanism?

There have been a number of problems encountered in applying growth centre strategies in the developed and developing worlds. In some cases, as in the USA in the 1960 investment has been ill-advised because it has been spread too thinly in too many growth centres and has been on a worst-first, greatest-need basis, rather than a greatest potential basis (Bradford and Kent, 1987). It resulted in having too many growth centres continually absorbing investment without achieving the aims of self-sustained growth and development through the cumulative causation process as envisaged. The broad based constraints to the growth of these centres are part of the social, economic, and physical

interaction complexes. The general trend linked with decline in growth points has to do with lack of investment and political constraints.

The theoretical basis of the growth point strategy has been extensively discussed and applied in both the developed and developing countries. The unattractiveness of the growth points in the developed countries tends to be enhanced by the desire by investors to locate in areas already enjoying economies of scale. Any business supplying goods or services, whether a shop selling groceries or a broker selling insurance, needs a minimum number of customers or threshold population in order to generate sufficient revenues to stay in business (Luckas, 1991). Declining growth centres are characterized by labour migration and the resultant shrinkage of market for the existing business, as well those aspiring to establish new investment ventures. As for migration, what seems to be crucial is the economic status of the area of origin, as compared to areas which labour migrates to moving away in search of labour deficient areas. Growth points even in the developed world are now confined to sheltering workers commuting to larger towns. They have been relegated to dormitory towns, or points. In Zimbabwe, most growth points have been turned into residential areas without any meaningful capital investments. It has been difficult to attract the right kind of industry, namely the propulsive growth industries, which have extensive multiplier effects (Bradford and Kent, 1987). The situation is even more critical for Zimbabwe, where it is not a question of failure to attract the right kind of industry, but failure to attract any economic investment at all in most cases. Hence, the dominance of services at the growth centres, which are failing to justify their being termed “growth poles” when they are literally “stagnant and disintegrating cores”.

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 decentralization 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. Hence, the stagnation at most growth centres. Attempts by governments to facilitate the processes of decentralization have resulted in tension between centralization and decentralization (Semu, 2001). There is need to strike a balance between the desire to implement central policies and to generate local development initiatives, whilst at the same time resolving the conflicting claims of centralization of political and administrative power (Rakodi, 1990; Semu, 2001). Policies that have been adopted emphasized rural decentralization while the political and financial implications of such programmes have meant continued centralization (Semu, 2001; Madzingira, 2002).

While during the policy-making stages of growth centre strategies, most governments support or view the relocation of a government funded enterprise or industries (decentralization of services) as key to growth; experience and practical life on growth centres has indicated otherwise. Very few growth centres can boast of having government-funded enterprises, hence the dominance of services and the economic decline which characterise most if not all such centres. In this regard the centres fail to play a key role in rural development.

In Zimbabwe, the concept of growth poles, or growth points, was actually introduced before independence as part of a policy document, called “Integrated Plan for Rural Development,” that was introduced in 1978. This plan designated ten growth centres in communal areas, namely Chisumbanje, Gutu, Jerera, Maphisa, Mataga, Murewa, Mushumbi, Nkayi, Sanyati, and Wedza. The designation of the aforementioned was to be adopted, after independence, as part of the government’s policy that embodied growth with equity, as it was felt that for general economic development to succeed at a national scale, regional inequalities had to be drastically reduced. Rambanapasi (1990), Mlalazi and Conyers (2001), and Heath (1978) agree that the theory of the growth centre strategy in Zimbabwe was adopted as a regional planning policy aimed at correcting colonial imbalances through the provision of infrastructure to the disadvantaged communal sector.

The impact of economic development has been disappointing. Significant economic growth occurred only in a few of the growth points, like Gokwe and Sanyati 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. The noted causative elements to this scenario were the lack of a strong economic base, low investment levels, lack of title deeds and financial incentives, like tax concessions. The latter problem was partially addressed by a later policy, which allowed a small town to apply to be designated as a financial growth point, thereby enabling industries to obtain various tax concessions. This, however, has tended to favour existing towns than the new growth points. To exacerbate the problem, cuts in government expenditure, which occurred along with prescriptions of economic reforms in the 1990s, came into effect before the programme of infrastructure and service provision was completed. Consequently, in some growth points, such as Gokwe, lack of such facilities is actually hampering growth. In summing up the problem of regional inequalities affecting peripheral cores of development and growth, Wekwete (1997) pointed out that the main reason for overall lack

of progress was that inherited inequalities, which were deeply entrenched, have been reinforced by the combined effects of local, national, and international power structures and relationships.

Solutions to stagnation of growth points take various forms (Mtukudzi, 1999; Hammond, 1985; Conyers, 2001). These could be the construction of new roads, railways, airports, the introduction of efficient telephone links, power supplies, postal services, the modernization of education facilities, the siting of new ware houses, retail premises, the reform for trading, land ownership, and tax laws. These have been tried the world over with limited success particularly in the developing countries.

The growth point strategy came about amid the desire by central governments to effect equitable regional development previously denied under colonialism. It was also an attempt to influence socio-economic development of peripheral rural areas through concentration of economic activities at selected growth points. The general failure by a larger number of these growth points, particularly in Zimbabwe, to economically take off into self sustained growth cores, formed the basis of this study. They intended to assess some of the constraints for the growth of Magunje Growth Point in Hurungwe District. To achieve this, locational factors were identified and the solutions to the limited development at Magunje Growth Point examined.

THE STUDY AREA

Magunje Growth Point is located thirty-five kilometres west of Karoi Town, off the main Harare to Chirundu Highway, in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. The environs of Magunje Growth Point are characterised by undulating terrain marked by numerous granite inselbergs, some of which are deeply jointed. These soil types vary from clay loam soils to black clay soils that favour the production of food maize, groundnuts, soya and sugar beans, tobacco, cotton, as well as paprika and sunflower among others.

The vegetation is typical *miombo*, dominated by varieties of *brancystegia* species. Medium-to-sparse bush are quite pronounced on either banks of Murereshi River, which passes through the southern limits of the centre. Tree density and species richness decreases sharply towards homesteads in all directions from the centre along the valleys and within the vicinity of the growth point. A variety of short-to-medium sized grass species dominate plains and open spaces separating the dense bush pockets.

Magunje Growth Point is in agro-ecological Region 3 and as such receives moderate rainfall, averaging 600 to 700 mm per annum with fairly high chances of droughts. Temperatures are generally high, averaging 24°C, peaking in summer months with the southern shift of the intertropical convergence zone into northern Zimbabwe.

The population was estimated at 13,000 (CSO, 2002) people. The main services provided at the centre included education at two primary schools and 3 secondary schools. Vocational training was provided at the vocational training centres two kilometres to the south along the Bumi Hills Highway. Other services offered at the centre included health at the main hospital and at the newly opened herbal clinic, hardware shops, retailing, restaurants, nightclubs, two service stations, butcheries, and a number of churches. The ministries of defence, education, and environment have offices at the centre. Recreation is catered for through the availability of a stadium in the western limits of the centre. A community library is also operational, as well as the recently commissioned New Start Centre. A market for fresh farm produce and a police station complete the list of services offered at the centre.

METHODOLOGY

This was a descriptive survey of the constraints to the growth of Magunje Growth Point conducted between September 2005 and April 2006. A questionnaire was used to collect data on the development, type of services provided by the centre, and the constraints that could have led to the stagnation in development. The growth point has three residential sections covering, Tiger (279 houses), White houses (280 houses), and Council Quarters (86 houses). Given the large number of the houses that needed to be covered; only 10 % was selected through proportional stratified sampling at the first level and systematic sampling for a 10% of each stratum. Key informants conveniently selected basing on their knowledge of the growth point were interviewed. Field observations guided by observation checklists were conducted to establish the constraints to the growth of the centre. This was done to cover up those homesteads that did not make up the 65 households selected as the sample for questionnaire survey. The results from interviews were compared with findings from the questionnaires, document analysis, as well as field observations. This triangulation process helped to cross check inconsistencies in data. The categorical and non-categorical data generated were coded according to themes and tabulated for easy of analysis and presentation.

RESULTS

Locational Factors for Magunje Growth Point

Four major locational factors were identified during the survey (Figure 1). These were, centrality (15%), farming (18.5%), Main Highway from Karoi Town (12.3%) and decentralization (53.8%). The centrality of the growth point, with respect to its surrounding, provides strong argument for the location of the centre. However, farming activities were dominant in the area, which could suggest the likelihood of the setting of the Grain Marketing Board depot as a distribution and collection point of inputs and farm produce. There are nine-grain silos. The main road provides easy accessibility to the growth point and has high chances of increasing economic activities at the centre and its periphery. Usually in spatial economic development the road could be a consequence of development or can trigger investment in an area.

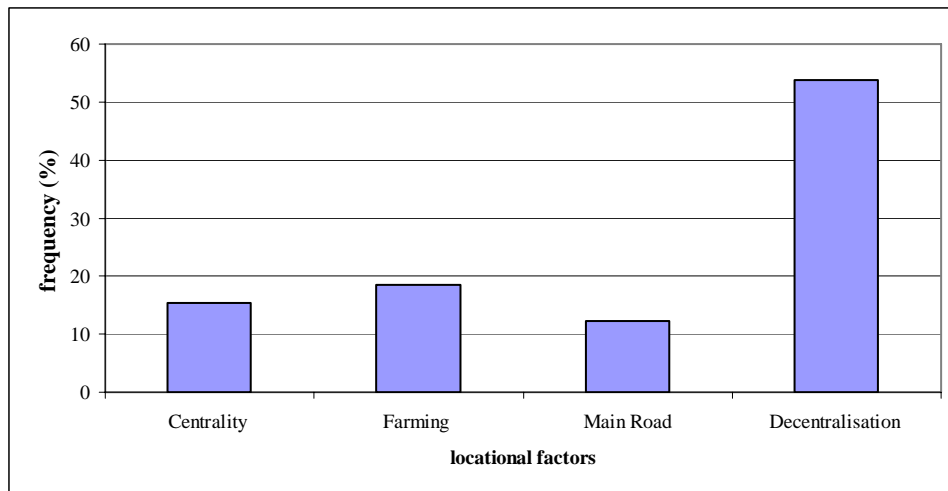


Figure1: Factors That Influenced the Location of Magunje Growth Point

It also emerged that decentralization of administrative and planning functions by central Government to the local authorities was also a major locational factor. Policy planners originally favoured the centre as it was meant to become an administrative centre for Hurungwe District. It was to become an economic core, whose growth and expansion was envisaged to influence the hinterland positively through spread effects. 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). With appropriate local conditions growth may occur despite overall structures and central planning. Aeroe (1992) shows how Makabambo, a small town in Tanzania, developed

from below with locally based industrialization, which was influenced by favourable overall structural conditions without assistance from government and donor agencies.

Entertainment points (9%), recreation (10%), education and culture (9%), grocery shops, butcheries, hardware, as well as wholesale shops (64%) were some of the major services offered at the centre. The worrying scenario was the low level of industrial investment (1%) that was represented by small-scale cottage industry. These ‘footloose’ activities lack the capacity to propel growth at the centre as they usually depend on the large industrial sector for their survival. In an economy that has experienced sharp decline in industrial productivity in the past ten years and has largely promoted informal activities, little income is generated for reinvestment in factories and infrastructure. The implication of this distribution has been the observed decline in quality and the quantity of services provided at the centre.

Table 1: Observed Services at Magunje Growth Point

a) Functional Services	Number observed	% Of total
Entertainment, bottle stores, night clubs	6	9
Recreation (playgrounds, parks)	7	10
Education	6	9
Shops	44	63
Financial Services	2	3
Cottage Industries	1	1
Health	3	4
GMB depot	1	1
Total	70	100
b) Redundant Services (closed)		
Type of Service observed		
Shops	5	50
Surgery	2	20
Banks	2	20
Butchery	1	10
Total	10	100

A considerable number of general dealers and banks had closed shop. The implication of this was that the growth point was failing to lure investors in industry, as a mere 1% of all the 70 services observed at the centre comprised small-scale industries. Absence of real manufacturing activities meant that the growth point had very limited capacity to grow. The point had a high number of shops of different kinds observed, making the growth point basically a service centre characterised by a

consumptive baseline which is not growth oriented. None of the services observed was capable of stimulating real economic growth, but perpetuated decline and stagnation. Declining growth centres in remote, isolated, and less interesting countryside are caught in the downward spiral of depopulation and decline. Many of them are probably reduced to mere residential centres, with very little vitality due to the dominance of the greying population.

Constraints to the Growth of Magunje

Responses to the question of constraints for the growth of Magunje Growth Point were varied and interesting. Table 2 shows the main constraints cited by residents. Among the constraints cited were uneconomic rates (4.6%), council planning problems (20%), lack of mineral resources (10.8%), financial constraints (7.7%), and others. The picture portrayed points towards the general economic hardships affecting the country. The current economic environment characterised by hyperinflation, escalation of prices, as well as a depressed job market have rendered residents' disposable incomes largely insignificant in the survival equation. This was worsened by the non-existence of industries whose presence could have minimized the impacts of high unemployment observed.

Table 2: Constraints to the Growth of Magunje Growth Point

Constraint	Frequency	% Frequency
Lack of industries	15	23.1
Financial Constraints	5	7.7
Lack of mineral Resources	7	10.8
Lack of incentives for investors	4	6.2
Council Planning Problems	13	20
Uneconomic rates and levies	3	4.6
Migration of Commercial farmers	4	6.2
Lack of title deeds	6	9.2
Spatial Dominance by individuals	5	7.7
A small market (population)	3	4.6
Total	65	100

Economic hardships have been exacerbated by the migration of commercial farmers during the just-ended resettlement exercise, which began around the year 2000. Commercial farmers, who occupied numerous farms around Magunje Growth Point, employed a considerable proportion of the people who now roam the streets of Magunje without any meaningful contribution to the centre's growth efforts. The migration of commercial farmers en masse impacted negatively on investments shrinkage in the market size. The absence of any manufacturing activity and related growth oriented enterprises at Magunje Growth Point is generally characteristic of most growth points in Zimbabwe.

Lack of minerals could have been a determinant to the decline and decay observed. However, it should be noted that mineral resources are non-renewable and get depleted with time. The decline in the global metal prices, particularly copper, was at the centre of the closure of many mines along the copper belt in Zambia and in small towns, like Mhangura and Alaska in Zimbabwe. At a global scale though, mineral resources were the triggers for the development of industrial belts within the coalfields in Germany and France, and the Appalachians in the USA. The relocation of some of these extractive industries upon the exhaustion of the mineral base has resulted in a number of mine closure shocks. Like in the case of most growth points designated countrywide, the proponents of decentralization had perhaps anticipated that once a centre was declared a growth point, growth would naturally trickle into the new core. Magunje Growth Point has, like others countrywide, failed to economically take off despite the presence of various government departments, which relocated to the centre at its inception. There is a tendency among policy planners to ignore the fact that there must be some basis for economic growth in an area where a growth point is to be established. True development poles cannot be created at just any odd place that some government chooses.

The urgency for restructuring the economy to reduce colonial imbalances was highlighted in the first major policy statements including 'Growth with Equity,' government of Zimbabwe 1981 and the transitional national development plan, 1981-1982, 1984-1985, (Government of Zimbabwe, 1982; Wekwete, 2001). Conceptually, the policies did not depart from the dominant paradigm whose objective was to transform the periphery of the economies and to allow capital to flow. This modernization paradigm was, however, subjected to major stresses with the adoption of a monolithic one party system with an extensive bureaucracy to direct development processes. There was a strong socialist influence on the development paradigm adopted in Zimbabwe, which is currently being blamed for disturbing economic processes and the role of the market. By 1990, the neo-liberal economic theories had taken centrality, following the demise of the socialist world. Structural adjustment programs advocated for the decentralization of the planning processes from the central government to the lower levels of the economy and society with the intention to improve participation, particularly private, in the economic space. This saw an upsurge in the number of small-scale businesses, especially at rural service centres, dominated in some areas by victims of retrenchments. Associated with this pattern has been an observable shift from centralization to the disorganized decentralization in the form of illegal activities as people tried to make a living.

Rambanapasi (1990) buttresses the above observations pertaining to lack of strong natural resource base on growth centres' ability to grow by pointing out that, "significant economic growth occurred only in a few of the growth points in the country, the cases of Sanyati and Gokwe, located in areas where agricultural output was expanding rapidly thus creating a market for secondary goods and services. The others have remained as no more than small service centres consisting of government offices and a few shops." There are no incentives to lure big investors to the centre. The continued absence of new growth oriented investments at the centre demands that the responsible authorities revisit their vision of the growth centre strategy.

Uneconomic rates and levies weigh down growth and may explain the deterioration of infrastructure observed during the field survey. These uneconomic rates and levies have adversely affected the Council's budget and operations as most development projects were stalled due to limited funding. This is also compounded by the spatial dominance of the economic space by a few individuals. At this centre three entrepreneurs dominated the services sector particularly retailing by using different trading names. This has constrained the expansion of service provision as vulnerable businesses folded due to the stiff competition and monopolies created by a few individuals.

In 1982, when the growth point was designated the population was estimated at 130 before rising significantly over a 10 year period to 6,500. The population, thus, significantly rose to 6,500 by 1992, to 10,000 by 2002, and to the current estimated population of 13,000. Although 13,000 may sound like a big number, the issue of importance here has to do with what percentage of that 13,000 can meaningfully contribute to growth efforts at the growth point. The economically active proportion of the residents is considered too small to sustain a viable economic growth pattern. Only 15% was gainfully employed, while 26% were children attending school, and the bulk of the residents were unemployed youths and adults. Since the majority of the people are out of employment and given that there are no current tangible strategies to involve them in meaningful income generating projects, council also suffers economically through a low income-generating baseline, as these unemployed people are unable to pay rates and levies. Shop owners and other service providers at the centre struggled to pay rents, levies, and rate arrears with the council. Magunje's bleak investment climate is not peculiar to it alone, as this has tended to be the case in other countries, when disinvestments take place and when spending power by farmers is drastically reduced.

When spending by local farmers is drastically reduced the new towns decline. As a result the small, less favourably situated country towns no longer serve their original function - the provision of services to the residents and the surrounding rural population. Reduced spending means that many of the shops and other businesses at the centre can no longer survive. They have to close down or cut operations. Employment opportunities decrease and people are forced to migrate to other towns and cities. The foregoing observation sums up the situation at the study area and other such centres in Zimbabwe, as the growth centre strategy seems to be failing to materialize.

An analysis of Magunje’s housing delivery situation shows that the property development sector has not been left out of the general decline in investment characterizing the area. Investors like a centre where their labour force can easily be accommodated. The housing situations at the growth point shows that there are not many private players in housing delivery, save for council and some parastatals. Table 3 shows housing delivery at Magunje Growth Point since 1982.

Table 3. Magunje Growth Point Housing Delivery Trends: 1982 – 2006

Year	Housing units Built	Growth rate (%)
1982	127	
1987	230	81
1992	570	148
1997	622	9
2002	634	2
2006	645	2

The centre started with initially 127 housing units, largely built by council, parastatals like the Grain Marketing Board, Natural Resource Board, Forestry Commission, and other private developers. Housing delivery grew by 81% between 1982 and 1987. By 1992, a doubling trend developed with the figure rising by 148%. A deceleration process is noted from 9% growth to 2% in 2006. The effects of economic reforms began to be felt. This could have been due to the steep price increases of materials, which accompanied the liberalization of the economy under ESAP. The housing delivery situation has been compounded by the decline in population, which has resulted in the decline of the demand for houses.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The locational factors identified in this study are similar to the generality of factors that have influenced the location of growth points at a national scale. Growth points were intended to serve districts, thus their location had to take into consideration the aspect of centrality as a key factor. Most of these, like Magunje, have a major road that passes through, which was used as a trigger or has been developed as result of the need to set up such centers. The major economic activity in a rural setting is farming and thus plays a critical role in determining the nature and rate of growth of the growth point. Most of the agricultural produce from this part of the country passes through the growth point for onwards distribution to the national and the international market. The major actors in the farming sector around the growth point have been large-scale commercial farmers supported by a strong labor force that was derived from the growth point and the surrounding communal areas. This major economic trigger was hampered by the out migration of the commercial farmers following the fast track land reform program embarked on in the year 2000. This socioeconomic trend had negative downstream effects that ranged from a small population to support meaningful business operation to increased unemployment among the economically active population.

The growth centre strategy was perceived as a rural development paradigm that was to curb rural urban migration and to minimize regional disparities at national level. Thus, it dominated economic planning issues, and attracted major international academic debate. It was nationally viewed as the ideal basis for implementation of the decentralization policy. Critical government services were to be provided at the centre with a view to effectively and efficiently serve the rural population and this was to set a wave of modernization. This has not materialized in the manner that it has been envisaged. Land ownership at the growth point remained a critical and debatable issue as no title deeds were given to business operators. Giving title deeds to individuals creates a strong sense of ownership and belonging to the growth point. However, such a policy has to be accompanied with financial support and or investment incentives for the development of meaningful industrial production. Economic liberalization adopted in 1990 seems to have also precipitated the decline of the growth point as government policy shifted towards reducing public expenditures in exchange for support from international donor organizations.

The growth point became a refugee of the victims of retrenchments as they sought business space to start their own ventures. Some used their retrenchment packages to start businesses, particularly in the retail trade. With time they suffered loss of business as the buying power of mostly the civil servants declined. This has resulted in a number of them closing shop or renting out to some that

were more resilient in terms of business acumen and financial strength. In view of this scenario it becomes imperative that the central government and the local government authorities start a national program that targets funding of these small businesses with a view to diversify their trades and enhance regional economic development. The current situation at the growth point best suits one of a stagnant and declining point as no meaningful spatial economic development has taken place in the last ten years. Thus, the Growth Point has become a reminder of the national economic crisis that warrants speedily and timely intervention.

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