



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Poverty Alleviation Strategies for Sivomo Villagers in Nkayi District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract:

Poverty continues to be a challenge in Zimbabwe, with increased levels recorded during the COVID pandemic. In rural areas such as Nkayi, interventions targeting poverty cut across numerous fields such as agriculture, education, and infrastructure. Despite these interventions, poverty continues to be a daily confrontation and challenge. This paper uses Michel de Certeau's theoretical tools to discuss the everyday contests between development agencies and community members as they formulate interventions to address poverty. It identifies strategies employed by agencies and the concomitant tactics deployed by community members. While these sometimes conflict, the paper argues that they culminate in processes of progression and regression or stages of poverty which translate to a little-to-no change in the poverty situation. As such, a rethink of strategies and their relevance is suggested.

Keywords: de Certeau, strategies, tactics, Nkayi, Poverty

1. Introduction

'Fight or surrender' (Chikwaza, 2022) reads a headline in South Africa's liberal publication Daily Maverick. Many factors have colluded to create yet another period of economic strain and social ambivalence. The challenges which face Zimbabwe and its citizenry have settled for more than a decade, becoming even worse during the COVID pandemic (Chingono, 2021). Although common parlance suggests that they mainly affect the ordinary person on the streets, the challenges are neither ordinary nor confined to the streets. Poverty is endemic in Zimbabwe and almost exists as a synonym for rural areas. The ZimVAC (2021) report covering Matabeleland North for 2021 bears testament to the rurality of poverty when/if poverty is understood as both an economic and socio-political condition. For example, in all districts (Binga, Bubi, Hwange, Lupane, Nkayi, Tsholotsho, Umguza), the educational attainment of household heads is predominantly in primary school. In addition, poor health outcomes hinder the productivity of households with HIV/Aids imposing the largest burden on communities across all districts. Although there are weak social support systems, the government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide a substantial base for material and resource support to households. These are complemented by meagre contributions from relatives in rural areas, urban areas, and the diaspora. This situation gives credence to Dzingirail's (1999) argument that migration does not necessarily lead to poverty reduction. Notably, the interventions and support have not changed much if historical records of annual reports are analysed. This perennial challenge then provokes scrutiny on broad development policy in general. Why has there been so little progress over so long a time? Even where poverty alone is scrutinised, how have policy interventions been crafted, deployed, assessed, and revised? With what effects? What strategies have been deployed to circumvent the adverse effects of poverty? Starting from these broad policy-related positions, this paper discusses the poverty-targeted approaches in a rural part of Zimbabwe.

The paper argues that contrary to policymakers' expectations, communities in developing countries endure what I call 'stages of poverty' despite various strategies to combat poverty. Stages of poverty acknowledge two related positions in development thinking:

- Poverty is tied to institutions and therefore takes very long to eradicate/alleviate/reduce.
- Moreover, there are power dynamics laden with the poverty trap. These power dynamics imply that even with external agents' best interests, completely doing away with poverty remains an ideal.

Aspects of my argument have been raised using different conceptual and theoretical moorings, most prominently in critiquing the excessive optimism of the millennium development goals (cf. Hickel, 2016).

The theoretical commitments maintained in the paper are structural-functionalist. As will be outlined in a later section, the empirical ground from which arguments are sustained is Nkayi, a rural part of Zimbabwe. In presenting empirical data to sustain my stages of poverty thesis, I do not suggest that the people of Nkayi lack the agency to make meaningful changes to their circumstances. Instead, I privilege the role of structure in shaping the conditions under which people can thrive. The paper complements quantitative scholarship, which has deployed sustainable intensification (Harris, 2019) and conservation agriculture (Homann-Kee Tui et al., 2015) as analytical tools in studying Nkayi.

In the following sections, I present a brief discussion on poverty as contained in some of the available literature. After that, I built a theoretical position within a structural-functionalist perspective and tied it to development concepts. The third section presents the research methodology and site. Finally, findings and discussions follow before conclusions are made.

1.1. Addressing Poverty: A History of Concepts and Commitments

At a time when the global agenda on development has largely swung towards climate interventions, much of the world continues to grapple with challenges that drew concerted efforts fifty years ago. Poverty, among many other social-political-economic issues, continues to be a significant challenge, especially in Africa. In 2020, half Zimbabwe's population will face extreme poverty (UNICEF, 2020). While this may be dismissed as an acute situation in extraordinary times, the endemic nature of poverty prior to the COVID pandemic had already been established with natural (Mtapuri et al., 2018) and political (Nyandoro & Hatti, 2018) causes underpinning it. Since its independence in 1980, many policies have been devised across diverse social, political, and economic contexts in Zimbabwe. Some policies so far have included:

Scientific socialism, structural adjustment, the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), the 'Look-East' policy, Government of National Unity (GNU)- politics, and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (zimasset) (Nyandoro & Hatti, 2018, p.60)

The latest policy mooted by the Government of Zimbabwe is 'National Development Strategy 1 - 2021-2025' (Ministry of Finance. (2021).

The broad national policies have been implemented under the aegis of various local development initiatives. Numerous programmes and projects have been implemented at the district and ward level across much of rural Zimbabwe. In discussing poverty in Nkayi, I recognize and complement the research that has established diverse notions of development and poverty-related interventions. Zikhali et al. (2014) have approached the poverty question primarily from an economic lens, using local economic development as a prism to understand rural development approaches. Zikhali (2022) maintains a similar economic lens but with a gendered nuance, while Zikhali & Zikhali (2017) elaborate on how agency among women can be fostered through projects which enhance income diversification. Although other researchers have identified resilience and coping mechanisms (Thebe, 2011), these are often detached from everyday life. This paper shifts from the agentic responses by communities and broad policy positions by policymakers to consider the daily solutions that communities and development partners formulate.

Development interventions which address poverty are not just national and localized. As part of a global community, Zimbabwe is part of global, multi-lateral, and supranational development activities. Complementing local efforts by the government are broader interventions that have been formulated largely by multi-lateral organisations for implementation in developing countries. The most notable global initiatives are the millennium development goals (MDGs) and their successor in the form of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, the claims of ending poverty and the successes of MDGs have been dismissed by leading researchers such as Hickel (2016).

At the centre of global initiatives is a discourse that portrays interventions as strategies and agendas. For example, poverty must be eliminated, eradicated, and so forth. This discourse lends the poverty effort open to criticism of what Andrea Cornwall (2007) identified as buzzwords and fuzzwords in development discourse. This paper addresses strategies and the notion of alleviation as constructs that affect how poverty is addressed, by who, and with what outcomes. To do this, conceptual tools from Michel de Certeau are employed.

Although not a structural functionalist, Rostow (1979) bequeathed scholarship with a valuable lens of thinking through development as a process. Notably, his stages of growth model magnify the role of structure in determining development outcomes. The stages of growth logic were followed throughout most of the 1970s, and 1980s through poverty eradication techniques which - spurred by the Brundtland Commission report, were embraced by many organisations. The World Bank (1984) embraced such an ideal, and over time it was incorporated into the Millennium Development Goals agenda as goal number one. Although appearing increasingly idealistic, if not naive, prominent scholars such as Sachs (2015) also presented arguments emphasising the approaches to end poverty. At the country level Zimbabwe had embraced the wisdom of the day, most notably adopting the Growth Point development model, which ostensibly would result in rural areas catching up to more developed urban centres (Manyanhaire et al., 2009; Wekwete, 1988). However, these approaches appeared to inadequately factor in community power dynamics, which meant that the change would be slow despite the best efforts. Shifts would later be made from these top-down to what were considered bottom-up approaches to development and addressing poverty.

The aim is not to survey the history of anti-poverty approaches but to highlight the discursive slant. Even more importantly, the aim is to create a backdrop for the key concepts which form the paper's conceptual framings. Institutions and knowledge shape the broad development agenda outlined so far. They determine what developmental projects, interventions, and approaches are applied and acceptable in each epoch. However, poverty - which the interventions attempt to address - is not only existential and therefore felt but also addressed by communities in various ways. The difference between the two camps is power and how it is engaged in social environments. But, how is power engaged in theory?

1.2. Thinking Strategy through De Certeau

Michel de Certeau complicates ways to think of engaging power through strategy within social contexts. His theorisation responds to Foucault, who approaches power from its broader manifestations and gives the impression that

power in some institutions is difficult to contest. De Certeau then argues that through strategies and tactics, people and organisations can participate daily. He asserts,

'I call a 'strategy' the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an 'environment.' A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, 'clienteles,' 'targets,' or 'objects' of research) (Certeau, 2002).

Therefore, strategies are associated with those with power who can shape what is deemed ideal or 'proper'. The strategies distinguish between those with more power and those with less in the sense that they 'generate relations'. As far as development interventions are concerned, strategies are deployed by the development organisations and institutions, which use their access to more information and other resources to provide solutions for communities.

If organisations and institutions can deploy tactics by virtue of their situatedness within the global development industry (Haan, 2009; Powell & Seddon, 1997), what options do communities have to participate in the social game? How do they generally navigate the development space to proffer their solutions over matters that affect them every day? To such questions, de Certeau adds tactics to his theoretical model. He asserts, 'I call a 'tactic,' on the other hand, a calculus that cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances' (De Certeau 2002: xix).

Tactics stem from shortcomings facing individuals in the form of information challenges. For example, with incomplete information about challenges plaguing a society, solutions offered will be typically 'fragmentary'. Moreover, tactics do not have the advantage of asserting the individual within their environment. They thus remain bound by the broader factors that bear on society. In Nkayi, some of the work that has hinted at such tactics include the activities of informal money changers (Zikhali, 2022), which mimic tactics many Zimbabweans employed elsewhere (Chagonda, 2016; Mawowa, 2013; Mawowa & Matongo, 2010).

Before shifting to the paper's methodology and description of the site, two issues are worthy of mention. Firstly, organisations and communities are not simply contesting power in deploying strategies and tactics within the human development space. Instead, their contest is over solutions to poverty, but this contest is laden with power. Hence *interventions* and *solutions* aimed at poverty become the focal areas. Secondly, in thinking of strategies targeting poverty, the paper acknowledges that macro factors have a dialectic effect on the effectiveness of poverty interventions. These macro factors – such as a global economic recession - may have global origins and are therefore discussed only within the context of Zimbabwe.

2. Methodology and Empirical Site

The theoretical orientations that I have outlined are complemented by a qualitative methodology, pivoting on ethnographic work conducted intermittently between March 2020 and December 2021. First, I outline and justify my selected methods in the following section. After that, I will describe the research site.

2.1. Methodology

The period was deliberately selected based on Zimbabwe's rain season, which also determines food security and poverty issues. Unfortunately, the rain season in Zimbabwe is variable even within agro-ecological regions (Mavhura et al., 2015). However, while rainfall volumes vary significantly from season to season, timing is less erratic. Generally, the rainfall period is between November and March. The study, therefore, commenced soon after the end of a rainy season, lasted through one, and ended in the middle of a second season. The approaches to dealing with poverty were therefore extensively observed and interrogated. In addition, villagers' strategies in Nkayi were observed using a convenience sampling technique.

Using ethnographic methods, the study explored the strategies which were devised, formulated, adopted, and deployed by local communities and development agencies from both state and non-state sectors. However, due to the guarded nature of data in Zimbabwe, access to some forms of data was very restricted. Hence, numerical data and nuanced positions such as rationale and justification of strategies from the state and non-state entities were inaccessible to the researcher. What was accessible, however, were the details regarding projects and actual activities conducted in the projects. It is such arenas that the researcher attended for observations. As a community member by virtue of autochthony, the researcher could observe much like anyone else in the area. Ties stemming from indigeneity were also helpful in setting up brief interviews and access to media reports covering Nkayi.

Due to limited resources, the study could not be extended to cover the entire district. Resultantly a convenience sampling frame was employed to identify two wards:¹(Sivomo and Mpande). The two wards are different in terms of their economies, with Sivomo comprising woodland and few agricultural options. At the same time, Mpande relies mainly on a local business centre and ties to regional centres such as Kwekwe and Bulawayo. In convenience sampling of the two sites, the researcher selected 'sample units that [we]re readily accessible' (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). The justifications for this sampling method were that:

- The researcher visits Nkayi at intermittent intervals and therefore was constrained for time to use a random sampling method which would have been difficult to attend to with little time for fieldwork on each trip.

¹Based on formal state bureaucratic governance boundaries, districts are subdivided into variably sized wards, which are further divided into villages.

- The researcher is familiar with many parts of Nkayi and could identify the areas with diverse interventions from communities and other agencies.

Adopting a non-probabilistic approach, the study findings cannot be generalised to the entire district or Zimbabwe. While there are limitations regarding the breadth of coverage applicable to findings, there remains extensive value regarding the depth of data covered in the smaller geopolitical area.

The analytical approach that was adopted relied upon narrative analysis. When used in qualitative studies, narrative analysis may be used to help understand the following questions: what is going on for a specific issue or person; how specific people sustain their participation; and identify examples of how their participation impacts professional development (Maxwell, 2013, p.185)

Narrative analysis caters to 'storied ways of knowing' (Cortazzi, 2001) or the presentation of themes that 'have in common a storied form' (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). To conduct the analysis, notes from observations, verbatim transcriptions from interview responses, and secondary material in the form of news articles were read (often more than once) to identify themes. The themes fit with the strategic slant of the study and other thematic areas identified by researchers in prior studies. After that, a storied presentation of the deployment of strategies over the study period was developed. This storied form is presented in the findings section.

2.2. Nkayi District

Nkayi district is situated in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North province. The province occupies part of the Zambezi escarpment, which is characterised by low rainfall and poor agricultural outputs. Water is generally of poor quality, inadequate in supply, and of limited access (Hoko, 2005).

Natural resources in the district have been depleted (Kwashirai & Mhike, 2019), creating a need for urgent environmental approaches Chirima et al. (2018), which redress the emerging environmental problem. Such interventions form part of the basis of this research as community agency and institutional involvement constitutes the broad mix of strategies employed. For example, in previous work (Zikhali, 2017, 2022; Zikhali et al., 2014), I have attended to the various approaches deployed to offset socio-economic pressures in both formal and informal, individual, and institutional settings. As outlined in these and other studies, Nkayi lies in an agro-ecological region that is characterised by average-to-poor rainfall, weak soils for agricultural production of major crops, and land deployed for other forms of income generation such as wildlife conservation (Chirima et al., 2018; Khumalo, 2021; Mavhura et al., 2015). These conditions demand strategizing in the de Certeauian sense. But what kinds and with what effects and outcomes? In the following sections, I turn towards an empirically based discussion of these issues.

2.2.1. Findings on Strategies

The findings are presented in two key sections, which have been classified according to the level of strategic intervention. The first set is associated with strategies that were formulated, promoted, and initiated by secondary agents in the form of state and non-state actors involved in social and development work. The second set relates to interventions made by community members and therefore hints at the assertion of agency. This latter section also briefly attends to the tactics deployed by communities and agencies to achieve short-term claims to address some issues. In turning to the community interventions, the study highlights the key challenges identified by community members, which often appeared in the coverage of the local media outlets.

2.2.2. Interventions as Strategies

Given the extensive rural immiseration of places like Nkayi, it is perhaps little surprising that numerous international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play an active part in proffering poverty-directed solutions through projects and programmes. The NGOs often work within the framework articulated by the government in official economic and social development policy. In Nkayi, a vast array of applicable interventions were under implementation. For example, the Strategic Agricultural Plan 2012-2032 (ZRBF, 2012) was implemented in Nkayi with agricultural projects targeting forms of agricultural activity deemed appropriate for the region. Similarly, Agricultural Model Inter-comparison and Improvement Project (AgMIP, 2022) was engaged in crop, and economic modelling, which factored in vulnerability and climate change-focused projects. Their approach typifies the strategic tenor of NGOs and the state, which collect data, devise models, engage in policy dialogues, 'consult stakeholders' and recommend a programme or project to be adopted. In the case of AgMIP, the projects would then encourage alterations to crop production and animal husbandry patterns. Over the research period, HEFO (a local faith-based organisation) was working in partnership with Methodist organisation All We Can in farmer training to improve livelihoods and incomes ostensibly 'through training in climate-smart farming practices and livestock production' (All We Can, 2022).

Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund-Matabeleland Enhanced Livelihoods Agriculture and Nutrition Adaptation (ZRBF-MELANA) extolled the value of seed banks and stockfeed production (Gonye, 2020). At the same time, there was a distribution of 'cash and/or food transfers, inclusive of specialized nutritious foods, as appropriate and sufficient to enable [communities] to meet their nutrition requirements' at World Food Program (WFP, 2022). Lastly, in the agricultural sector, Amalima Loko was engaged in projects for food security via USAID and Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture (CNFA, 2022).

Equally important sectors that received attention from government and NGOs were education, infrastructure, and provision of potable water across wards (Kubatana, 2021). The rationale was ostensible because of the district's history of water challenges established in the literature (Cleaver, 1995; Kwashirai & Mhike, 2019). Interventions included the mundane extension of training and support through organisations such as USAID's water storage (Fintrac Inc., 2016). In

addition, Nkayi benefitted from the government's 2021 Infrastructure development projects (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2021) which were also supported by the African Development Bank (2019).

How did these interventions play out in the everydayness of life in Sivomo and Mpande? From observations and informal conversations with community members, three themes emerged regarding the interventions from corporate entities. These three were power and control, time use, and ownership. They all intersected to create a mesh of concerns whose ramifications I later discuss through stages of poverty.

When the research project was still in its infancy, the state or NGOs demonstrated their power by determining who qualified to participate, how the project would be conducted, what resources would be availed, and how long an intervention would last. When these entities approached communities, they arrived as reservoirs of resources and knowledge which, although acknowledging indigenous knowledge systems, privileged technological advances and forms of knowledge backed by 'empirical data'. As such, the question of addressing poverty was solved merely by inputting data extracted from villagers (experiences and demographic data) into models and then identifying a course of action.

While NGOs and the state brought material resources, the immaterial resources presented by communities (such as time) were hardly recognised save for when food for work interventions was mooted. For villagers who were invited to participate in projects, one core assumption was that they would have time to participate. Endemic poverty appeared to give the impression that villagers had little else to do given their limited livelihood options. For example, in March 2021, a portion of the Kwekwe-Nkayi-Lupane road was under construction and ran through the district. Local villagers were employed for the preliminary stages of the road, which entailed marking and clearance. At the same time, NGOs were conducting reviews of the previous agricultural season's outputs while initiating new projects to support the vulnerable population, which had largely been cast into a more precarious economic condition. A villager's time would have to be split across - at least - two activities because both were important in addressing local social and economic challenges. Even where development agencies (state or NGOs) collaborated and ensured that they did not duplicate each other's work, the repeated provision of projects meant that community members were swayed from one project to another in a Voltairian effort to get the best of all worlds.

The third thematic area where strategies were manifest was over the question of ownership. Who owned projects and their outputs? Given that development agencies predominantly crafted interventions, the implementation and monitoring appeared to be a wholly external enterprise. However, resources availed (seed, farm implements, water containers) and outputs of projects (crop yields, income from labour) appeared to be owned by community members.

2.3. A Brief Note on Tactics

Everyday life in the two wards entails confronting various forms of hardship. Although they have been attended to through strategies deployed by the entities above, this section of the paper briefly considers the tactics deployed by community members to counter the power hierarchies created through development interventions. Evoking the history of some agricultural interventions of the past (Andersson, 1999; Nyandoro, 2019), one interlocutor captures the daily contests that they engage in, saying, *'When the authorities come with their projects, we accept and play along so that we benefit. However, we also have ways of using the projects and resources given for our own ways of developing. It is like the ones who came with a water and sanitation project. They gave us many instructions on how to use the resources, but we knew that once they leave, we can use their tanks and drums for other ways of earning a living. Those drums do not just store water but can be used for traditional beer storage, washed, and then used again for water.'* (J.M, Mpande Ward)

Echoing this sentiment, another community member from Sivomo stated bluntly, *'We have no choice. They tell us to grow some crops here, and yet the rains have been poor. We are told to use our local resources but not exploit the trees in the forest. But we all know that wood is in high demand from the towns and is available in abundance here. Why can we not extract some of it and sell it so our lives can improve? We listen, agree, and participate in their programmes, but once we are free of them, we do what enables us to earn a living and survive.'* (S.V, Sivomo Ward)

The two comments by community members in both Sivomo and Mpande reveal the tactical responses adopted to make the most of circumstances despite interventions from other organisations. For example, organisations involved in natural resource conservation have – together with commercial entities that exploit Nkayi's forestry resources – led campaigns for sustainable use of resources. Such interventions have been well-received so long as they do not inconvenience one's mundane existence. The two quotes presented above highlight the tactics that community members devise as they try to adhere to guidance while also ensuring that they are not constrained to the point of succumbing to poverty. Adherence cannot come at the expense of survival and negation of poverty.

There were numerous other activities, primarily in the informal sector, where community members engaged in similar forms of renegotiation with development interventions and policy prescriptions. News articles carried stories of informal and sometimes irregular forms of work, such as gold panning by members of the Nkayi community in and beyond the district (Mining Zimbabwe, 2021).

So far, tactics have been discussed as a form of resistance against controls and forms of restriction. The intention is not to suggest that they are always ingrained in a negative connotation. For instance, communities realized that if they continued waiting for bureaucratic processes to unfold, their prospects for a better quality of life would remain unattained. Such was the case in constructing a school (Moyo, 2021) that had been destroyed by violent storms years prior to the research. Communities realised that if they waited on the government to come to their assistance, then they might get the school repaired after decades. Considering that children relied on the school for their education, a decision was made to bypass state bureaucracies and repair the school through community initiatives. A similar stance was adopted regarding water infrastructure (Maphosa, 2021), which had been destroyed over a decade and a half before. While procedures may

have prescribed approaching various offices and adhering to process, the local communities opted to put together resources through local and transnational communities for projects to commence.

Having presented the findings in this part of the paper, the following section discusses tactics and earlier presented strategies as a useful lens through which to interrogate notions of dealing with poverty.

3. Discussion

Strategies and tactics avail useful lens through which to understand everyday life and the contests which play out as powerful entities (state and NGOs) are engaged by weaker agents (villagers). As the findings suggest, NGOs and the state proffer interventions which place demands on time, power/control, and questions of ownership. Communities in Sivomo and Mpande find ways of engaging the strategic positions adopted by development agencies and, in the process, formulate ways of occupying spaces within the development interventions to their personal benefit and beyond the objectives of the projects. Where a project was set up for sustainable conservation, community members would participate in the project but do so with an awareness of their pressing needs to survive. As such, they also engaged in activities that enabled them to resolve their most pressing needs even if such activities ran contrary to the principles of sustainable conservation. As a result of such power contests, the question of whether strategies targeting poverty were yielding fruit revealed that strategies magnified what the researcher termed 'stages of poverty'.

During stages of poverty, the argument is that strategies reveal the well-intentioned interventions of development agencies. However, these come up against life's daily exigencies, which are sometimes addressed through contradictory tactics. The result is that motions to address poverty through projects may be affected by motions to meet life's immediate needs through immediate action. As one participant stated, 'You cannot be productive in a project on an empty stomach' (D.T, Sivomo).

In a villager's everyday life, provision of water, methods of applying better farming methods, better infrastructure, improved resource usage, and access to education are all valuable. However, when they are extended in a slew of interventions with little regard for how time is consumed, who owns the entire process, and what liberties communities retain, tactics become the chosen mode of resistance. This resistance is not necessarily negative because it may yield positive outcomes such as agentic positions taken in rebuilding a school. However, resistance can also mean participating in altering resources, technologies, and outcomes for one's felt needs.

The result is a moving back and forth of positions – a series of stages of poverty. This is typified by the ebb and flow of strategy versus tactic, sustainability versus immediacy, and structure versus agency, culminating in shifts from progress to poverty. This partly explains why despite decades of interventions, strategies, policies, and solutions, Nkayi remains largely poor.

4. Conclusion

The paper has discussed development interventions that address poverty in two wards in Nkayi, Zimbabwe. Interventions are principally made by development agencies that, by virtue of the power architectures in the field, imply that they devise de Certeau's (2002) strategies. The strategies targeted various aspects of communal life, ranging from agriculture to road construction. The paper highlighted three thematic areas in which strategies have a bearing on the lives of communities and villagers. The three were time, ownership, and power/control. Strategies were deployed within a context where community members were, in some instances, constrained for time. In addition, the question of project ownership, process, and output was sometimes fuzzy. Lastly, power and control contests played out between organisations and communities. Again, referring to de Certeau, the paper has revealed that community members are not hostage to the whims of development agencies but also deploy tactics to make the best of the circumstances. Already faced with endemic poverty, they play by the rules of the game to ensure that they participate in projects. However, they also use the resources and opportunities available to them to solve immediate issues beyond agencies' focus. In this way, they contest strategies.

Contesting strategies are, however, the only outcome of the process. Instead, communities endure successive periods of apparent progression and then regression. These 'stages of poverty' highlight the challenge that continues to face the global development industry, that is, persistent poverty despite diverse interventions (Ammann & Förster, 2018; Ayittey, 2015). Contrary to Rostow (1979), who posited a linear progression to development with third world countries catching up to the more advanced countries, the approaches in Nkayi reveal progress and regression. This state of affairs results in stages of poverty which are ebbs and flows, neither making substantial gains nor regressing markedly; poverty remains the order of the day. The study sets the tone for more scrutiny on the utility of supposed strategies and interventions targeting poverty. A much more longitudinal study would help reveal the nuances within development agencies and communities.

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