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Poverty Reduction Programmes and Sustainable Livelihoods in the South Tongu District in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how poverty reduction programmes have affected sustainable livelihoods in the South Tongu District in Ghana. It focused on livelihood benefits derived by beneficiaries from three poverty reduction programmes and how they could be sustained. The study design was descriptive and exploratory. Based on qualitative approach, the study used purposive sampling procedure to select 44 respondents for interviews (28 people) and focus group discussions (16 people) between June and September 2014. Narratives and themes were used to analyse data. The study shows that the programmes created jobs, led to livelihood improvement and diversification, income growth, and poverty reduction. Regular monitoring of activities and capacity building were essential to sustain the benefits gained while inadequate human resources and logistics impeded the effectiveness of the programmes to support beneficiaries sufficiently. It was recommended that the programmes, with its inbuilt capacity building training, financial support and monitoring, should be intensified to consolidate the gains made.

Introduction

Poverty, a global phenomenon, permeates both developed and developing countries with its incidence more noticeable in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean with varying degrees of damaging consequences. Sixteen of the countries considered 'desperately deprived' were found in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chronic Poverty Research Centre [CPRC], 2004). The proportion of Africa's poverty level is about half its population (CPRC, 2009; UNDP, 2011). The pervasiveness of poverty

obstructs development. Essentially, poverty must be reduced and standard of living improved to achieve sustainable development (Sen, 1999).

Ghana, like many other developing countries, embraced some of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) economic policies in the 1980s and 1990s such as the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) which were mainly targeted at promoting economic development and reducing poverty (Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2003; Aryeetey, Osei, Laryea, Antwi-Asare, Baah-Boateng, Turkson, Codjoe & Ahorator, 2005; Rai, 2008). Ghana was also a signatory to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) strategies (2000-2015) geared towards poverty reduction. In view of this, the government adopted the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I), Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II), and Ghana

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Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA I & II) to foster economic growth and poverty reduction.

To achieve the aims of these strategies in Ghana, some specific intervention programmes were implemented as shown in Table 1. Some directly initiated programmes by the government of Ghana were the Rural Enterprise Project (REP), the National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) (now the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development

Agency [GYEEDA]) and the Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP). Other programmes initiated in collaboration with private organisations included the Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP) and the Youth Enterprise and Skills Development Programme (YESDEP). The programmes could be classified as cash transfer (e.g. LEAP) and non-cash transfer which involves skills training (e.g. others).

Table-1: Major Poverty Reduction Programmes Implemented in Ghana (1995-2010)

Programme	Year Established	Programme Objective(s)	Target Group
Rural Enterprise Project	1995	Improve the livelihoods and incomes of rural poor micro and small entrepreneurs	Rural poor and youth
National Youth Employment Programme	2006	Provide employment for the youth and address the limited staffing in social services sector	Youth
Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty	2008	Support extremely poor households with a cash sum	Disabled, widows and orphaned child
Local Enterprises and Skills Development Programme	2010	Resolve unemployment issues through the selection of the most profitable business opportunities for its trainees as well as provide them financial assistance.	Entrepreneurial youth
Youth Enterprise and Skills Development Programme	2010	Create and facilitate the acquisition of technical, entrepreneurial and other specialized skills	Youth

Source: Compiled from IFAD (n.d); Handa *et al.* (2013); Ministry of Youth and Sports (2013).

Though Ghana’s growth rates in the past decade are encouraging, poverty rates still remain very high and the improvements in the lives of the poor have been unacceptably slow (NDPC, 2010). Ghana’s poverty declined from 51 percent of the population in 1991 to 24.2 percent in 2013 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). However, the concern should not only be about poverty reduction but also about sustaining poverty reduction. One approach that addresses the issue of sustainability is the Sustainable Livelihood framework which is not only interested in the significant improvement in the livelihoods of the poor, but also in ensuring that it can withstand shocks and stresses (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000). It is therefore, necessary to study the poverty reduction programmes in relation to the livelihoods they offer, the lessons learnt to enhance future programmes and how livelihood outcomes can be sustained.

The South Tongu District, based on the GPRS I, was less endowed and deprived. As a transitional poverty area, the district having benefited from some of the poverty reduction programmes, has its own experience to contribute to bridge the gap in literature on poverty. No studies have been conducted on poverty reduction programmes and livelihoods in the district. This paper examines how poverty reduction programmes have engendered sustainable livelihoods of beneficiaries in the South Tongu District. The specific objectives are to:

1. explore the vulnerability context of poverty reduction programmes;
2. examine the nature of poverty reduction programmes;

3. analyse the sustainability of the benefits gained; and
4. identify the enablers and challenges of poverty reduction programmes.

The paper is structured into five sections: introduction, theoretical and conceptual issues, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion and recommendations.

Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

Poverty is multifaceted, multi-dimensional and multi-level phenomenon and its reduction involves multi-actors. Poverty may result from a lack of human, physical and financial capital needed to sustain livelihoods and from inequities in access to control and benefit from reasons, whether political, social or economic (Antwi & Mensah, 2007; Adamu & Mensah, 2008). Several theories have been proposed to explain poverty and how to direct activities to reduce poverty. The paper draws on the individual, cultural and structural theories of poverty to examine poverty reduction programmes and sustainable livelihoods.

The individual theory of poverty suggests that poverty stems from individual deficiencies. The assumption is that the problems of the poor are the products of their own idleness and inability (Alcock, 1993). The theory argues that individuals are responsible for their own poverty and that poverty exists because individuals are unwilling to provide adequately for themselves (Bibangambah, 1985; Asen, 2002; Bradshaw, 2006). This stream of thought explains poverty in relation to the

individual's or household's decisions about education, work and other decisions that affect the social, political and economic environment of the individual. Hence, people should be held responsible for choosing short term or low pay-offs over the long term benefits. Asen (2002) expounds that any individual can succeed through hard work, persistence and motivation. With hard work and better choices, the poor can pull out of poverty (World Bank, 2001; Bradshaw, 2006). Thus, poverty reduction programmes tend to focus more on psyching the individual to perform or eliminate the factors that obstruct them from getting out of poverty.

The cultural theory of poverty shifts away from explaining poverty from the individual perspective to the community based one. This theory is sometimes linked together with the individual explanations of poverty (Shaw, 1996; Bradshaw, 2006). As argued in Shaw (1996), Bradshaw (2006) and Ferris and Stein (2012), the theory was introduced by Oscar Lewis (American anthropologist) to mean a design for living that is passed on from one generation to the next. Correspondingly, poor people by reason of their exclusion from mainstream development, develop a way of life (which are opposed to economic growth rather than encourage it) to help them cope and gradually internalized them. This makes them to accept their situations instead of working out of it, thereby creating their own subculture. It means that inherent in the fabric of society are practices, norms and values that perpetuate poverty (Haralambos & Holborn, 2004). To reduce poverty, Bradshaw (2006) indicated that: (1) existing culture should be replaced with a more functional one that supports productive work, investment and social responsibility, or (2) re-socialize the young ones of the next generation or if possible move them from those areas and or (3) work within the culture to redefine it for the wellbeing of the people.

According to Bibangambah (1985), the structural theory of poverty is an institutionalised phenomenon that tackles the causes of poverty that shaped the conditions of the poor. The theory posits that the root causes of poverty are in the structures, processes and mechanisms which determine or govern the ownership, distribution and utilization of assets. In this regard, poverty is seen as a product of a social system which reflects the differences in access to economic, social and political power by various groups. The society, in its attempt to organize its social, economic and political spheres, creates poverty or makes some people more vulnerable. The structural failings of society thwart the efforts or inhibit some group of people from attaining wellbeing no matter how competent they may be. The elimination of structural barriers will result in poverty reduction. Bibangambah (1985) calls for a structural change with collective impact on the status of the poor. Interventions must not only be geared towards changes in the economy but also promoting civil rights and developing alternative institutions which will put the interest of the poor at its core (Bradshaw, 2006; Hulme, 2007).

Poverty reduction is the means or processes directed towards lessening of poverty levels in a community, a group of

people or a country (Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones, 2002). It is a collective responsibility to fight all avoidable forms of deprivation and improve on the quality of life of people. It entails making the poor to escape from deprivation and to build institutions that prevent people from becoming poor or slipping further into poverty (Narayan, 2002). The earlier and common strategy used to reduce poverty was to transfer resources (food aid, shelter) directly to the individual or households. Other social forms include education, health and sanitation.

The paper adopts the sustainable livelihood framework, which shows the interactions that must exist for poverty reduction programmes to engender sustainable livelihood outcomes. Conceptually, livelihoods represent the capabilities or means, activities, entitlements and assets by which people make a living (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Elasha, Elhassan, Ahmed & Zakieldins, 2005). Poverty reduction programmes help the poor to diversify their livelihoods which open avenues for growth by providing extra incomes and resources that would otherwise not be available to them in order to survive (Ashley & Carney, 1999; Ellis et al., 2003).

The sustainable livelihood approach is people-centred and participatory (DFID, 1999). It provides a way of thinking about the livelihoods of poor people that stimulates debate and reflection, thereby improving performance in poverty reduction (Chambers, 2004). The emphasis is on understanding the vulnerability context and the institutional environment within which poor people draw upon assets (human, social, natural, physical and financial capitals) in order to implement a livelihood strategy. The elements of the framework consist of the context in which people act, their available resources, the institutions that govern the access to the resources, activities and livelihood choices, and their goals (DFID, 1999; Scoones, 1998; Carney, 1998; De Haan & Zoomers, 2005).

Research Methodology

The study employed qualitative approach to investigate how poverty reduction programmes have affected livelihoods in the South Tongu District. Qualitative research yields rich first-hand data that capture the personal experiences and perspectives of participants (Neuman, 2007). The exploratory and descriptive design was used. The South Tongu District had population of 87,950 in 2010 representing 4.2 percent of the national population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). The study population consisted of all beneficiaries and implementers (staff) of poverty reduction programmes being implemented in the South Tongu District as of 2011 and the Assembly members. Participants for the study were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling, according to Neuman (2007), is used in situations in which a researcher uses judgment in selecting respondents with a specific purpose in mind. This basically is less strict and makes no claim for representativeness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Ofori & Dampson, 2011) but used to gain a deeper insight into a phenomenon.

A total of 44 respondents were involved in the study comprising 38 beneficiaries of three programmes (i.e. REP,

GYEEDA and LESDEP), three members of staff (programme implementers) and three Assembly members. In all, 28 respondents were involved in interviews while the remaining 16 participants were involved in two focus group discussion (FGD) sessions (nine beneficiaries from GYEEDA and seven beneficiaries from REP). These were the respondents who were available and willing to be interviewed and participated in FGD sessions. According to Bryman (2004), the quality of information is necessary in qualitative research and the focus should not be on interviewing large numbers. The respondents are chosen because they are exemplifying cases and not because they have some extraordinary characteristics.

The study relied on both primary and secondary data which were useful in validation of data. Primary data collected from July to September, 2013 were gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. Data focused on the background characteristics of respondents, vulnerability, poverty reduction programmes and the sustainability of livelihood benefits gained. Secondary data were obtained from existing documents such as policy documents, programme reports, journals and books.

Data analysis in qualitative enquiry is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2002). The study employed both narrative (data narrated as it is) and thematic analysis (data organized into groups on thematic basis and the linkages between them determined) in order to make information attained understandable to others.

Results and Discussion

Based on the specific objectives of the study and conceptual framework, the findings are presented and discussed by examining the vulnerability factors of the three programmes, nature of poverty reduction programmes, livelihood benefits (outcomes) and sustainability, enablers and challenges of poverty reduction programmes.

The vulnerability context of the poverty reduction programmes

The meaning of poverty cannot be explained just by the income levels and calories per day (NDPC, 2003) but also from what the individuals who are experiencing poverty understood by it (Chambers, 2005). It comprised both income and non-income measures of poverty (Mensah, Enu-Kwesi & Akorsu, 2008; Essaw, 2013). The sampled beneficiaries understood poverty in terms of inadequate income. In the focus group discussion (FGD) sessions, one GYEEDA beneficiary stated:

Poverty means you do not have money at all, you cannot feed yourself or your children, you cannot visit the hospital when you are sick and you cannot pay fees and bills or do business.

Thus, poverty was seen as a deprivation or the inability to fulfil the basic needs of life. Poverty was also explained in terms of one's self worth. It was revealed from the FGD session that

poverty denied them of participating in decision making. One REP beneficiary stated that:

When you are poor, you cannot do things that you want to do. You lack respect and so you can't express your views. I was always borrowing but I felt shy about it. Sometimes I had to do jobs that were demeaning just to get some money (REP beneficiary).

The causes of poverty per the experiences of the poor in the South Tongu District were mostly economically related. They included unemployment and underemployment, low employable skills, insufficient capital to invest in ventures of one's choice and non-availability of jobs. A respondent stated:

Unemployment and low employable skills are the main causes. If you do not have skills, how can you work? Sometimes even if you have the skills, there are no jobs to do. If I had money, I would have started my own business (LESDEP beneficiary).

Also, the inconsistent rainfall pattern and inadequate irrigation facilities affected livelihoods of farmers. This was compounded with the low knowledge in preserving and processing their yields. One respondent viewed it like this:

The weather conditions are not favourable. You know, we depend on the rains for farming. The times that it does not rain or rains well or there is too much rain, sometimes, I lose all my crops and that make me poor (REP beneficiary).

Other views on the causes of poverty were attributed to individual's choices such as dropping out of school and laziness. A respondent in FGD sessions captured it as this:

Not working and being idle cause poverty. I, for one, do not earn much because I do not have money to do any business. I can't do anything because I dropped out of school and did not learn any vocational skill. I was poor and so depended on my parents and friends for survival (GYEEDA beneficiary).

Also, the cultural practice one inherits has a strong bearing on the causes of poverty. Most often, livelihoods are determined by what pertains in the community and people were socialised in those livelihoods (Chambers & Conway, 1992). A woman in a FGD explained it as follows:

My forefathers handed over mat weaving to us. The job is not as profitable as it used to be. I cannot leave it because it is a kind of connection to my late mother and ancestors. I could not care for my children and myself. However, I could not continue in that struggle and so I decided to make my life meaningful (female REP beneficiary).

The programme implementers had this to say about the causes of poverty in the district:

The lack of access to finance and working tools (staff of LESDEP).

Massive unemployment poses security threat to the district and the nation at large due to lack of access to quality education and lack of industries to employ the youth (staff of GYEEDA).

Lack of employable skills, refusal or unwillingness to learn a trade and dependency on rain for farming activities (staff of REP).

An Assembly member in the district explained:

The causes of poverty in the district are many and varied. They include weather failures and poor access to market, especially for the very remote villages in the district.

The respondents' assertions suggest the acceptance that individuals were to some extent responsible for their poverty. Anyone who is unwilling to work or acquire skills will surely be poor. Individuals can therefore pull out of poverty and succeed through hard work, persistence, better choices and motivation (Bradshaw, 2006; Asen, 2002). The study also revealed other factors related to the cultural, social, economic and political situations that perpetuated poverty. The limited employment opportunities in the district for instance, prohibited some people from engaging in meaningful activities that would generate income for them. This can be changed by reforming the structural factors in the district to provide enabling environment for the poor (Gros & Prokopovych, 2005; Bradshaw, 2006; Ferris & Stein, 2012).

The beneficiaries were also vulnerable and this affected their standard of living and ability to support their family. Vulnerability reflects defencelessness, insecurity and exposure to risk (Essaw, 2013). The beneficiaries were exposed to difficulties including low yields, droughts, poor access to market, lack of further education or training, inappropriate product finishing, no access to loans due to lack of collateral, food shortage, limited access to health care services, low level of education of children, low incomes and inadequate funds. These are consistent with the findings of Ellis, Kutengule and Nyasulu (2003) that the poor in rural Malawi are confronted with multiple severe constraints and these trigger decline in wellbeing (Chamber, 2005).

A LESDEP beneficiary who is a welder with two dependants had this to say:

My biggest problem was money; I was always short of money since I did not have the required tools to work with. What to eat and buy drugs was virtually non-existent. We could not go to the hospital even when we were sick. I lost my last child because of that.

Similarly, in a FGD session, a beneficiary who had been selling by the roadside said:

I could not do commercial farming because I did not have the right equipment and the rainfall was bad. So I did not have money to do anything. I could not take care of myself and two children. I could not buy food or clothes and I could not even go out with friends to socialise. It was very hard (REP beneficiary).

Thus, in the absence of any intervention, these people were at the risk of going deeper into poverty. Some of the circumstances that contributed to deepening their poverty state, thereby making them more vulnerable were insufficient capital, low level of technical know-how to process farm yields, poor packaging of products or services and limited access to markets. More so, people's vulnerability was made worse with the harsh socio-economic situation of the district. The situation was explained by a participant at the GYEEDA FGD session as follows:

Things were made worse whenever fuel prices were increased. It made prices of other goods go up and the little you were managing became too little even to feed the children well.

Though it cannot be established that these beneficiaries were the most vulnerable following methodological issues (Essaw, 2013), they were susceptible to some extent, based on the issues raised. The beneficiaries however, engaged in certain activities as coping strategies before the programme interventions. They resorted to assisting others or taking by-day jobs, hawking, managing their limited resources and depending on their families and friends (social networks) for survival. Some beneficiaries initially depended on the extended family or friends who themselves were poor and were unable to offer much help, thereby limiting the effectiveness of the safety nets. Children also played vital roles in the coping strategies, which predisposed them to vulnerability. The following view was expressed by a REP beneficiary in FGD:

I just have to do something so that I can live up to expectation. The "okada" (commercial motor bike) business is risky and we are always watching over our shoulders for the police. We were really suffering. I sent one of my daughters to stay with someone in Accra and that has been generating small monies every month. Others do the same. We only pray that the worst would not happen - either child abuse or death.

The following were the observations of the programme implementers and Assembly members on how the beneficiaries were coping.

1. *Some were exploring other markets to sell their products or produce, others engaged in "okada" business (staff of REP).*
2. *Some were depending on family members for support and some managing the limited resources at their disposal (staff of LESDEP).*
3. *Most of them had resorted to social vices such as petty robbery, theft and prostitution (staff of GYEEDA).*
4. *Most of them practised self-medication and depend on herbs instead of going to the clinic. Some resorted to charcoal burning, begging for alms, harvesting and selling of firewood while others even resigned to fate (Assembly member).*

The narrations are congruent with what Snel and Staring (2001) argued that poor people developed certain strategies or

mechanisms to cope in their marginal socio-economic situations to meet their basic needs. Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones (2002) also noted that poor people themselves are not passive or inactive agents in building their livelihoods.

Nature of Poverty Reduction Programmes

This section discusses the nature of REP, GYEEDA and LESDEP as being implemented in the South Tongu District. The discussion was done under various themes relating to the understanding of the programmes, the selection process, training, the usefulness and challenges of training received, material support, personnel and logistics, and monitoring.

Understanding of the programmes

The sampled beneficiaries' understandings of the programmes were mainly based on the kind of benefits gained from the programmes. The responses elicited from the beneficiaries are listed below:

1. REP is about training and capacity building of the unemployed.
2. LESDEP aims at supporting SMEs and creating employment.
3. GYEEDA is to equip the youth with employable skills and help the youth secure jobs.

It was further revealed that REP is different from the others because it has a regular source of funding and so beneficiaries could be maintained as programme clients and supported again if the need arises. GYEEDA is unique in the sense that it provides monthly allowances to some beneficiaries and opportunities to upgrade themselves. It facilitates acquisition of skills and also supplies equipment to beneficiaries. LESDEP distinguishes itself by providing tools to beneficiaries who needed them.

On the role of the District Assembly, one Assembly member stated that:

All the programmes are unique: they are backed by the government and the district as evident in them being housed in and reporting to the District Assembly. The beauty is the inter-departmental collaboration that exists within the programmes in their aim to reduce poverty. The most important thing is that they are all playing their roles to better develop the district.

Comparatively, the claims of the beneficiaries did not differ from the goals and objectives of the various programmes. Based on the responses, it could be said that the programmes impacted positively on the lives of the beneficiaries and the implementers understood their core values and sought to address them.

Selection process

The poverty reduction programmes sought to reach out to those in the low economic group in the society. However, the selection process might not necessarily aid in achieving their respective goals. The study showed that the entry point varied

from programme to programme. Some of the beneficiaries (those trained and employed to work in the formal sector such as teaching and nursing) needed some basic qualification to partake in the programme. One GYEEDA beneficiary reported that: *I wrote an application letter to the programme and was interviewed and selected.*

One Assembly member revealed that the process was quite fair and those who qualified but could not get the chance were put on a waiting list till the next session when they were taken. Thus, not all the applicants could benefit at the same time. Nevertheless, the majority of the beneficiary respondents in the vocational and trade sectors did not require any such qualification. In this case, the selection process was done through community fora, the Assembly member's initiatives or visits by the workers/staff or anyone who have heard about the programme and was interested in joining. In the FGD sessions, two beneficiaries described the selection process this way:

1. *A meeting was called for the people in the community and we were told of the programme. They said the programme was to help train us so that we could do something on our own and to help farmers improve on yield and process them. All you needed to do was to be there when training was being conducted (REP beneficiary).*
2. *They made announcements in the community for those who needed help and were interested but some people who were not poor also came (GYEEDA beneficiary).*

These demonstrate the resourcefulness of the programmes to encourage participation. However, it could not be ascertained that these assertions were ultimately true since the process to achieve participation had loopholes. This was a basis for a heated argument in one of the FGDs as some participants believe that others were not as poor as they wanted others to believe.

Training of beneficiaries

The beneficiaries (except LESDEP) were provided avenue for skills acquisition and were trained in their respective choice or field of work although some already had some knowledge to help them function. Thus, it was out of place for LESDEP beneficiaries not to have gone through any training. The following were some of the responses from other beneficiaries:

1. *We were trained in technology improvement in cassava processing and packaging (REP beneficiary).*
2. *I was trained in nursing. The training was in two parts: theory for two months and practical for four months in the hospital (GYEEDA beneficiary).*

As accounted for by the beneficiaries, the trainings were participatory, short and done at the community basis. The REP beneficiaries were also trained in small business management skills such as record keeping, customer care, banking and finance. According to the beneficiaries in a FGD session, the trainings enabled them to better manage their businesses. The

programmes also engaged beneficiaries who excelled to become service providers. According to the interviewees, the facilitators imparted them with the best practices drawing on their broad knowledge gained from their own experiences in terms of both failures and success stories.

Usefulness and challenges of training

The trainings were useful in the attainment of management skills, support of tools or technical assistance, establishment and improvement of business. Generally, the trainings had a positive impact on the sampled beneficiaries, though this could not be said of all beneficiaries. However, more could be done to further sharpen and harness their skills. The following was a response from a FGD session:

I was trained in bread baking and with the tools I received, have established my own business. I was also trained in financial management and record keeping skills. I know how to record my finances and to keep my books in order. The training has ... helped me to manage my business in a meaningful way (REP beneficiary).

Another supporting view put forward by a GYEEDA beneficiary in an interview was:

I have basic knowledge in nursing. I educate people on infection prevention, management of minor ailments and how to manage supplies and consumables.

The trainings were not without challenges. However, most of the beneficiaries from REP did not have any real challenge with the trainings even though some had to forgo their farming and selling activities to make time for the training sessions. The main challenges in respect to GYEEDA had to do with issues of accommodation and feeding during the training process. The programme did not consider accommodation and feeding but the prospective beneficiaries were informed beforehand. One person shared this experience:

I had to leave my village to Sogakope for the training. Where to stay was a major problem for me. To make matters worse, I have had to think of feeding myself, imagine that I did not have money already.

Support for small business development

The support given to beneficiaries was a key area in understanding the nature and effectiveness of the programmes. Material resources were given to some beneficiaries for free or payable within some stipulated timeframe. Some beneficiaries described the support as follows:

I was supported with industrial hair dryer and a roller stand. Well, that was some months after the training. I am expected to pay for them within a year (GYEEDA beneficiary).

I have my own tricycle that I use to work. Every morning, I go round to collect people's rubbish. Even though some people do not respect this work, I make money of my own to support my family (LESDEP beneficiary).

Conversely, a few respondents from REP did not receive any support because it was not needed. A beneficiary of REP gave this response in a focus group discussion:

We have the local materials – cassava. We have learnt what to do with it and do not need anything.

A FGD session revealed that with GYEEDA, not all beneficiaries received material support as promised. One Assembly member concurred to such issues and explained that it was difficult for the programmes to meet all the basic needs of beneficiaries due to resource constraints.

Personnel and logistics

Findings revealed that REP had enough personnel to carry out their activities. The programme also had a car and a driver which made monitoring of beneficiaries in their various villages easier although sometimes there was pressure on the car. This however, could not be said of GYEEDA and LESDEP. GYEEDA had few logistics and only three workers, which according to the Director, were very inadequate considering the workload. For LESDEP, the situation was quite disturbing as the office was manned by only one person and most often did not have the required tools.

Monitoring activities

The programmes had the responsibility to monitor beneficiaries. The things checked during monitoring visits were business records, level of income generation, rate of training adoption, state of equipment, progress of work and operational challenges as reported by the beneficiaries, Assembly members and implementers. An Assembly member shared the following:

We the Assembly members and officers have an important role to play in monitoring and encouraging the beneficiaries so that our goals for the district can be achieved.

Livelihood benefits gained and their sustainability

The effectiveness of poverty reduction programmes depends on their ability to reduce poverty and give livelihoods to the poor. The sampled beneficiaries viewed the programmes as beneficial in improving the socio-economic status of their households through either the creation of new jobs or improving on existing jobs. Some beneficiaries had either employed workers or engaged apprentices. From the FGD sessions, it came out that some beneficiaries had also become service providers for the programmes. The outcomes validated the study conducted by Belshaw and Coyle (2001) which concluded that projects have positive impact on beneficiaries' livelihoods either directly or indirectly. However, the improvements faced challenges including non-availability of funds to start the business soon after training and the delay in accessing the material support, especially with GYEEDA.

The administrative lapses and untimely release of funds led to the low adoption rate by some beneficiaries. Some of the sampled beneficiaries also suffered objections from their

families based on their values. A respondent who was supported with a tricycle for refuse collection shared:

My family was vehemently against me doing Zoomlion (refuse collection) job. They did everything humanly possible to discourage me. I was told to go and do a better job of value like my peers rather than wasting time on this unacceptable job. I am glad it is paying off. I guess some of my family members are happy because I am no more highly dependent on them. I am able to now care for most of our basic needs (GYEEDA beneficiary).

A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets (Chambers & Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998; Ellis, 2000). The following views were shared by the beneficiaries on how they perceived and prepared to cope with difficulties in the future:

1. *I am saving part of my income at bank and also doing 'susu' contribution. I planned to buy more equipment to make my work easier and productive so that I can get more money. I also planned to get some training to aid my work. Apart from that, I am selling other commodities (LESDEP beneficiary).*
2. *It is not easy but I am trying to save part of my profit. I am investing more into farming to produce more for storage against the future increase in price aside from cassava processing. I am also investing in my children's education because when they grow they will take good care of me (REP beneficiary).*
3. *Through the initiative of the programme, I was able to go to school and very soon will become a nurse. With a regular salary, I think I will be able to manage and even get married soon. I know about how to save and so I will do some savings and probably invest it into something for the turbulent days (GYEEDA beneficiary).*

These assertions indicated that most of the sampled beneficiaries were saving part of their incomes or profits. They believed that saving for further investment was crucial in the sustenance of livelihood gains and better standard of living. Some were engaging in other activities as a way of diversification (Solesbury, 2003). Diversifying livelihoods offered some scope for constructing pathways out of poverty (Ellis, Kutengule & Nyasulu, 2003). The greater the diversity of livelihood strategies, the higher the household's resilience to the shocks, trends, and seasonality conditions (Hussien, 2002). Other activities that created opportunity for growth included skills development, reinvestment in business, further education and auditing of tools and equipment. Poverty reduction programmes have encouraged self-reliance and directed economic activities.

In the focus group discussions, the role of the District Assembly and government in ensuring sustainability were brought to the fore as indicated in these statements:

1. *I think the programme or Assembly should give us more funds so that we could buy more raw materials. Then we would produce more and generate more income to help our families and others (GYEEDA beneficiary).*
2. *I cannot say I am rich or will be able to manage well when something happens. But the income I get now allows me a relatively good life. I can produce my own cassava, process and package it for selling. The Assembly can help by providing market for our products so we can produce more (REP beneficiary).*

One Assembly member had this to say:

In view of the job opportunities the programmes offer to the youth, they should be supported and sustained. Adequate financial resources should be allocated to support the programmes so that more communities could be taken on board. We need to construct and mend damaged roads, health facilities and extend water supply to those areas lacking them to ensure integration and transfer of these livelihood benefits.

The programme implementers maintained that, firstly, the programmes should continue to build the capacity of beneficiaries in small businesses from time to time. Secondly, counselling services should be provided to beneficiaries relating to their fields of works. All beneficiaries should be taught how to save and invest. Thirdly, other economic activities in the district should be explored. The findings dovetail with the assertion that livelihoods gained result in improvement in well-being, asset accumulation and poverty reduction (Barrett, Reardon & Webb, 2001).

Enablers of poverty reduction programmes

The study identified free skills and capacity building trainings for beneficiaries, provision of tools and constant monitoring and evaluation as key factors that made the programmes effective. The programmes used local materials in the trade and vocation modules and created direct employment.

The assistance given to the beneficiaries made it possible for them to set-up business after the trainings. The start-up tools were free for some but for others it had flexible terms of payment with no interest. The machines given were commercial and of good quality. Where beneficiaries were absorbed into the mainstream of organisations, salaries were paid. Another area of support was the registration of artisans. One respondent corroborated this by saying: "we the artisans were registered free for further training with the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI)".

The monitoring supports given, enhanced by regular follow-ups, helped to make the beneficiaries more responsible. The beneficiaries were monitored to ensure sustainability of livelihoods and benefits gained. One beneficiary summarised it like this: "though not done often, monitoring has brought some sense of worth to me and urged me to do better".

Other enablers included the selection process done through intensive assessment and open to all. The involvement of the

Assembly members was beneficial though it was not clear whether it was done on merit. The GYEEDA programme particularly gave some beneficiaries the opportunity to further their education. The programmes not only opened avenues for diversification but also offered opportunities to those in the formal sector to be absorbed into the system. However, as recommended by Matin and Hulme (2003), the programmes needed to be continuously adapted so that they could deal with the complex factors that keep poor people poor.

Challenges of Poverty Reduction Programmes

The poverty reduction programmes, regardless of their achievements, were not without challenges. The challenges related to logistics, funding, repayment of credits and training. The insufficient logistics hindered the progress and effective running of the programmes. One of the implementers shared this sentiment:

We have inadequate fuel for vehicles for monitoring of activities, we have inadequate office accommodation, office furniture and stationery as well as inadequate personnel (staff of GYEEDA).

The untimely release of funds to enable the officials carry out their duties effectively also obstructed the programme implementation. This affected payments to service providers and the timely provision of tools to support beneficiaries leading to delay in starting business. Also, lack of access to finance impeded efforts of beneficiaries to start and to grow, thereby corroborating with the finding of Belshaw and Coyle (2001) that the interests of the poor might be neglected in policy areas such as micro-finance legislation. Beneficiaries in the formal sector salaries were not being paid on time.

Other difficulties included the hectic bureaucracy in acquiring space to set up workshops, financial assistance to get some other basic tools and delayed absorption of those with skilled labour into the mainstream. The repayment duration of credits though flexible was too short and payment was done at the offices instead of through nearby banks. The challenges associated with trainings were lack of accommodation and feeding for the beneficiaries. These challenges had negative effects on the livelihood outcomes gained and their sustainability

Conclusion and Recommendations

The poverty reduction programmes aimed at improving on the living conditions of beneficiaries who were unable to provide for their basic needs due to factors such as insufficient income and low employable skills. The nature of the poverty reduction programmes included capacity building, regular monitoring and evaluation, technical support and structures that empowered the poor both economically and socially.

The study has demonstrated that though there were contextual issues that affected livelihoods, the beneficiaries of the programmes had improved on their livelihoods, thereby agreeing with Tollens (2002) who argues that poverty is a

product of livelihood systems and the socio-political forces that shape them. Thus, the poor are not passive victims but are capable of reducing their own poverty when given the needed support.

The programmes were, to some extent, effective as they led to livelihood improvement by equipping beneficiaries with livelihood outcomes and opportunities for alternative outcomes. The livelihoods gained could be sustained through regular monitoring and refresher capacity building workshops for beneficiaries. The policy makers and implementers should improve upon the programmes by enhancing the promoting factors while mitigating the challenges.

The programmes should incorporate a credit scheme by linking with reputable micro-finance institutions to assist beneficiaries after training. Basic financial management skills should be made compulsory for all beneficiaries to ensure judicious and efficient use of credit advanced to them. The government and programme implementers should explore other sustainable sources of funding to enhance the programme operations. They should also address the challenges relating to logistics, staffing and training accommodation. The District Assembly should get highly involved in supporting the beneficiaries by providing the necessary structures like markets. Finally, the beneficiaries should work hard to utilize the skills and materials gained.

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