GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN SUSTAINABLE RURAL LIVELIHOOD PLANNING: ENGENDERING RURAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

While it may be argued that worldwide women in rural areas are more likely to experience poverty than rural men and urban men and women, it is an even greater challenge for Africa. The impoverishment experienced by the communities in predominately rural areas of Africa, especially the more vulnerable segments of the population such as women, pose a significant challenge to the ensuring of their livelihoods. Furthermore, in South Africa rural women must also contend with the legacy of apartheid policies, which for instance had significant socio-economic impacts such as the disruption of the familial support structures, in addition to bearing the brunt of poverty. The aim of this research is to emphasise the significant contribution that the development of sustainable rural livelihoods could have, as well as the necessity of engendering rural development approaches in South Africa, in effectively addressing rural poverty. It also creates the opportunity of promoting gender equity, through the incorporation of the perspectives, needs and interests of women (which are different from men and moreover reflect the needs of children and families) in decision making. This article investigates the contribution that sustainable livelihood development has in alleviating poverty in rural areas and the contextual gendered realities attendant to rural livelihoods in South Africa. The result of this study indicates that although there are several ways in which the gender dimension can be incorporated in the development of sustainable rural livelihoods, there are certain fundamental aspects that are required in a South African context. These are strategies related to the specific contextual empowerment of women, the resources that women in rural areas have access to and an appropriate scale of intervention. The central role of women in sustainable rural livelihoods, both as the most deprived grouping as well as most vigorous drivers of development, should form the crux of sustainable rural livelihood development initiatives.
Keywords: sustainable rural livelihood, rural women, empowerment, land rights, ICT, micro-development.

1 INTRODUCTION

While it may be argued that worldwide women in rural areas are more likely to experience poverty than rural men and urban men and women [1], it is an even greater challenge for Africa. The impoverishment experienced by the communities in predominately rural areas of Africa, especially the more vulnerable segments of the population such as women [2], pose a significant challenge to the ensuring of their livelihoods. Furthermore, in South Africa rural women must also contend with the legacy of apartheid policies, which for instance had significant socio-economic impacts such as the disruption of the familial support structures, in addition to bearing the brunt of poverty [3]. According to the Department of Human Settlements [4], women constitute the greater part of the rural population and female-headed households are particularly disadvantaged. Basic social services (i.e. food, water, shelter, energy, transport, etc.), for example, are comparatively more expensive for the poor (especially women). They face numerous other difficulties which include, amongst other

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things, the loss of essential natural resources, food insecurity, a lack of economic opportunity, the unmet need for social services, poor education, geographic isolation and poor infrastructure [5]. Although continuous efforts are made by various institutions and organisations to address these challenges, the deprivation suffered by these communities seems greater than ever. A baseline study released in 2011 by the North-West University [6] asserts that in the North-West Province (a predominantly rural province), many households still do not have access to basic human necessities (e.g. they are not on the services grid), circumstances which is also prevalent in most of the other predominantly rural areas in South Africa.

Sustainable rural livelihood development may have a significant contribution to make in addressing this challenge, enabling communities in predominantly rural areas to contend with the deteriorating quality of life, meet the pressures of urban growth and challenge the homogenisation of settlement form and design in the developing world [7]. Sustainable rural livelihood development derives from the sustainable approach towards development which encompass a complex interrelationship between the economic, environmental and social spheres. Jouve et al. [8] describes it as a "historically constituted, sustainable mode of organization employed by a rural society to use its area and manage its resources, resulting in interactions between the bio-physical, socio-economic and technical factors". It situates sustainable rural livelihoods within a specific local context and recognises the diversity of livelihoods within these contexts.

The significance that local context has in sustainable rural livelihood development is emphasised by Chambers and Conway [9], who devised their sustainable livelihoods framework with a considerable emphasis on the diversity of local context, specifically in rural areas. One of the primary determinants of this context is the development of sustainable social behaviour. Goldsmith contends that sustainable social behaviour in this regard should be a self-regulating system in which behaviour which satisfies the needs of the differentiated parts also satisfy those of the whole [10]. Consequently, there are certain patterns of social behaviour that support sustainable rural livelihoods which, according to the Northwest Policy Centre at the Graduate School of Public Affairs, University of Washington, are fostering commitment to "place", promoting vitality, building resilience, acting as stewards, forging connections and promoting equity [11]. This also creates the opportunity of promoting gender equity, through the incorporation of the perspectives, needs and interests of women (which are different from men and also reflect the needs of children and families) in decision making [12].

Pursuant to the understanding of developing sustainable rural livelihoods within a specific local context, it is vital to situate the perspectives of rural communities at the heart of strategic rural planning [13]. This approach emphasises that sustainable development strategies should be devised on a country-specific basis, with due regard for local conditions, resource endowments and social needs [14]. Zetter and Watson [15] likewise contend that to design sustainable settlements, people-based neighbourhoods must be attuned to cultural precepts, encode the history and collective identity of residents, build on community-empowered models of design, and be physically adapted to environmental conditions. In terms of sustainable rural livelihoods within South African (and elsewhere in Africa), this approach should include particularly valuing the integral part of women in developing context-specific approaches.

2 THE GENDER DIMENSION OF RURAL LIVELIHOODS
Considering that women in South Africa constitute a large percentage of the rural poor [16], it is obvious that sustainable rural livelihood development strategies should specifically

provide for their needs and priorities. However, even though the specific gender dimension of rural poverty in great parts of South Africa is referenced in policy documents, it does not really manifest in concrete strategies in policy and development approaches. The Strategic Plan 2009–2012 of the Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs, for instance, only mention women once specifically in their Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP), stating that social infrastructure should be improved including the provision of "sport and recreation facilities especially for women and youth development" [17]. Other documents demonstrate a better understanding of the challenges rural women face, such as the Rural Development Strategy of the Government of National Unity, published as a general notice in October 1995 [3]. It lists specific gender issues that need to be incorporated into any approach towards sustainable rural livelihood development such as increased access for women to social grants and support, enabling women to participate in planning and implementation processes, and access to resources. The National Development Plan 2030 [18] adds that access to safe drinking water, electricity and quality early childhood education, for example, would greatly ease the burden of women having to generate survivalist strategies in rural areas.

Although there are several ways in which the gender dimension can be incorporated in the development of sustainable rural livelihoods, there are certain fundamental aspects that are required in a South African context, namely specific contextual empowerment of women, the resources that women in rural areas have access to and an appropriate scale of intervention. These are discussed in more detail below.

2.1 Empowerment of women

In South Africa, the primary planning tool to effect development in rural areas is Integrated Development Plans (IDP), which aims to coordinate the work of local and other spheres of government into a coherent plan to improve the quality of life for all the people living in an area, by enhancing development and service delivery, improving governance and deepening democracy. This is in accordance with Section 25 of the Municipal Systems Act [19], which requires municipalities to adopt a single, inclusive and strategic plan for the development of the municipality. The empowerment of community members is viewed as a critical aspect of the IDP process, particularly the empowerment of the poor and marginalised, and it must happen simultaneously with the integrative aspect of the IDP process. The South African Local Government Association (SALGA) [20] explicitly states that one of the primary goals of the IDP process is the empowerment of community participants. Furthermore, the White Paper on Local Government [21] stresses that municipalities should make every effort to encourage the equal and effective participation of marginalised groupings such as women, by including strategies aimed at removing obstacles to and actively encouraging their participation in local government.

In addition to the legal requirement to include empowerment strategies as part of local development planning, there are also other imperatives. Empowerment strategies have a tremendous potential to overcome the traditional gender bias in rural society, enabling women the opportunity to counterbalance the advantage that men usually have as a result of more access to power, information and resources (United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) [22]. This is vital in supporting the pivotal role that women have in the survival strategies of rural communities. Premchander and Chidambaranathan [12] furthermore state that it is crucial for women to have greater participation in leadership, so that their perspectives, needs and interest can be incorporated in decision making. It supports the contention of Carley [23] that the self-development and empowerment of communities is

essential in achieving sustainable development, particularly if social polarisation means that some communities are grossly disadvantaged in terms of basic needs or their ability to participate in the development process.

The most suitable approach to include empowerment strategies for women and establishing the central role and contribution they have in sustainable rural livelihood development, is that of community-based planning [24]–[26]. Gender-specific considerations can be included as a matter of course in the process and the active participation of women sought whenever possible. Some of the gender-specific considerations include the reality of women in predominantly rural areas having very little time for any kind of participation and training, due to their household responsibilities [7]. Consider, for instance, that 60% of SA children have absent fathers, and more than 40% of South African mothers are single parents [27]. Provision should therefore be made to enable their participation and training, such as the provision of sufficient childcare during participation and training periods.

Furthermore, the appropriate training strategies in sustainable rural livelihood development and community-based planning should be approached in an integrated manner, focussing not only on the required training itself but also on the abilities and skills already present in the community [28], [29]. It should be timely, consistent and appropriate, considering the local circumstances and community [5], and should therefore incorporate the knowledge, expertise and values that women have, as well as their specific preferences in the evaluation of alternative measures for sustainable practices. This approach is supported by Mwanyama [30] who states that understanding the community context and combining it with empowerment, awareness and capacity building is the most successful route to encouraging economic development. Moreover, a key aspect of training is enabling communities to be self-reliant, so that they do not remain obligated to the providers or sponsors of sustainable technologies [31]. Appropriate training strategies could therefor provide an excellent opportunity to empower rural women, especially the older women who tend to be drivers in communities [28].

An excellent example of how this approach has been put into practice is that of the Barefoot College in India, established in 1972, which combines the traditional knowledge of the community (the "barefoot" part of the college) and demystified modern skills in order to make villages self-sufficient [32]. The array of programmes that is provided by the college to help create viable livelihoods in rural communities include solar, water, education, health care, crafts, people's action and communication. The curriculum of the college is based upon the development of skill sets that support sustainable rural living, as well as increasing the literacy of the rural community. It also focuses on using members of the rural community to plan, manage and implement the initiatives and programmes of the college, especially women.

2.2 Access to resources

The realisation of sustainable rural livelihoods, particularly for women, requires that their access to resources be addressed, especially with regards to land rights, food security, child support and training in basic skills. Other issues such as access to water, electricity and telephones, health care facilities and issues emanating from customary law and the lack of understanding of bureaucratic systems, are also relevant to women [7].

Perhaps the most crucial aspect for achieving sustainable rural development in South Africa is the matter of access to land and land rights. According to the draft National Spatial Development Framework (NSDF) [33] this requires land restitution (redress of wrongs committed under the Apartheid government), land redistribution (provision of land to the

poor who do not have access to land for residential and economic purposes), and tenure reform (ensuring security of tenure). The most significant determinant in this matter is the institutional environment through which resources are distributed [34]. Additionally, the manner in which this is to be achieved should be carefully considered, as rapid and large-scale land reforms could be economically disastrous [35], as is evident in the current circumstances Puerto Rico [36], Venezuela [37] and Zimbabwe [38].

The gender dimension of access to land rights and other associated resources in rural areas, requires an understanding that this is considerably more challenging for women [1]. Some of the issues in this regard include the problems related to women's succession rights, insufficient protection of women landowners under the Interim Protection of Informal Land Rights Act (IPILRA) (Act 31 of 1996), women's lack of knowledge regarding their rights to land (especially communal land) and skills training focussing on female farmers [39].

Related to the access that of women to land rights is the question of food security. Work done by CARE International in Lesotho on the Livelihoods Recovery through Agriculture Programme (LRAP) has demonstrated that there can be a dramatic reduction in food insecurity at the household level by supporting food production for household consumption [40]. Another instance of this approach is the Backpack Farm initiative, originating in Kenya. It focuses on enhancing small landholder farmers' production models with improved agricultural inputs, training and monitoring. In addition, it places the emphasis on increasing the income of women in particular, who produce 80% of the food reserves in East Africa [41]. The value of this approach becomes even more significant when considering that in a country such as Zimbabwe, where land reform has been unproductive, small-scale farmers contribute almost all the national reserve annually to the Grain Marketing Board [42].

There is also an opportunity to improve the access for women in rural areas to resources by incorporating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in sustainable rural livelihood development. Lynch [25] states that often, the information needs and access of women in poor settlements are restricted and ignored. It may be ascribed to their position within society, high rate of illiteracy, the difference in need from those of men and lack of authority. In sustainable rural livelihood development, the topics of interest to women should be prioritised in ICT provision, such as livestock rearing, family support (family planning, health, nutrition and health), creating income from local raw materials, and training in basic skills [43].

2.3 Commensurate scale of development

While centralised rural development planning has dominated for a long time, there has also been a growing realisation that decentralisation is pivotal to sustainable rural livelihood development [13]. Almost all development planning is "local" (decentralised) in the sense of the needs of people, interventions to address them and accountability to local populations, but it is only from the early 1970s that, instead of centralised development planning approaches, a more comprehensible scale of planning, or "micro-development", began to be seriously considered. Jacobs' book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* [44] could be said to exemplify this "neighbourhood-level" approach. Brooks [45] explains this as a realisation that people rather identified with the immediate neighbourhood where they lived than the administrative unit (planning level) in which it was situated.

The complexity of rural space and the resulting specificity of local context, as well as the interdependence of socio-political, economic and environmental factors in sustainable development further argues in favour of a "micro-development" approach towards sustainable rural livelihood development planning. Micro-development, in this regard,

essentially focuses on the smallest territory that has meaning for the local people; which is also effective and efficient; and for which they can define their own "life space" in terms of their values and realities [46]. Many studies show the complexity and diversity of rural livelihoods and the strong influence that local contexts have on the scale and nature thereof [47]. Jouve et al. [8], for example, have concluded that village communities are the most effective scale of planning, stating that in many developing countries (especially sub-Saharan Africa), individuals are usually closely integrated in family and lineage units, where their technical and social behaviour is relatively homogeneous and codified within a village community. This supports a micro-development approach in a rural African context where all these aspects can be assimilated, and where the gender dimension of sustainable rural livelihoods can be incorporated.

Micro-development as a sustainable rural livelihood strategy, however, cannot occur in isolation and is subject to the issue of coordination with other planning instruments, as well as decision-making powers [48]. Rural development projects are rarely successfully implemented in developing countries, as responsible authorities often lack enough authority and/or resources [13]. This is amply illustrated by the inability of most local governments in the predominantly rural areas of South Africa to implement their IDPs, especially at territorial and social scales, such as the village agrosystem [7]. To truly realise sustainable rural livelihoods, communities often need the involvement of central government and possible third parties such as NGOs [46].

In an African context, there are numerous studies corroborating the success of a micro-development approach towards sustainable rural livelihood development [8], [13]. However, Ndaro [49] argues that local initiatives will remain marginal to the development process unless they are integrated with the planning efforts of government. It is encouraging that in this regard micro-development is being promoted in South Africa by national policies such as the National Development Plan (2012), Urban Spatial Development Framework (2016) and draft National Spatial Development Framework (2018). These policy documents make provision for village development, supporting the stance that effective sustainable rural livelihood development needs to take place at village level. The necessity for active involvement of local people, including women, in managing the resources they depend upon, and in planning their own development, cannot be denied [13], but they need institutional support from various levels of government if they are to succeed.

A case in point illustrating the effectiveness of micro-development approaches towards sustainable rural livelihood development in an African context, with a specific focus on women, is the Boma Project in Kenya [50]. The NGO Boma Project in Kenya aims to alleviate poverty and build resiliency through their Rural Entrepreneur Access Project (REAP). It consists of an ongoing programme that provides a cash grant (seed capital to launch a business), sustained training in business skills and savings, and hands-on local mentoring by village mentors to business groups of three women. In this manner local knowledge and support is leveraged to provide a diversified income, while Boma savings associations provide women with access to resources that assist them in their particular needs such as school fees, medical care and responding to shocks (such as drought or family emergencies). Another example is that of the Millennium Villages initiative in Africa [51]. Millennium Promise believes that villages can transform themselves and meet the Millennium Development Goals if they are empowered to implement inexpensive, community-led interventions. In addition to actively engaging communities to lead the implementation of these interventions, there is also the provision of low-cost, practical and integrated investment. This occurs with the understanding that the development of

Millennium Villages (micro-development) cannot take place in isolation but need the support of government, partner organisations and, of course, the village members themselves.

In South Africa, the relevant context of predominantly rural communities includes matters such as the existing complex farming systems, the influence of gender (specifically the position of women), and the impact of social obligations, land resources and access. Other specific issues in rural areas include the fear of making decisions, the fear of hunger, the fear of family break-up, respect for the ancestral spirits, the fear of losing the little they still have, the fear of the trainer, and even a fear of training itself [52]. The majority of rural people are unable to satisfy their most basic needs. They therefore feel that they have failed in life and have developed an extremely poor self-esteem as a result [53]. This often leads to a negative frame of mind and extreme resistance to change [52]. Sustainable rural livelihood development therefor needs knowledge of the diversity of rural areas and practising agricultural activity in order to avoid the exclusion of households due to ignorance and assist in contextualising and focusing interventions [54].

3 CONCLUSION

It has been repeatedly demonstrated that women bear the brunt of poverty in the predominantly rural areas of South Africa, as well as suffer the most from lack of access to resources. At the same time, however, there is a tremendous opportunity to develop sustainable rural livelihoods by empowering women in rural areas, especially considering that older women tend to be drivers for development in rural communities. These circumstances need specific attention in rural livelihood development strategies to be able to fulfil the mandate of the policy and legal framework for rural development in South Africa. Women should be considered the primary drivers and implementers of the pilot projects, particularly as they are the keepers of tradition and cohesiveness in communities. This should include the priority goals of securing land use and water rights for women in rural areas and enabling their participation through supportive strategies (i.e. childcare).

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