

An Examination of the Learning Conditions in Zimbabwe's Satellite Schools: A Case of Somabhula Resettlement Area- Midlands Province

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Abstract

The Zimbabwean Land Reform Programme of 2000 yielded both positive and negative results. It gave birth to a new phenomenon, the satellite schools, established in former commercial farming areas. During the colonial era education was not easily accessible to the Zimbabwean majority. Therefore, when the land was grabbed from the few representatives of Western hegemony, the government sanctioned the establishment of satellite schools in areas which had once belonged to the white minority in order to grant the newly resettled populace an opportunity to acquire an education in compliance with the United Nations Charter on human rights. This paper examined the teaching and learning conditions in these schools, paying particular attention to Somabhula resettlement area in the Midlands province. Through the mixed methods approach this paper established that the satellite schools were a noble initiative by the government especially considering that education is the key to sustainable development which every government is striving to promote.

Keywords: satellite schools, learning conditions, resettlement area, land reform programme, farm invasions, sustainable development

Introduction and Background of the Study

Zimbabwe is one of the numerous African countries which experienced the excruciating pain of colonialism. The pre-independence era was characterised by discriminatory policies which marginalised and disadvantaged the indigenous majority ([planipolis://epesco.org.un](http://planipolis.epesco.org.un)). The education sector was not spared the segregation (Arnold and Weiner, 2008). Abdi, Puplampu and Dei (2006) assert that in colonial Zimbabwe education was based on racial dualism, offering free and compulsory education to white children while for black children it was optional and parents had to pay for it. This meant that the majority of Zimbabwean black children did not get the opportunity to acquire an education while the fortunate ones could not go beyond the primary school save for the 12.5% which was allowed to proceed by the bottle neck system of education of the day (Machingura, 2012). He goes on to say that the bottle neck system of education worked against the progression of Africans leading to serious inequalities and underdevelopment. Abdi et al (2006) assert that the education policy of the day was fashioned primarily to create a supply of well disciplined workers to operate in white controlled and dominated industrial and agricultural sectors. So with the advent of independence the government of Zimbabwe was bent on addressing these inequalities and also with the rise of new global phenomena like sustainable development the government of Zimbabwe is obliged to provide education for sustainable development to its populace. Kates et al (2005) state that sustainable development is concerned with economic, social and environmental issues; at local, national, regional and global levels. Education is therefore envisaged to play an essential role in promoting sustainable development. Thus given such circumstances the Zimbabwean government allowed the establishment of the satellite schools without giving much thought to the programme. Therefore, this paper concentrates on the teaching and learning conditions in the former commercial farming areas' infamous satellite schools.

In colonial Zimbabwe most commercial farms did not have schools for the farm workers' children. The masters' children were driven to faraway schools or sent to boarding schools so that they could acquire the best education (Kabayanjiri, 2012). The area under study boasts of a government primary boarding school established during the colonial era for the sole purpose of accommodating white children.

Bass (2004) says in Zimbabwean commercial farms schools were often introduced as a way of extracting the children's labour for commercial agriculture. The education they got from those schools was meant to make them loyal labourers. On the contrary, UNESCO (1997) states that education makes society wiser, more knowledgeable, and better informed which helps them contribute more meaningfully to the socio-economic growth of the country. But colonial education was meant to create a docile labour force which did not make any meaningful contribution to its own society and nation at large. The colonial education system was in direct contrast to the principle of sustainable development because it did not empower the learners to become responsible citizens economically, socially and environmentally. Jacobs in Bell et al (2003) argues that farm workers were poorly educated, with high illiteracy rates, all this owing to the colonial system of education. Shizha & Kariwo (2011) argue that the Zimbabwean government recognises that education is a basic human right and that it is an investment in human capital which sustains and accelerates the rate of economic growth and socio-economic development. Kabayanjiri (2012) shares the same sentiments and states that the Ministry of Education had to make sure that children are provided with an education in the former commercial farms. This also goes in line with the government's aim of trying to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals of which the provision of education is one of them. Tuli (2009) asserts that education is the most effective means that society possesses for confronting the current challenges and also those of the future. An educated populace can successfully cohabit with the environment and people of other cultures without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Such people know how to preserve the environment as well as how to nurture it for social and economic development. Bajaj & Chiu (2009) argue that education brings about social responsibility which is vital for sustainable development. Therefore, Zimbabwe being a member of the United Nations Organisation is bound by the organisation's principles of which one of them is ensuring universal primary school education among member states. This background provides the government of Zimbabwe with every reason to establish satellite schools in the former commercial farming areas.

The Land Reform unfolded from 2000 after random farm invasions by ZANU-PF war veterans (Marimira, 2010). Other invaders came from neighbouring communal areas as well as urban informal settlements in search of agricultural land. Obviously they moved in with their families which included children of school going ages. Kabayanjiri (2012) says the Land Reform was characterised by a massive influx of black Zimbabweans into former commercial farms which earlier on had been less populated. This movement spurred the establishment of satellite schools in the affected areas. Langa (2012) states that the birth of satellite schools was a stop-gap measure since the schools do not meet the expectations of conventional schools. He goes on to say that the Senate Thematic Committee says the schools are just make-shift because they were not meant to be schools. Surprisingly it is now about 13 years after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and these schools are still there with no changes effected whatsoever. Instead, the Ministry of Education continues to deploy teachers in the satellite schools despite the fact that it was just a stop gap measure. Thus this writer is interested in the learning conditions in these schools since it is now clear that what started as a temporary measure meant to correct the anomalies of the colonial era has slowly become the order of the day.

Since the satellite schools started as a temporary measure appropriate infrastructure was a nightmare, old farm houses, tobacco barns, stables and sties were converted into learning and teaching venues (Kabayanjiri, 2012). Some innovative and hardworking farm occupants have gone to the extent of erecting pole and daggas huts so that their children could carry out their learning activities in some form of shelter. Furthermore, the schools are not registered; they operate attached to established schools. Their enrolments are part of the mother schools and are headed by Teachers in Charge (TIC). This means quite a lot on learning and teaching and might have a serious impact on the 'new settlers' and their children's perception of education.

There is an acute shortage of resources in these satellite schools. It is very normal to find pupils learning while seated on timber, bricks or on the floor. The teacher is the one privileged of being in possession of a text book which means pupils are deprived of individual exposure to such learning materials. In addition the Ministry of Education stipulates that teacher-pupil ratio be 1:40 and this means that teachers end up combining classes because the enrolments are too low in the satellite schools. That in itself has an undesirable bearing on teaching and learning. Normally the schools have at least 5 teachers including the Teacher in charge (TIC) who is also a fulltime teaching administrator. Teachers have no proper accommodation and some commute from neighbouring towns and cities on a daily basis (<http://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/> 2012).

Such a scenario poses a challenge to the contribution of education towards sustainable development since the conditions are not conducive for bringing about changes in knowledge, values, behaviours and lifestyles required for sustainable development (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009). Thus this paper is bent on investigating the learning conditions in Somabhula resettlement area, a former cattle ranch in order to ascertain the effectiveness of these schools.

Methodology

The Mixed methods approach was used in carrying out this research. Biber (2010) says the mixed methods research uses both qualitative and quantitative data to answer questions. Denscombe in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that mixed methods research increases the accuracy of data and provide a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study than would be yielded by a single approach. This approach paves way for triangulation in a research activity right from the onset. Fifty questionnaires were administered to fifty pupils who were purposively sampled from the satellite schools in Somabhula resettlement area for purposes of this study. Ten teachers were also purposively sampled from the same schools where the sample for pupils was drawn. To further consolidate the study interviews were held with Teachers in charge of these satellite schools. Parents could not be left out of this study because they are major stakeholders in their children's educational needs. As such some interviews were held with thirty parents who have children of school going age.

Facts and Discussion

Satellite schools have been a welcome development in Somabhula resettlement area as evidenced by participants' responses. However, quite a number of issues arose from this investigation as shall be shown in this section of the paper.

Table 1: Satellite Schools an Opportunity or a Challenge

Respondents	Opportunity	Challenge	Total
Pupils	35 (70%)	15 (30%)	50 (100%)
Parents	22 (73%)	08 (27%)	30 (100%)
Teachers	08 (80%)	02 (20%)	10 (100%)

From the interviews held with the parents it was noted that 73% of the parents concurred that satellite schools were an opportunity for their children to acquire an education. Some went on to say that they were deprived of that basic human right when the farms were under the auspices of the white commercial farmers. Others added that their former bosses taught them how to count so that they could be able to count the farmers' cattle since Somabhula is a cattle ranching area. 70% of the pupils who participated in the study agreed with what their parents said about the schools being an opportunity for them to acquire an education just like any other children in Zimbabwe. The 70% plainly said that they enjoyed and liked going to school. 80% of the teachers also shared the same view with the parents and students. The teachers referred to education as a basic human right which should be accorded all children regardless of colour, race, status or religion. Thus by establishing the satellite schools the Zimbabwean government was advancing the goals of education for sustainability which calls for engagement and equipping people for socio-economic change. Education leads to behavior and attitude change which is essential for sustainable development.

However, of the interviewed parents, 27% complained that schools disrupted their farming activities. They no longer had sufficient labour force in the fields as well as to look after their livestock. 20% of the teachers said both parents and pupils did not value education so the establishment of satellite schools in Somabhula posed a great challenge. 30% of pupils also indicated that they did not like the idea of going to school because the schools were too far away and the activities were boring. Therefore, this shows that government effort to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals by providing education to its citizens is a welcome development among most of the newly resettled farmers because only a small percentage does not welcome this programme. It is such people who will not promote programmes which enhance sustainable development because they lack appropriate knowledge and skills, (UNESCO, 2011).

Table 2: Parental/ Guardian Support in Pupils' Education

Item	Rating				
Parental support	Good	Very Good	Satisfactory	Average	Below Average
Number of teachers	2 (20%)	0	0	2 (20%)	6 (60%)

When asked about parental/guardian support for children's education, 60% of the teachers stated that it was below average. They argued that when pupils are motivated from home, the teachers' work becomes enjoyable even where one would be operating using the barest minimum resources. 20% of the teachers gave parental support for pupils' education as good while the other 20% said it was average. From the interviews held with the parents it was noted that there were some parents who sat for their ZJC and O'level examinations. It was such parents who indicated that they tried the best they could to provide for their children's education. Since the majority of people in this area were former farm workers, they do not have the means and the fact that some of the parents themselves did not go to school explains why they do not place any significant value in their children's education. This becomes a cycle which is very difficult to break and these individuals' lifestyles are a direct contrast to what sustainable development advocates.

Table 3a: Challenges Associated with Satellite Schools as Cited By Teachers

Challenges	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Lack of teaching/learning resources	10	—	—
Low enrolment	10	—	—
Punctuality	08	02	—
Irregular attendance	10	—	—
Dropouts	10	—	—
Inappropriate infrastructure	10	—	—
Lack of parental support	08	02	—

Table 3b: Challenges as Given by Parents

Challenges	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Fees payment	30	—	—
Long distances	30	—	—
Inappropriate infrastructure	30	—	—
Lack of teaching and learning resources	30	—	—
Few teachers	30	—	—

Table 3c: Pupils' Views on the Challenges

Challenges	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Inappropriate infrastructure	50	—	—
Insufficient furniture	50	—	—
No books	50	—	—
Long distances	40	—	—
Fees and uniforms	35	15	—

The three groups of respondents gave very similar challenges which range from improper infrastructure, lack of furniture, inadequate teaching and learning resources to long distances which pupils walk to and from schools. This shows how rampant these challenges are and it tallies very well with what other scholars have found out in relation to Zimbabwean satellite schools. Kabayanjiri (2012) asserts that old farm houses and tobacco barns have been converted to teaching and learning venues while on the other hand pupils travel up to twenty kilometers to and from school. This host of challenges impacts negatively on service delivery by teachers as well as pupil performance. Sadomba (2011) says primary education declined between 2004 and 2006 the time when the land reform reached its climax. This goes against one of the goals of sustainable development which advocates for universal primary school education by 2015 (Kates et al, 2005). As a result, a lot needs to be done especially if these schools are to be viable and sustain the country's socio-economic growth.

All the three groups agreed that improper infrastructure, lack of resources like books and furniture were the worst challenges. All the teachers went on to mention issues like irregular attendance, punctuality, low enrolments and school drop outs as other causes for concern in all the satellite schools. Some said it was very difficult to conduct lessons where a quarter of the pupils will be absent or trickling in one after the other well after lessons would have begun. They argued that their lessons lacked continuity because the teachers keep on seeing new faces every day. Some of those who would have come on a Monday might not come on Tuesday and Wednesday, and might decide to come on Friday. When asked about coming to school regularly 85% of pupils agreed that they tended to miss classes because they came from faraway places. Others said they did not absent themselves at will but that their guardians or parents sent them on family errands made them work in the fields or other such activities, even during normal school time. Bell et al (2003) note that former farm workers (who in Somabhula are the majority) are poorly educated and this high level of illiteracy makes it very difficult for them to appreciate the place of education in their lives. Such is the life of most pupils in Zimbabwean satellite schools and given such unfavourable learning conditions it is very difficult for both teachers and pupils to perform to their maximum. Pupils end up taking schooling as some other dull and boring game which they are free to skip whenever an opportunity arises. However 15% of pupils indicated that they tried their best to come to school regularly because they wanted to acquire an education which would rescue them from their forefathers and fathers' predicament. To such pupils going to school is a serious business not another pastime activity.

Another issue that was alluded to as a challenge by all parents together with their children was fees payment. From the interviews held with the Teachers in charge it was found out that all of them agreed that running satellite schools was very difficult because the fees were hard to come by. They said that there are students who have sat for their Grade 7 tests without having paid fees for even a single term. Some parents argued that they could not put enough food on the table for their families so how could they be in a position to pay the fees. Even those parents who did not owe the school any money sympathized with their counterparts who were in arrears. However this negatively impacts on service delivery in satellite schools because without money it is impossible to acquire the necessary teaching and learning resources. That is why the satellite schools do not have proper infrastructure and suitable furniture among others. Therefore, government effort to promote sustainable development through education and economic empowerment becomes fruitless because of this host of challenges militating against its efforts.

The respondents were also asked ways of encouraging pupils to regularly attend school even under those unpleasant conditions because there are some who have benefitted from these schools. There is need for a follow up study on those students who graduate from satellite primary schools and proceed to either satellite secondary schools in that same area or a nearby established secondary school.

Table 4: Ways of Motivating Pupils to Learn

Activity	Agree	Disagree	Teachers	Pupils	Agree	Disagree
Core curricular	10	—			45	05
Feeding schemes	04	06			43	07
Educational awareness campaigns	07	03			30	20
Family support	08	02			50	—

Table 4 shows the suggestions given by both teachers and pupils on ways of motivating pupils to learn. All teachers agreed that core curricular activities like athletics and ball games among others could be used to encourage pupils to come to school. They said so because most of their attendance registers showed that most pupils attended classes during the first and second term because they love participating in sporting activities. On the other hand 10% of pupils tended to disagree with the idea though the majority showed that they enjoyed sporting activities and would try by all means not to miss them.

Furthermore, 70% of teachers and 60% of pupils agreed that resettled communities needed some live educational campaigns since most of the challenges emanated from the home. This will be in a bid to enlighten those parents who thought otherwise about school maybe because of illiteracy (Bell et al, 2003). They need to be educated on the role of education in improving their livelihoods through behaviour and attitude change which is a result of education.

It makes them make better use of the environment and help them adopt current farming and environmental conservation practices which promote sustainable development (UNESCO, 2011). However 30% of teachers argued that in this 21 century there was no need for literacy campaigns. They said it was high time both parents and pupils stood up against illiteracy and join hands with the government by being cooperative in as far as the acquisition of education is concerned.

In addition all pupils indicated that they highly esteemed parental involvement in their educational endeavours. 80% of teachers were in agreement with this opinion but 20% argued that the onus rested solely with the pupil. They said if the pupil showed commitment to learning parents would reciprocate. They went on to say that some parents had the potential to provide for all the school requirements but were deterred by their pupils' attitudes towards school. It was also noted that during periods of drought pupil attendance improved especially when there are some feeding schemes in the schools. Pupils will be coming mainly to get their share of the food; therefore attending classes will be a decent way to wait for the food. However such programmes need funding for them to be sustainable since it becomes meaningless to continue with such programmes when people are having enough. Berry (2002:2) asserts that, "When a school environment is transformed from a state of hopeless deterioration to a healthy condition, attitudes of the students, teachers, parents and surrounding community turn energetically positive so as to allow for effective teaching and learning." This is what needs to be done in the country's satellite schools or the government effort to promote this basic human right might be futile.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Satellite schools were a noble idea by the government of Zimbabwe but the appalling conditions under which they operate leave a lot to be desired. The future of these schools is bleak because of the numerous challenges which all the stakeholders face. These challenges negatively impact on the advancement of sustainable development through the provision of education. If education provision is to play a key role in enhancing sustainable development the government of Zimbabwe should come up with a framework to guide the operations of the satellite schools. The resettled communities should be proactive in improving their children's learning conditions and the teachers in these schools should also actively participate in promoting the provision of education for sustainable development.

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