



## Research Article

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## Community Share Ownership Trusts and Economic Empowerment: A Case Study of Rural Communities in Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** This study focused on the economic empowerment challenges and opportunities of rural communities in Zimbabwe through the Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) initiative. Pragmatic research methodology was used to collect data from two CSOT officials, six traditional leaders, and six executives of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) that contributed to CSOTs. Data were collected from the aforementioned key informants through interviews, structured questionnaire and observations. Results show that after several amendments and the 2018 repeal of the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, the majority of CSOTs were no longer functional or were underfunded. Hence, the recipient rural communities remained impoverished, a sign that the model was futile. Given that the CSOTs initiative had failed to deliver economic empowerment to recipient rural communities, this study proposed a model that emphasises rural community participation in the value chains of MNCs.

**Keywords:** Rural Community, Community Share Ownership Trust, Economic Empowerment, Multinational Companies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) established the Community Share Ownership Trust (CSOTs) in March 2010 through Chapter 14:33 of the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment (IEE) Act, and Statutory Instrument (SI) 21. The IEE model required Multinational Companies (MNCs) and other non-indigenous companies to cede at least 51 percent of their shareholding to indigenous Zimbabweans, with the community owning 10 percent of the 51 percent shareholding (Nechena & Kurebwa, 2018; Matsa & Masimbiti, 2014). The 10 % shareholding was meant to economically transform rural communities in a positive way. At the time of its inception, CSOT economic empowerment initiative was not a new phenomenon, both developed and developing countries including India and South Africa had implemented and produced different outcomes. Although the CSOTs in Zimbabwe was backed by a legal framework, it suffered serious loopholes in so far as legal enforcement was concerned. Overall, more than a decade after its inception, the majority of natural resource-rich rural communities in Zimbabwe remain impoverished. Instead of bringing economic empowerment, the concerned rural communities suffered substantial environmental degradation as a result of the operations of the MNCs. This paper illuminates the pitfalls of CSOTs as model of empowering rural communities and propose a

reengineered model that places emphasis on community participation on value chains of MNCs as opposed to waiting for charity contributions from the same. The paper provides a background, a synthesis of the reviewed empirical literature, the methodology used, and discussion of key findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations.

## BACKGROUND

The CSOTs economic empowerment initiative was introduced by the Government of Zimbabwe via SI 21 of 2010 under the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act Chapter 14:33 of 2007. The Act together with the relevant SI, required eligible businesses to earmark at least 10% of their shareholding to CSOTs in order to economically empower rural communities where the MNCs extracted natural resources. At the early stages of its inception, 61 CSOTs were registered throughout the country, with sixty (60) in rural areas and one (1) in an urban area, Harare. Since their inception in 2011, CSOTs became the foremost subject of economic debate on various socioeconomic platforms such as talk shows, political gatherings, parliamentary debates and social gatherings in rural areas gifted with natural resources. The economic empowerment that was expected from the operationalization of CSOTs heightened rural folks' interest in this economic model as evidenced by the

rapid surge in the number of registered Trusts. More than 60 CSOTs including Bikita CSOT, Gwanda CSOT, Masvingo CSOT, Mhondoro/Ngezi/ Zvimba CSOT, Tongogara CSOT and Zvishavane CSOT among an influx of others (Nechena & Kurebwa, 2018).

The primary goal of the CSOT economic empowerment model was to ensure that resource-rich communities, especially rural populations benefitted from the resources that are deposited in their localities. Thus, CSOTs were designed to empower marginalised rural communities through financial contributions from businesses in their communal jurisdictions. In simpler terms, CSOTs were meant to ensure that communities benefit from the extraction of natural resources in their immediate areas (Nechena & Kurebwa, 2018; Makwerere & Chiwada, 2014; Dube, 2013; Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). The GoZ anticipated that by launching CSOTs, a robust foundation for rural community economic empowerment was laid and it was projected that the outcomes were going to positively impact all economic sectors of the country, leading to accelerated economic development of the country (Nechena & Kurebwa, 2018; Matsa & Masimbiti, 2014). It was also expected that CSOTs would inspire broad-based participation in economic activities by rural community for the development of their own areas, using contributions from MNCs. A decade after the inception of this promising model, the effectiveness of CSOTs as an empowerment model was debatable. One school of thought was that CSOTs were created to enrich the elite who benefited through corruption (Zvauya, 2013) at the expense of the targeted rural communities who remained poverty sunken (Makwerere & Chiwada, 2014). The contrasting view was that rural communities benefited a lot through various developmental programmes that were funded through the CSOTs arrangement. Nechena & Kurebwa (2018) thought that CSOTs transformed rural communities through several infrastructure development projects, especially in the areas of education, health, transportation, and agriculture. By the time the IEE Act was repealed in 2018, a total of US\$44.5 million had been contributed by various business entities and this cumulative amount was disbursed to 26 CSOTs in different communities of Zimbabwe. However, this amount was a pittance compared to US\$128 million that was pledged in the initial stages of the initiative.

With the noble idea to bring concrete economic empowerment to the intended communities, CSOTs were managed through Boards of Trustees comprising traditional chiefs, district development coordinators (DDCs), Rural District Council (RDC) Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) among a host of other interest groups such as youth, women and war veterans representatives (GoZ, 2010). Nevertheless, the majority of Zimbabwe's rural communities holding MNCs openly complained about the negative effects of mining

activities on their communities. In particular, land degradation and environmental degradation, water and air pollution caused by harmful chemicals in the mines, loss of human and livestock life due to uncovered mines holes, just to name a few. Surprisingly, the GoZ was doing little to protect the affected communities from the MNC's environmental abuse. with a very weak Environmental Management Agency (EMA) that failed to enforce its rules regarding the implementation of an Environmental Impact Plan (EIA) as emphasised in the mining regulations. In the face of such vital protection, MNC's based in rural communities were focusing on making super profits while neglecting the needs of their impoverished host communities. Thus to a large extent, the mechanisms that mandated MNC's to contribute towards economic empowerment of host communities were left to the discretion of each MNC. Except in few rural communities, the CSOTs economic initiative failed to achieve its main objective of economic empowerment of rural communities. In fact, the majority of CSOTs were dysfunctional because most of the MNCs stopped their contributions towards the fund after the reversal of IEE Act in 2018. After the repeal, no substantive economic empowerment model for rural communities was instituted and rural communities in Zimbabwe persist in poverty despite that they are endowed with vast natural resources. This unequal distribution of natural resources prompted this study to pose the following research question.

### **Research Question**

How can Community Share Ownership Trust initiative be re-engineered to boost rural community economic empowerment?

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the Nexus of Contracts Theory (NCT) and the Distributive Theory (DT). According to the NCT, a business entity is a complex but adaptable system with different but intertwined subsystems that work together to achieve the business entity's goals (Knoll et al., 2018; Hayden & Bodie, 2010). The numerous subsystems are viewed as outcomes of moral and legal agreements reached between diverse stakeholder groups. Stockholders including employees, consumers, suppliers, financiers, and local communities are among some of the vital network groupings of a business entity (Harrison, 2010; Knoll et al., 2018). According to the DT, economic resources should be divided among all the stakeholders in a fair modus so that even people in surrounding communities could live good lives. Thus, economic inequality impacting communities should be addressed in the interest of justice (Nardin, 2006). To put it another way, the theoretical foundation of the DT is concerned with stakeholder relationships and the many considerations made when distributing resources.

The adoption of the NCT and DT enabled this study to develop profound awareness of the issues faced

by Zimbabwe's destitute rural populations, a reality that contrasted with their multibillion-dollar MNCs who extracted natural resources from these disadvantaged communities. The guiding theories were chosen because they clearly demonstrated to us that if the principle of equality was used in the distribution of the vast natural resources deposited in rural communities, poverty could be eradicated in rural communities. Therefore, the theories we chose provided an appropriate beginning point for evaluating the issues that contributed to the indigenization and economic empowerment program's failure as a paradigm of economic emancipation and poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe's rural communities. By using the NCT and DT, we were able to explore and identify the rural communities' economic empowerment concerns and inherent pitfalls of CSOTs economic empowerment model.

## RELATED LITERATURE

Poverty is a global concern that affects people all over the world, with the World Bank estimating that 1.1 billion people earn less than USD\$1 per day and face daily hardships that threaten their very survival. Much of this poverty is concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is home to approximately 413 million poor people and has a poverty rate of 41%, which was significantly higher than other regions of the world. As of 2014, Africa was also the world's most rural region, with 60% of the population living in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). The number of deprived rural people in the globe was estimated to be in the range of 580 million. The development community, comprising governments and other development agencies are committed improve impoverished rural people's livelihoods through various poverty reduction initiatives that address the root causes of poverty and its crippling effect on people trapped in adverse situations.

Statistics show that in Zimbabwe, poverty was fast increasing and 83.5 % of the reported poverty was found in rural areas where households were living on less than USD\$ 1.83 per day by close of 2017. A recent study by Dhiraj (2021) show that in Zimbabwe poverty was rising at quicker rate due to droughts induced by adverse climate change among other economic factors. The fact that most rural communities are impoverished in the midst of abundance of mineral and other natural resources is a painful reality that must be addressed with the urgency it deserves. To exacerbate the situation, impoverished rural communities near mining operations, suffer long term environmental degradation. Faced with increasing economic inequality between the rural and urban population, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) introduced the concept of Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) in 2010 (Block, 2010; Government of Zimbabwe, 2011). This model was expected to promoting development in rural areas. Particularly, CSOTs were meant to economically empower rural communities by providing them a 10% interest in all firms that use natural resources in their

communal jurisdictions (Mazaranye, 2016; Matsa & Masimbiti, 2014). The goal of fixing the shareholding to be ceded by MNCs was to control the selfish profit seeking and exploitation of the rural communities' natural resources for the benefit of MNCs and other qualifying business organisations. Thus, the overarching objective of the CSOTs was to improve the livelihoods of people in recipient rural communities.

Extant literature (Dhiraj, 2021; Knoll et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018; Mazaranye, 2016) show that economic alleviation policies are widely used across the globe to address economic inequality affecting sections of the population, especially those living in rural areas. For example, community share ownership schemes were used with a measure of success in India, Japan, South Africa and Botswana to name but a few cases. However, the distinction between rural and urban populations is not universal across the globe. In this study, we conceptualised rural communities as those areas where the majority of the inhabitants depend on agriculture in a broad sense and extraction of natural resources in narrow sense, as their source of livelihoods. In Japan, the emphasis was on empowering rural communities to increase agricultural production. The emphasis of the empowerment initiatives was on skills transfer in the areas of installation of irrigation systems and the implementation of farming techniques. Despite the successes scored through this initiative, it was noted that the agricultural model alone was insufficient and economic empowerment programs were expanded. The lessons that Zimbabwe can derive from the Japanese experience was that relying on CSOTs alone for economic empowerment of rural communities was not adequate if at all this model was ever going to deliver the required empowerment. Like elsewhere, rural communities in Zimbabwe have been excluded from participating in meaningful economic activities involving mining companies in their vicinity. This historical and colonial legacy of inequality triggered the conduct of this study, which provided the evidence from primary sources from various stakeholders about the pitfalls of CSOTs and the prospects of our proposed economic empowerment model which revolves around rural community participation in the value chains of MNCs as a way to maximise economic benefits they could derive from the extraction of natural resources in their localities.

## METHODOLOGY

This study evaluated the efficacy of CSOTs and the pitfalls of this economic empowerment model with regard to poverty eradication in natural resource-rich rural communities in Zimbabwe. A pragmatic research philosophy encompassing qualitative research approach and multiple case study design was employed. Pragmatism was chosen because it enabled this study to adopt multiple and flexible data collection methods (Creswell, 2014; Kothari, 2013) given that the study was conducted under restrictive Covid-19 guidelines

which curtailed movement and physical interactions. Key informant interviews, focus groups and field observations were used to collect data from 14 participants comprising 2 CSOT officials, 6 traditional leaders and 6 MNC executives. Using these triangulated data collection methods, the study managed to explore the contributions of CSOTs to economic empowerment of rural communities after a decade of the model's existence. We used qualitative thematic procedures to analyse the data. The main objective of this study was to provide a re-engineered economic model that could boost economic prospects of rural communities for sustainable livelihoods in line with the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015), and in the interest of resource distributive justice (Knoll et al., 2018). In this regard, the selected methodology enabled this study to put forward a participatory economic model that provides rural communities with opportunities which are embedded in the value chains of MNCs conducting businesses in their jurisdictions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The article emphasizes the importance of empowering natural resource-rich rural communities through economic empowerment models that facilitate the participation of rural people in their own development. The background of the study was even though most rural communities in Zimbabwe are gifted with abundance of natural resources, the majority of people in these communities lead impoverished livelihoods because they were not deriving significant benefit from the natural resources that MNCs were extracting from rural jurisdictions (Nechena & Kurebwa, 2018; Nelson et al., 2015; Dube, 2013). This economic injustice forced many countries to introduce various economic empowerment models that seeking to address economic disparities that favored multinational business organisations at the expense of poverty stricken rural people. In Zimbabwe, Community Share Ownership Trusts (CSOTs) were implemented as one of numerous policy tools under Chapter 14: 33 of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act. CSOT was an economic empowerment instrument through which eligible firms that use a community's natural resources ceded 10% of their shareholding to surrounding communities for their own development. However, several studies (Steiner & Farmer, 2018; Gwisai, 2010; Government of Zimbabwe, 2012; Zvauya, 2013) found that a variety of factors including imposition of developmental projects, policy inconsistency, corruption, inadequate contributions, lack of transparency, lack of community participation and policy inconsistency on the part of government are some of the hurdles that rural communities in their bid to benefit economically from CSOTs in their original prototype.

All the 6 traditional leaders who took part in this study disclosed that their communities were

endowed with vast natural resources including platinum, chrome, diamonds and gold to mention but a few. Nevertheless, the same participants lamented the extreme poverty suffered by the majority of their subjects whose livelihoods depended on donations from non-governmental organisations and other well-wishers. In some extreme cases, families were not able to fend for their children to the extent that they dropped out of school for lack of school fees and related expenses. Ultimately, these school dropouts were hired by MNCs in their areas to perform unskilled and low wage jobs. The dire situation was captured in following excerpt from one participant who lamented that:

*We have diamonds here but look at the poverty affecting people in this community. We have nothing to show for our resources, they are taken away by these big companies. Government must ensure that these mining companies share their profits with us because we are the owners of the resources they are extracting.*

Responding to whether their community was being economically empowered by the extraction of natural resources from their locality by MNCs, yet another participant, a community member, complained that;

*All they tell is that they are developing our area because they are rehabilitating roads and bridges. Our people do not have cars, they do not afford them so these roads do not empower us in anyway. The roads benefit the mining companies because they are the ones who use them to transport the minerals they extract from our area.*

In contrast, representatives of the participating MNCs disagreed with the aforesaid view. They claimed that their companies were contributing immensely towards the development of their host communities. According to this divergent view, the 10% contribution towards CSOT was instrumental in driving a number of developmental projects in their host communities. One senior MNC executive explained how his company was empowering their surrounding rural communities.

*Statutory Instrument 21 of 2010 compels us to contribute 10% of our shareholding towards the CSOT. This fund is used to finance various developmental projects that directly benefit our host community as well as its surrounding neighbouring rural communities. A number of schools and clinics have been constructed while roads, bridges and irrigation schemes were rehabilitated. These developmental projects are there for all to see and that is what we are doing as a company to empower the communities that co-exist with us.*

The same sentiments were echoed by another participant, who was also an executive of another mining company. He stated that:

*In addition to our CSOT contributions, every year we distribute agricultural inputs to ensure that our surrounding rural communities achieve food security at the household level. We employ locals from neighbouring rural communities if opportunities arise in our organisation. We also help them with field extension services so that they get good yields. We also employ a number of local people and reduce unemployment in our adjacent rural communities.*

Observations during fieldwork helped this study to streamline the two divergent views presented by the traditional leaders as representatives of their rural communities and the executives as representatives of MNCs. First the study established that the majority of the rural communities were indeed poverty sunken, with most families barely affording three solid meals per day. These communities relied on NGOs and other charitable organisations for their food requirements. It was also observed that children in some of the studied rural communities were wandering the communities or engaged in illegal mining activities after abandoning their education. Their parents failed to pay USD \$10 tuition fees per term demanded by most rural schools. Indeed, as indicated by the traditional leaders, it was true that the studied 6 rural communities were epithets of poverty despite the vast natural resources in their communities. Living conditions of people in these communities were pathetic to say the least. On the other hand, observations also confirmed the claims made by the MNC executives with regard to various developmental projects that were funded through the CSOTs. In the 6 rural communities that the study focused on, it was evident that roads, bridges and irrigation schemes were rehabilitated using the CSOT contributions made by MNCs. In some of the communities, schools and clinics were constructed through the CSOT initiative. Thus, the claim by executives of the participating MNCs were indeed pacified.

Looking at the accusations and counter-accusations between resource-rich rural communities and their guest MNCs, it was apparent that while the developmental projects that were funded by proceeds from the CSOTs were welcome, they fell short of addressing the poverty situation of individual rural folks. Thus, people in rural communities remained in economic doldrums with no economic empowerment prospects in the near future. For example, while roads and bridges were rehabilitated these relevant developmental programs were not on themselves bridging food on the tables of hungry villagers. This is why the affected participants felt that CSOT engineered programmes were meant to benefit the MNCs who

wanted trafficable roads and crossable bridges for the transporting extracted natural resources. In the first place, the degraded road and bridge infrastructure in rural communities was a problem that was brought about by the activities of the concerned MNCs. Therefore, rehabilitating them was not an act of empowering the affected rural communities. Observations also revealed that in addition to little or no signs of economic empowerment, rural communities which hosted MNCs were suffering monumental environmental degradation at the hands of MNCs' extractive activities. Another glaring reality was that while schools were constructed using CSOTs funds, a number of children in rural communities with mineral deposits, were not able to attend those schools because their families could not afford the minimum tuition fees and levies charged. One would ask, what good is a rehabilitated bridge to a hungry rural populace? What good is a constructed school if children cannot afford to attend it? These challenges reflect a grim image of economically disempowered rural communities, hence, the curiosity to know who then benefitted from the millions of dollars the MNCs' claimed they contributed towards the CSOTs. One of the participants sheds light to this question. He narrated:

*People living in rural communities are not benefiting from the extraction of precious minerals in their areas. The challenge is that the indigenisation and economic empowerment policies are highly politicised and meant to benefit the politically connected elites. This problem has not only weakened the potential of CSOTs but also destroyed them. No meaningful economic empowerment has happened in rural communities serve for enormous degradation that is destroying our ecosystem.*

Given the realities calamitous economic reality of the studied 6 rural communities, this study concluded that while the CSOT economic empowerment model had produced encouraging outcomes in other countries as shown in the reviewed literature, this well-thought-out model failed to turn improve livelihoods in rural communities of Zimbabwe. While numerous factors contributed to the economic miscarriage of justice suffered by rural communities, the key problem hinged on lack of active participation by rural communities in the value chains of MNCs. This gap was exploited by the political elite who exploited CSOTs funds for their selfish political expediency. The abuse of CSOTs by the elite at the expense of the poor rural people constitutes an act of corruption, a concept defined as the abuse of public resources for personal benefit, and it indicates a lack of good governance (USAID, 2006). It is widely acknowledged that less corrupt governments have more efficient systems that create more equitable societies. A study by Saunders (2007) noted that the advent of a politically connected elite tends to create conditions for inequality as few rather than many grab economic

opportunities under the cover of cosmetic policy frameworks. CSOTs in Zimbabwe suffered the same demise. In the 6 study cases, the contributions by qualifying MNCs were used to fund infrastructure development projects. While this was good for the surrounding rural communities, the same failed to translate to meaningful economic empowerment. As a result, most rural communities in Zimbabwe remained economically poor and deeply dependent on charity, a decade after the inception of CSOTs.

## CONCLUSION

Zimbabwe's Indigenization and Economic Empowerment (IEE) Act, Chapter 14:33, and Statutory Instrument (SI) 21 of 2010 were intended to bring economic empowerment to rural communities by providing them a 10% shareholding in each MNC and other qualifying firms that extracted natural resources in rural localities. The ceded 10% shareholding was contributed into CSOTs. This study focused on 6 resource-rich rural communities in Zimbabwe who remained in economic quagmire a decade after the introduction of aforementioned CSOTs. The study found that CSOTs focused on development of public infrastructure as opposed to real economic emancipation and eradication of poverty in the concerned rural communities. Thus, rural communities remain marginalized and in economic distress. An analysis of this problem showed that besides community-based developmental projects that were bank-rolled CSOTs contributions, the studied rural communities were not participating in opportunities in the chains of MNCs. Lucrative contracts were awarded to distal business entities while CSOTs created dependency syndromes in rural communities to the extent that they stopped demanding a fair share of the resources extracted from their areas. The study contends that while CSOT-driven development projects were acceptable, they were only a drop in the ocean compared to the quantum of natural resources extracted by MNCs and other eligible companies. The study further contends that resource-rich rural communities should actively participate in the value chains of MNCs in order to derive the greatest economic benefit from their natural resources.

## IMPLICATIONS

We applied the nexus of contracts and distributive theories in a novel mix to explore the challenges of CSOTs as a model for economic empowerment of rural communities in Zimbabwe. Through the prism of these two theoretical lenses, this study exposed the flaws in Zimbabwe's CSOTs as a model for empowering rural communities. The study revealed that while the CSOTs model was a noble attempt to empower rural communities economically, the contributions were used for infrastructural development as opposed to direct economic empowerment of people in the rural communities. This

explains why rural folks remained economically marginalised despite the vast natural resources that were extracted from their midst by multi-million dollar companies. The same rural communities suffered double jeopardy in that in addition to their marginalisation, they also suffered the consequences of environmental degradation as result of mining activities in their regions. This study buttresses the view that rural communities are the rightful custodians of natural resource endowments in their localities and for that reason they deserve a substantive share of the extracted portion of such resources. Therefore, this study proposed an empowerment model that emphasises rural community participation in the value chains of MNCs and other established business organisation that extract community resources. In this proposed economic empowerment model, the 10% CSOTs contributions should be directed towards building the capacity of rural communities so that they take control of their own economic emancipation.

## Recommendations

It was recommended that:

- Governments should institute economic empowerment models that emphasises rural community capacity building rather than promoting dependency syndrome through funded community projects.
- Rural communities should participate in value chains of MNCs so that they derive maximum benefits from natural resources that are extracted from their midst. That way, rural communities can take control of their own economic progress.
- All economic empowerment models should balance between the economic empowerment needs of rural communities and profit needs of investing MNCs.
- Economic empowerment of rural communities should be enforced by robust frameworks that serve the interest of substantive distributive justice.

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