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REALITIES OF PROGRAMME BENEFICIARIES AND NUTRITION GARDENS IN MASVINGO, ZIMBABWE

Kudzayi Savious Tarisayi & Everjoy Munyaradzi

ABSTRACT

A plethora of studies has established that nutrition gardens have been utilized in Zimbabwe to alleviate poverty in recent years. This article interrogates the realities of the intended programme beneficiaries of a poverty alleviation intervention in Zimbabwe. The authors drew from the work of Robert Chambers to unpack the marginalization of the realities of the intended beneficiaries and the sustainability of selected nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe. Central to Robert Chambers' work is the argument that imposed development initiatives are problematic due to lack of programme beneficiary consultation. A purposive sample of 15 participants, made up of 12 beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens and three community leaders were selected for this study. Data was generated utilizing photo-elicitation interviewing and photographs. Thematic data analysis was adopted to analyse the transcribed data. The findings from this study revealed that the selected nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe succumbed to numerous sustainability challenges. Due to these challenges livelihoods of vulnerable communities were lost. The study further noted that the sustainability challenges of the selected nutrition gardens were attributable to the one size fits all approach adopted in the introduction of the nutrition gardens and inadequate research before the implementation of the nutrition gardens. The study also established that there was no programme beneficiary consultation. It is recommended that poverty alleviation interventions should prioritize the realities of the intended beneficiaries.

Keywords: Relegation; NGOs: realities of the poor; nutrition gardens; Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

A plethora of studies has established that nutrition gardens have been utilized in Zimbabwe to alleviate poverty in recent years. Nutrition gardens were introduced in Zimbabwe to address food insecurity which was prevalent among vulnerable communities. The beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens were supposed to grow vegetables for their consumption and sell the surplus. This article interrogates the realities of the intended programme beneficiaries of a poverty alleviation intervention in Zimbabwe.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Dominant narratives in contemporary literature on poverty and food insecurity in Zimbabwe have mainly focussed on rural areas. Resultantly, leading to a misinforming narrative that poverty and food insecurity are essentially and predominantly rural phenomenon. It is also interesting to note that poverty alleviation and intervention strategies (both state and donor-funded) have

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subsequently mainly targeted rural areas in Zimbabwe. However, Chihambakwe, Mafongoya, and Jiri (2019) opine that urbanization and the global financial recession have brought food insecurity in sub-Saharan African cities to the fore. A study by Manjengwa, Matema, and Tirivanhu (2016) established that there were high levels of income poverty in the high-density suburbs of Harare, Zimbabwe. The World Food Programme (WFP) reported that urban poverty in Zimbabwe was due to high unemployment and a lack of social services (Chingono, 2019). While there is no consensus on the unemployment statistics in Zimbabwe, experts have utilised figures ranging between 90 and 96 % (BBC, 2019). Additionally, statistics reveal that about 34, 5 % of urban workers in Zimbabwe have incomes below the poverty datum line (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2019). However, this article pursued a thesis that view poverty and food insecurity as both rural and urban phenomena.

Nutrition gardens are interrogated in this paper as a poverty alleviation intervention in urban areas in Zimbabwe. Nutrition gardens are viewed in this paper as an intervention funded by various donors to ameliorate urban poverty. The introduction of donor-funded nutrition gardens in urban areas in Zimbabwe has been regarded in the light of the realization that poverty and food insecurity are not predominately rural phenomena (Chazovachii, Mutami, and Bowora, 2013). In Zimbabwe, Non-governmental Organisation sponsored nutrition gardens are fairly recent phenomenon having been introduced in January 2011. The introduction of nutrition gardens in urban spaces ignited academic interest among scholars and development practitioners. The interest in the nutrition gardens stemmed from the desire to evaluate the extent to which the nutrition gardens were addressing urban poverty. Additionally, the interest in the nutrition gardens was also sparked by the fact that in Zimbabwe nutrition gardens were initially predominantly a rural phenomenon. Thus, the transplanting of the nutrition gardens from the rural landscape into urban settings generated scholarly attention as indicated by numerous studies (Chimbwanda, 2016; Chinyanganya, Ncube-Phiri, Mapuva, and Tichagwa, 2015; Ncube and Ncube, 2016) that were carried out over the last decade. Scholars were keen to interrogate the implementation challenges of nutrition gardens as well as the benefits derived from the nutrition gardens by people in urban areas.

Internationally, there is no consensus on the genesis of the concept of nutrition gardens in contemporary scholarship. Seminal scholar on community gardens Grigg (1974) points out that community gardens can be traced to the eighteenth century mixed gardens in South East Asia. It can be noted that gardens have been in existence for centuries despite assuming various names such as mixed gardens, family gardens, home gardens, neighbourhood gardens, and more recently community gardens, therapy gardens, and nutrition gardens among others. Conversely, in this paper, the term nutrition gardens is being utilised. Chazovachii et al (2013) state that in Zimbabwe there was a mass establishment of community gardens funded by non-governmental organizations such as Action Faim and CARE Zimbabwe. The establishment of nutrition gardens in urban areas in Zimbabwe coincided with the economic decline in the country.

A plethora of studies have been carried out on nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe. The main threads emerging in the nutrition gardens discourse in Zimbabwe centres on the contribution of nutrition gardens to livelihoods in rural areas (Chazovadii et al, 2013) as well as in urban settings (Chinyanganya et al, 2015; Gondo, Madigele, Mogomotsi, Tokwe, Chakuya and Chirefu, 2017; Ncube and Ncube, 2016). In a study on perceptions towards urban gardening in Masvingo, Chimbwanda (2016) noted that nutrition garden programmes targeted mainly the widows, orphans, elderly and the sick. Thus, it can be argued that the selection of beneficiaries of nutrition garden

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programmes was based on vulnerability. Chinyanganya et al (2015) established that participants in nutrition gardens were unemployed. This article utilised the term beneficiaries of nutrition gardens to demarcate the people who were selected and allocated plots in the nutrition gardens in the selected high-density area in Zimbabwe. It is noteworthy that while a plethora of studies have been carried out on urban nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe little is known about the sustainability of nutrition gardens. Thus, the focus of this paper was to interrogate the sustainability of nutrition gardens in the selected high-density area in Zimbabwe.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The authors drew their theoretical lens from Robert Chambers' monograph on 'whose reality counts?' The decision to introduce urban nutrition gardens was the brainchild of technocrats far-removed from the realities on the ground in the high-density areas of Zimbabwe. One of the key arguments in Chambers' monograph is to problematise the role played by "outsiders" in development initiatives. Thus, the decision to implement nutrition gardens in urban spaces in Zimbabwe was made technocrats, who are viewed in this paper as outsiders. Additionally, Chambers argues that there should be ownership of development initiatives by the intended programme beneficiaries. Chambers (1995, 2012) further argues that there are multiple realities in the conceptualization of poverty.

The realities of the poor are different from the realities of the professionals and experts who make decisions in NGOs (Chambers, 1995). It was noted from Chambers' work that decision makers due to their positionality as outsiders should ensure that there is adequate programme beneficiary consultation. Hence, the authors in this article were guided by Chambers' work to interrogate the contribution of programme beneficiary consultation on the sustainability of nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe. Chambers (1997) argues that the realities of the powerful tend to be given prominence in development initiatives. Consequently, the relegation of the realities of the programme beneficiaries is regarded as a reflection of the power struggles in development initiatives. Additionally, the work of Robert Chambers influenced the selection of research methods utilised in this study. The authors included ensured that there was inclusive and participatory data generation for this study as revealed in the next section.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was located within the interpretive framework because it sought an understanding of the realities of the beneficiaries of nutrition gardens in high-density areas in Zimbabwe. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018, 19) state "the central endeavor in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience." The realization that the experiences of the beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens are subjective also informed the adoption of the interpretive paradigm. Additionally, Neuman (2011, 102) defines the interpretive approach as, "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds." The researchers utilized the interpretive paradigm because they sought an understanding of the realities of the intended beneficiaries. The researchers used a

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qualitative research approach to understand the meaning of the experiences of beneficiaries of nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe. Braun and Clarke (2019, 591) argue "qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making…" A case study of one purposively selected high-density suburb in Zimbabwe was utilized. Gustafsson (2017, 2) explains "A case study can be defined as an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit, which is aimed to generalize over several units." Additionally, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, 376) state "case studies are set in temporal, geographical, organizational, institutional and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case."

Data was generated using photo-elicitation interviewing and transect walks. Glaw, Inder, Kable, and Hazelton (2017, 1) define photo-elicitation as "using photographs or other visual mediums in an interview to generate verbal discussion to create data and knowledge." Bignante (2010, 1) states that photo-elicitation "involves photos, videos, and other forms of visual representation used in an interview, with informants asked to comment on the images." Douglas, Jordan, Lande, and Bumbaco (2015, 2) state that photographs "evoke information, feelings, and memories that are due to the photograph's particular form of representation." Additionally, Bignante (2010, 2) narrates "the researcher assumes that the images, the meaning(s) we attribute to them, the emotions they arouse in the observer, and the information they elicit generate insights that do not necessarily or exclusively correspond to those obtained in verbal inquiry." The 15 participants in this study were asked to bring a picture of their nutrition gardens during the photo-elicitation interviews (each beneficiary was allocated a plot in the nutrition garden). Mannay (2013) states that during photo-elicitation interviewing either the researcher brings the photos or the participants can be asked to supply their own. Although transect walk was initially mooted as a rural participatory method, it is now being utilized in urban spaces (Omer, 2017). Omer (2017, 1) explains "the transect walk can be considered as a valuable on-field activity by which different urban actors can engage in walking activity through a specified community area to break down the problems, assets and other existence solutions." Chambers (1997) also views transect walk as an inclusive and participatory data generation method. Transect walk as a research method ensured the generation of different points of view on the nutrition gardens in Zimbabwe.

The researchers utilized convenience sampling to select four participants from each of the three purposively selected nutrition gardens in high-density areas in Zimbabwe. Additionally, three community leaders were included among the interview participants to triangulate data sources. Triangulation was also ensured through the sampling of participants from three different nutrition gardens. The researchers presented the findings from the study utilizing 'within-case and across-case' approaches. Pseudonyms were given to the interview participants. Data were analysed utilizing thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019) state that thematic analysis involves the use of themes emerging from the transcribed data. Braun and Clarke (2006, 6) state that, "thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data." The authors utilized pseudonyms for ethical reasons. There was informed consent, voluntary participation among other ethical considerations.

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings under the themes that emerged from this study. The themes that emerged were: loss of livelihoods due to vandalism and theft, one size fits all approach, location of the nutrition gardens, inadequate research, and silver lining on beneficiaries way of life.

Loss of Livelihoods Due to Vandalism and Theft

It was evident from the findings that the beneficiaries lost their newly acquired livelihoods due to vandalism and theft. The beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens programme in high-density areas in Zimbabwe revealed that the introduction of the gardens despite being a noble idea, it was unsustainable due to vandalism. Faith stated,

> *The introduction of gardens in our residential area was very noble. However, our garden was only viable for a few months. The fence was vandalised and our vegetables were stolen. In urban areas, issues of security are difficult to maintain.*

Another participant Ruth explained,

> *Gardens were a good intervention but they failed to anticipate the security challenges in urban settings. It's difficult to secure the fence as well as vegetables in urban areas. Resultantly, the gardens failed to operate for more than six months.*

George (a local councillor) explained,

> *All the gardens*[1] *that were introduced are no longer operational. The fences have been vandalised as you can see from the pictures. It was difficult for the residents to continue farming without any security.*

The authors observed from all the pictures supplied by the participants that the fences were vandalised at the selected nutrition gardens in the selected high-density area in Zimbabwe. It was noted from the study that there was an apparent abandonment of the gardening activities due to the vandalism of fences. Secondly, there was an outgrowing of weeds and grass which provided evidence that the selected nutrition gardens were no longer operational in the selected high-density area in Zimbabwe. Additionally, it was noted that the effect of vandalism and theft on the nutrition gardens was a recurring theme throughout all the interviews. However, it essentially to note that before the vandalism and theft, the beneficiaries' livelihoods were now linked to the nutrition gardens. The vulnerable communities got vegetables such onions, tomatoes, cabbage among others from the nutrition gardens. Hence, it can be argued that vandalism and theft adversely affected food security of the vulnerable communities.Another participant Grace explained,

> *The gardens were more like **'chewing gum'**...good for a very short time. An NGO donated fences, a borehole, and constructed a blair toilet. For a few months, it was an impressive project. But all crumbled within six months after the vandalism of the fences and roofing materials for the blair toilets.*

There was consensus among the beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens who participated in this study that the introduction of nutrition gardens was a great innovation. However, it was also noted from the above statements that the nutrition gardens' sustainability was adversely affected by vandalism and theft. Additionally, the participants revealed that all the nutrition gardens (seven)

[1] A total of seven gardens were introduced in high density areas in Masvingo

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in the selected high-density area were no longer operational due to vandalism and theft. One participant proffered an interesting analogue of the nutrition gardens as **'chewing gum'** because of their apparent goodness (viability) was short-lived. The authors also noted from the pictures supplied by the participants that the fences on all the selected nutrition gardens had been completely vandalised and stolen. The pictures provided by the participants further showed that the beneficiaries had abandoned their plots in the nutrition gardens due to the vandalism and theft of the fences. Findings from the selected nutrition gardens in the high-density areas are consistent with a study carried out by Chimbwanda (2016). Chimbwanda utilised descriptive statistics to establish that 90 % of the participants in her study viewed theft as a challenge to urban gardening.

One Size Fits All Approach

The participants' views on the reasons for the unsustainability of the nutrition gardens are presented in this section. Emmerson (a local councillor) explained,

> *The introduction of gardens to assist the vulnerable in our high-density areas was a good initiative. However, I think there was an oversight in terms of security. The donor must have assumed that the same community ownership found in rural areas was also applicable to the high-density areas. The NGO initiative appears to be a 'one size fits all' without regard to context. Unfortunately, the initiative in the high-density areas fell victim to vandalism and theft.*

The above statement revealed that the NGO which introduced the nutrition gardens in the high-density areas marginalized the critical aspect of security which led to theft and vandalism. Additionally, the oversight by the NGO which funded the nutrition gardens was explained by the participant as due to a 'one size fits all approach'. In the 'one size fits all approach' the NGO was accused of introducing one poverty alleviation programme without due regard for the local conditions and the realities of the beneficiaries. Despite food insecurity in Zimbabwe affecting both rural and high-density residents, the study established that there was a need for different poverty alleviation approaches. Therefore, it can be argued that one size fits all approach failed largely because it was an alien solution. Thus, the imposition of an alien solution by the NGO in the high-density areas was viewed as contributory to the sustainability challenges established by this study. Susan added,

> *The gardens proved that it was difficult to transfer community gardens from rural areas to high-density areas. The security in rural areas is enhanced by community ownership of gardens. Additionally, urban residents are more used to individual pursuits instead of community initiatives like the gardens introduced by the NGOs.*

The above statement further supports the view that the beneficiaries of nutrition gardens encountered sustainability challenges because of failure to appreciate that urban residents are used to individual pursuits as compared to communal initiatives. This finding on the imposition of the 'one size fits all approach' concurs with the argument that some NGOs run their projects without consideration for local conditions and interests within the community (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Tarisayi, 2015). Hence, it can be noted from the selected nutrition gardens that the neglect of the security situation in the selected high-density area contributed greatly to the unsustainability of the intervention. The authors construct the neglect of the realities of the intended beneficiaries revealed by this study of selected nutrition gardens as a power struggle as aptly captured by

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Chambers (1997). The one size fits all approach utilized in the selected nutrition gardens aptly buttress the marginalization of the realities of the intended beneficiaries due to the negation of the disparities in contexts.

Inadequate Research

The sustainability challenges encountered by the beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens who participated in this study were attributed to inadequate research by the NGO. Nelson stated,

> *The NGO which introduced the gardens did not carry out adequate research on the sustainability of their innovation. The NGO failed to ensure that there was adequate security for the gardens which eventually affected their sustainability. Certainly, if the NGO had asked the residents, they were going to be told about the security concerns in the high-density areas.*

The above narration attributed the sustainability challenges experienced by the beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens to inadequate research by the NGO. The participant argued that with adequate research the NGO was going to learn about the security challenges in the high-density areas. This finding is consistent with the argument by Chambers (1995, 2012) that the realities of the poor are neglected in the decision making on poverty alleviation programmes. Another participant, Faith stated,

> *The returns on the gardens also affected their viability. In urban areas, natural organic manure is not readily available. It was difficult for us to source manure and therefore, were supposed to rely on fertilisers. We could not afford to buy the fertilisers due to poverty.*

From the above statement, it can be noted that sustainability challenges faced by the beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens were also linked with the returns from the gardens. The participant suggested that the yields were low due to a lack of access to natural organic manure in urban areas. Muzawazi (2015) established that beneficiaries of nutrition gardens in rural communities in Zimbabwe relied on their livestock for natural organic manure. Artificial fertilisers were not an affordable alternative to the poor and food-insecure beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens.

Findings from this study indicated that the returns from the nutrition gardens were low due to lack of inputs, a conclusion also reached by Ncube and Ncube (2016) and Gondo et al (2017). The inability of the beneficiaries of nutrition gardens to procure fertilisers further buttresses the argument that there was inadequate research as well as the marginalization of the realities of the beneficiaries. The marginalization of the reality that high-density area residents did not own big livestock like cattle, goats, and sheep which can contribute manure to the nutrition gardens. The inadequacy of research and marginalization of the realities of the poor before the introduction of the selected nutrition gardens concurs with the argument by Smith (1999) about the power of research. Smith (1999, 2) argues that "Western research brings with it a particular set of values and conceptualisations of time, space, subjectivity, gender relations, and knowledge." The apparent marginalization of the realities of the intended beneficiaries suggests that the decision to transplant nutrition gardens from rural areas into high-density areas was a product of Western research.

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Location of The Nutrition Gardens

The participants in this study indicated that sustainability challenges that inhibited the selected nutrition gardens in Masvingo were attributable to their location. Nelson stated,

> *The location of the gardens on the outskirts of the high-density complicated security for the beneficiaries.*

The authors also observed during transect walk that the nutrition gardens were located on the outskirts of residential areas. Locating the nutrition in the outskirts and secluded areas in the high-density areas made the gardens more prone to vandalism and theft. Another participant, Faith added,

> *The nutrition gardens were easily targeted by thieves due to their location on the outskirts. It was difficult to provide security on the outskirts of our residential areas.*

While other factors such as land availability were also considered the location of nutrition gardens on the outskirts further buttresses the need for programme beneficiary consultation.

Silver Lining

The boreholes drilled for the nutrition gardens project benefited the vulnerable communities with a reliable source of water. The study area had water rationing and perennial water problems and therefore the boreholes have become a reliable source of water for the communities. The participants in this study revealed that the boreholes drilled to supply water to the nutrition gardens were the only relic from the NGO initiative. Beauty revealed,

> *The only thing sustainable about the gardens introduced in the high-density suburbs are the boreholes. The donors drilled boreholes to provide water for the gardens. Due to the current water challenges[2] facing residents in high-density suburbs in Masvingo, the boreholes are providing a reliable source of water.*

Another participant, Emmerson added,

> *The only positive that came out of the gardens are the boreholes. There are recurrent water shortages in Masvingo high-density areas and so residents have been forced to rely on borehole water. At some point, the town went for more than a week without water, and residents had to fetch water from the boreholes.*

George stated,

> *Before the introduction of nutrition gardens in Masvingo high density, the local authority provided trucks with water to the residents during irregular water supply times. However, the local authority always failed to meet the water needs of the residents. When there is an irregular water supply, residents are now fetching water from the boreholes in the nutrition gardens.*

The above statements revealed that the boreholes which were meant to supply water for gardening purposes were now supplying water for domestic use. The participants further revealed that there were water challenges in the selected high-density area and the boreholes were providing a reliable

[2] This study was carried out in 2019 when the City of Masvingo was facing debilitating irregular water supply. In the second half of 2019 the city went for a week with dry taps. Thus, residents relied on boreholes that had initially been drilled for nutrition gardens for water.

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source of water. The authors observed during the study that residents in Masvingo high-density area relied on the boreholes drilled to supply water at the selected nutrition gardens. Some of the residents spent more than four hours in the long queues at the boreholes. Hence, it can be argued from the findings at the selected nutrition gardens that the nutrition gardens instead of supplying vegetables were now a source of safe and clean water. Therefore, it was noted from this study that despite the nutrition gardens failing to be sustainable in terms of supplying vegetables, the boreholes provided a silver lining to the nutrition gardens story.

DISCUSSION

From the findings presented in the preceding section, it can be established that there was no programme beneficiary consultation. Most of the challenges that were encountered in the implementation of the nutrition gardens were supposed to have been identified through programme beneficiary consultation according to the participants in this study. A report by the Asian Development Bank (2004) acknowledged the importance of programme beneficiary consultation in anticipating and addressing sustainability challenges in development initiatives. Hence, the findings from this study concur that poverty alleviation initiatives should not be externally imposed. Hence, it can be argued that due to lack of adequate programme beneficiary consultation in the implementation of the nutrition gardens there was loss of livelihoods.

Additionally, poverty alleviation initiatives mooted by outsiders should be prioritise programme beneficiary consultations to ensure sustainability. Security issue (theft and vandalism) are of utmost importance for any intervention in urban settings. The article concludes that the sustainability of nutrition gardens in a selected high-density area was affected by vandalism and theft. Vandalism and theft inturn led to the loss of livelihoods for the beenficiaries of the nutrition gardens. The findings further attributed the sustainability challenges that were encountered in the selected nutrition gardens in a selected high-density area to the imposition of an alien solution to urban poverty and food insecurity. Nutrition gardens were considered alien in this study because contemporary literature revealed that they had been developed and implemented successfully in rural areas in Zimbabwe. Thus, it can be argued from this study that there was an apparent assumption that due to the successes realised by the implementation of nutrition gardens in rural areas in Zimbabwe, it followed that they could also be implemented in a selected high-density area. Additionally, the findings from this study revealed that the realities of the intended beneficiaries of the nutrition gardens were relegated in the planning process. The fact that all the selected nutrition gardens succumbed to vandalism and theft suggests that the security challenges commonly associated with the selected high-density area in Zimbabwe were not considered. Thus, the authors argue from this study that the failure of the selected nutrition gardens was largely intertwined with the relegation of the realities of the intended beneficiaries and local conditions.

The realities of the intended beneficiaries were arguably not considered and resultantly the nutrition gardens encountered a multiplicity of challenges. Furthermore, the unavailability of natural organic manure in high-density areas was another reality of the intended beneficiaries that were marginalized. Zimbabwean farmers rely on their livestock as sources of manure which can be fed into their gardening activities. However, despite the viability challenges faced by the selected nutrition gardens in high-density areas, it was established that residents relied on the

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boreholes. The boreholes that were initially drilled to supply water to the nutrition gardens now supplied water to desperate residents during recurring water shortages in high-density areas in Zimbabwe. Given the sustainability challenges encountered in the selected nutrition gardens in high-density areas in Zimbabwe, it is recommended that the poverty interventions regard the realities of the intended beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION

This articles indicates that due to the relegation of the realities of the beneficiaries of nutrition gardens, livelihoods were lost due to vandalism and theft. Vulnerable communities in the case study area prior to the vandalism benefited through income and vegetables which improved food security. Additionally, the study established that the location of the nutrition gardens on the outskirts of the residential areas contributed ultimately to the challenges which were faced in the sustainability of the project. However, boreholes sunk to provide water for the nutrition gardens continued to provide a reliable source of water for the vulnerable communities close to the nutrition gardens.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

KUDZAYI SAVIOUS TARISAYI (PhD)
University of Kwazulu-Natal
kudzayit@gmail.com

EVERJOY MUNYARADZI
Great Zimbabwe University
evermunyaradzi@gmail.com