

# Editorial

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**Betty C. Mubangizi**

I write this editorial at the peak of the global lockdown following the WHO declaration of a global pandemic because of the unprecedented infection and death rate from COVID-19. As countries battle to contain the fast spreading epidemic, and sadly, rising mortality, there is a glimmer of hope that communities, countries and indeed the world will save as many lives as possible. What is increasingly becoming a matter of concern is whether the world will manage to save livelihoods.

Livelihoods refer to a set of activities in which people engage in to survive and that are a means of securing the necessities of life. They are dependent on a range of access to and control of physical, social, financial, human and natural resources. Livelihoods are, in addition, dependent on the prevailing policy processes, legislative frameworks and institutional processes of a given society. Different societies have different modalities of policy and legal frameworks that in combination determine the level of assets that people can muster, and by extension, the standard of living they can enjoy. Livelihoods are affected by such shocks as floods, droughts, global financial crises, political turmoil and diseases. The COVID-19 pandemic is such a 'shock' to livelihoods across the globe (Mubangizi, 2020). A livelihood is said to be sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its resources both now and in the future without undermining natural resource bases.

Rural livelihoods across the globe have always been fragile. In Africa's rural communities, problems rooted in colonialism and apartheid continue to manifest in the form of spatial inequalities, inadequate transport, poorly resourced municipalities and a host of other socio-economic realities. In this issue of the Loyola Journal of Social Sciences, researchers from institutions in Zimbabwe, India and South Africa explore and unpack the topical and urgent issue of livelihoods in the context of rurality, decentralisation and the COVID-19 pandemic. They discuss the social vulnerabilities people are exposed to because of climate change and the resultant poverty; interpersonal, community,

organisational and policy factors; as well as pandemics and other disasters.

Against the backdrop of climate change that has caused dwindling water resources, **Musarandega, Marango and Chitongo** explore the potential within rural communities to use citizen participation in the formulation of a legally binding local water management constitution. Using the Biriiri-Runhenga Water Project in Chimanimani district in western Zimbabwe as a case study, the study established that while the Biriiri-Runhenga community was given the opportunity to craft its own water management constitution, it is difficult to totally eradicate external interference in the management of local resources, including water. Issues to do with environmental governance are entangled in a dynamic web of inter-ministerial demands that are at times hard to separate without sound governance structures. At community level, poverty prevalence also makes it hard for people to maintain sustainable watershed management practices. From this perspective, it appears that having honest and transparent water management programmes that benefit communities without external interference cannot be guaranteed.

Yet decentralisation and community participation in governance and administrative matters have long been touted as the mantra for grass root development. Although Smoke (2003) argued that decentralisation is not a monolithic concept nor is it inherently positive or negative, there is value in determining its desirability and its appropriate form in particular cases. To this end, drawing on relevant literature, **Nyikadzino and Vyas-Doorgapersad** explored the impact of devolutionary reforms on poverty reduction in Zimbabwean rural local authorities. They concluded that although devolution facilitates poverty eradication, in the case of Zimbabwe this has not been automatic because of inadequacies in fiscal devolution. In particular and following the use of pertinent models on poverty, the authors affirm that fiscal devolution has negatively impacted poverty eradication in Zimbabwean rural authorities. They conclude that governments should follow the 'finance follows functions' approach as this will avoid a state of unfunded mandates and ensure sustainable financing of local pro-poor policies, programmes and projects.

Similar views on properly funded decentralised institutions are echoed by **Chazovachii, Chitaka, Sibanda, Chindanya and Gozo**. They undertook a study to establish the determinants of the prevalence of stunting in a food secure region of Chimanimani in Zimbabwe. Informed by the Social Ecological Model, descriptive statistics and thematic con-

tent analysis was used on quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. Their findings revealed that despite food security in the study area, nutrition insecurity existed and was caused by a range of factors. **Chazovachii et al.** are of the view that strengthening collaborative health promotion activities, capacity building of district and subdistrict health structures will significantly impact the nutritional status of children. In particular, however, the authors emphasise that while the understanding of community, organisational and policy factors as levels that influence stunting in children, one should also note that resilience to stunting should be built at individual levels by empowering households to directly influence behaviour and attitude change.

The influence of interpersonal, community, organisational and policy factors on livelihoods and living standards is brought into sharp focus by **Aloor**. Along with educational and other developmental aspects, focus must be placed on equipping the young generation to believe in self, preserving their self-respect and enhancing skills. Designing tailor made and locally relevant solutions should facilitate the empowerment process, and indigenous skills should be protected and used for development. Lastly, Aloor advises that institutional support for micro-enterprises in the pottery industry will help many people find a better livelihood in the this industry.

The discussion on the role of institutions in enterprise development and support is taken further by **Khambule** who discusses the limits and pitfalls of government's response to South Africa's informal economy. Against the backdrop of economic downturns brought on by the COVID-19 lockdown, **Khambule** interrogates the effectiveness of South Africa's R500 billion social and economic relief package on the livelihood of those employed in the informal economy. **Khambule's** analysis suggests that while the government's economic relief is an effective measure to stimulate the economy and cushion workers and citizens, it does little to protect those in the informal economy. This is primarily because the pandemic is likely to worsen their socio-economic conditions; yet, the government's interventions are not fully inclusive of the realities of the informally employed who remain without social security.

Together the articles in this issue speak to the strengths of public policy formulation but also reveal weaknesses in the implementation of public policies and programmes. Disasters brought on by climate change and pandemics, like the ongoing COVID-19, bring out the best in society but also expose major inequalities between the rural and urban, the rich and poor as well as those living in the centre and those on the

fringe of society. The post-COVID 19 period may see much discourse on how to recalibrate relationships between central and local government institutions and how to build the rural populace's resilience to disasters. We hope that this issue will be a valuable part of the start of this discussion.

### **References**

- Mubangizi, B.C. (2020). Saving Livelihoods While Saving Lives: Rural Livelihoods Following Shock Events. Cape Times (First Edition) Thursday, 30 April 2020
- Smoke, P. 2003. "Decentralisation in Africa: Goals, Dimensions, Myths and Challenges." *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and Practice* 23(1): 7–16.