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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Note from the Editor</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beware, the Middle Class is Being Hijacked by the World Bank!</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research in South African Public Administration: The Paradox of Science, Politics and Economics of a Public Policy</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment of Muslim Women in India: A Sociological Analysis</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Struggle of the ‘Empowered’ Women in Bangladesh</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, Motivation and Success</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovation and the Exercise of Agency in an Informalising Economy: An Analysis of the Lived Realities of Enterprenures at Chimusana Market in Masvingo Urban</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Unions’ Struggle with Neo-liberal Policies in Nigeria</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocking the Door from Poverty through Rotating Savings and Credit Associations: A Study of Group Based Savings in Ward 14 of Gutu District, Zimbabwe</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protecting Children from Exposure to Pornography in South Africa</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and are purely academic in nature.
Note from the Editor

For a while now we were having all kinds of troubles with the website at www.bangladeshssociology.org Much of these are technical but some relate to negligence on the part of the service providers. As a result, we have finally decided to move to another site and rented space at a new site by the name www.bangladeshsociology.net and have started operating from that site and eventually plan move to the new site entirely, if there is not much of a technical problem. So, from now on Bangladesh e-Journal of Sociology will be available from both the sites. We hope that we shall be able to offer hassle free service from there.

This issue in the meantime is ready with a mix of articles covering a wide range of subjects. We had originally decided to focus on women empowerment in this issue as we had received a number of articles on the subject but unfortunately some of the articles were not cleared by the reviewers. We are, thus, left with only a couple of articles on women empowerment and another on women entrepreneurship. The first of these is the controversy over women’s empowerment in India. The authors Abdul Waheed, Afzal Sayeed and Sheikh Idrees Mujtaba begin from the premise that the Muslim women in India suffer from disempowerment, justification for which is ingrained in the religious and cultural norms and supported by the sharia. This, the authors argue, is neither scientific nor based on empirical evidence. On the contrary, they conclude that the disempowerment of Muslim women in India is rooted in the embedded poverty, high illiteracy, constantly increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes.

The situation of women in Bangladesh is far removed from that of the Muslim women in India. Women, in Bangladesh, particularly the rural women, are often quoted as the very symbol of empowerment of women in a developing country. Located at the centre of microcredit lending programmes, the women have over the years earned much freedom of decision making as they control the purse. Sifat-E-Azam, Obaydullah Al Marzuk and Tabassum Amina in their “Social Struggle of ‘Empowered’ Women in Bangladesh” argue that this empowerment of illiterate and poor women in the rural setting is often and automatically transposed on the women with higher education and a well paying jobs, the professional women, as being even more empowered. Unfortunately, they argue from evidence gathered through a sample study of professional women, that these women are not as “empowered” as is commonly assumed. Indeed, while the husbands welcome the added income brought home by the women, the day to day struggle the professional women have to face and in particular the role they have to play at home is far from a liberating one and is still steeped in the old cultural expectations.

As opposed to the professional women reported in the above article, the women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh seem to be doing better in the three regions of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Chittagong and Rangpur, reported by Munsura Rahmatullah and Farhana Zaman in their study of “Female Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, Motivation and Success”. The women entrepreneurs, they show do face some constrains, including cultural ones, but by and large they receive major support from the family. Indeed, their success can actually be attributed to that support since much of the starting capital is often generated from the family. The Bangladeshi women in this study seem to fare better in certain ways compared to even their developed country counterparts especially in terms of their reasons for starting a business and succeeding in the venture. As opposed to the work-family conflicts suffered by the professional women in the Sifat-E-Azam, Al Marzuk and Amina study, these women entrepreneurs appear to be dealing better with their work family situation as well.
Entrepreneurship, however, takes on a very different meaning in the context of Zimbabwean economy as reported by Nhodo Lloyd in “Innovation and the Exercise of Agency in an Informalising Economy: An Analysis of the Lived Realities of Entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market in Masvingo Urban”. The entrepreneurs of the Chimsuana Market, in the face of the impediments introduced by the “dollarization” and the subsequent “informalisation” of the economy, showed tremendous innovativeness and by using the agency, they not only successfully improvised under the given conditions but dictated the form and shape the structure can take. Lloyd “triangulated” the Structuration thesis, the Strain theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Framework in order to explain and understand these issues.

In recent years I have been intrigued by the changing composition of the middle class in Bangladesh and its fast altering value structure. In a search for some clue I landed in a huge deluge of middle class research reported on the internet by, guess who, the economists! That very fact was more surprising for me than the content of the research papers. In any case, I suddenly came upon a monumental, albeit thoroughly confusing, effort by the economists, led by the ones from the World Bank, trying to “define” the middle class. The result of that sudden discovery is the lead article in this issue, “Beware, the Middle Class is being Hijacked by the World Bank!” by me. I was at a loss to define this set of economists of the World Bank variety, who, in spite of their total lack of understanding of the intricacies of “class analysis”, indulged in one armed with complicated looking equations and household surveys deciphering “income data”! The reviewer of the article had, fortunately, suggested calling them the “free market economists” and I have left it at that. Hope the article will be a challenge to the sociologists to respond to these “free market economists” and prompt them to indulge in a fresh round of “class analysis” which seems to have gone out of fashion since the demise of the Soviet Union and the eventual burial of the Marxist thoughts.

The concerns raised in the above paper on the power of the World Bank, the IMF and other such world organizations to impose their “neo-liberal” policies on the poor developing countries is echoed in the article by Akeem Ayofo Akinwale on the “Labour Unions’ Struggle with Neo-liberal Policies in Nigeria”. Like the governments of many developing countries coming under the sway of the World Bank and similar agencies, Nigerian governments have from time to time had to adopt “neo-liberal” policies dictated by these agencies. Such decisions regularly create adverse conditions for the workers in every country and in the end prove to be detrimental to the very process of development. Labour Unions in Nigeria have regularly voiced their dissatisfaction over the adoption of such neo-liberal policies often through violent protests. Akinwale brings home these issues through a study of 440 respondents from two major Nigerian unions. He concludes that “there is urgent need for a substantial improvement in government’s relations with labour unions to promote industrial peace and development in Nigeria”.

Sociologists, indeed, scientists of all disciplines, frequently indulge in research, often commissioned to do so, on complicated subjects to assist policy makers and administrators to make informed decisions. The policy makers and administrators on their part quote findings of such research to drive home their decisions, particularly in matters of public debate. However, M.P Sebola seriously questions this very simple assumption in his “Research in South African Public Administration: The Paradox of Science, Politics and Economics of a Public Policy”. Focusing his arguments on the HIV/AIDS debate of the former President Thabo Mbeki era in South Africa, he shows how governments, in spite their avowed aim of using informed knowledge, depend squarely on the economic and political expediency in their decision making. The article concludes that the “ruling governments only consider scientific recommendations that purports to support their preconceived ideologies before scientific studies are undertaken”.

MP Sebola continues his search for responsible or good governance with JP Tsheola and M. Molopa in the paper on "Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?" raising the issue of dependable media. The researchers argue that though the media has “a strong realistic potential to promote the voices of the poor majority”, the media continues to use the violent protests by the poor for service delivery in South Africa for “making headline, selling their products and running their businesses” rather than representing the voices of the poor. They conclude that “access to conventional media is highly variable and dependent upon economic and socio-political class. Whereas the “haves” access all forms of media, poor people may be limited to the social media networks, unless when conventional media seek to exploit their plight for suspicious, unspecified agendas”.

Social media has become important for the wrong reasons also. Lufuno Nevondwe and Kola O. Odeku in their paper on “Protecting Children from Exposure to Pornography in South Africa” looks at the use of online media as it is being used to create and distribute child pornography in South Africa. The authors argue that “the lack of parental supervision on the use of cellphones by their children perpetuates child pornography.” The paper examines the mandate of the Films and Publication Board which is fighting against child pornography. The paper also "looks at the rights of the children and freedom of expression and how these rights either complement or contradict each other and argues that the best interest of the child are of paramount importance in every matter." Finally the paper recommends legislations prohibiting child pornography in South Africa.

One of the novelties that Bangladesh has exported to the rest of the world in the recent times has been the concept of collateral free micro credit. The results, though largely debated, have impressed country after country to adopt the system in one form or the other. But here, in their study of another similar concept that of “rotating savings” Alimos Mushuku and Julliet Mayisa show that the practice of group saving and sharing the saving for assisting a single recipient or a single cause among the poor is an age old process that can be traced to as early as the 200 BC in China and demonstrate the evidence of its existence in many countries of Africa and elsewhere. In the study of “Unlocking the Door from Poverty through Rotating Savings and Credit Associations: A Study of Group Based Savings in Ward 14 of Gutu District, Zimbabwe” Mushuku and Maysia explain the workings of this system of collateral free informal banking system as is being currently practiced in Zimbabwe.

Thus, in the end, this issue has turned out to be very rich in diverse topics. We also have a very rich collection of authors from five different countries in Asia and Africa, some fresh, for the first time, young authors mixed with seasoned senior scholars. The issue this time deals much more in theoretical papers, that were missing for long in the journal, than papers reporting results from empirical research and we hope this will lead to future contribution of similar articles. In all, we have been able to retain our high standard of academic presentation in this issue as well. Hope the reader will find them as stimulating.
Beware, the Middle Class is being Hijacked by the World Bank!

Nazrul Islam

Abstract: In recent years the World Bank and some economists have suddenly taken an interest in analysing the “Middle Class”. The original impetus seems to have been a genuine intent to identify the social location of those who graduate from poverty. Like the measurement of poverty, they all concentrated in using income or consumption data to place these graduated poor in the middle class, totally oblivious of the numerous variations of the middle class and the difficulty in defining one. And like the questionable poverty measure they are also trying to come up one single measure to identify the middle class and only confusing themselves in the process. This article shows how miserably the World Bank and some like minded economists are failing in their endevour, trying to indulge in “class analysis” when, clearly, it is not their cup of tea. However, there appears to be a more sinister intent behind hijacking the middle class, that of identifying the future consumers for the global big business.

Keywords: Middle class, class analysis, World Bank, big business, poverty

Introduction

Class is a dangerous concept that could lead you to your death until very recently and will land you in jail even today in some countries. Yet, everyone belongs to a class and according to Karl Marx (does the name sound familiar?) one either fought for a class, as in class struggle, or fought against those who fought for a class. These fights in the twentieth century divided the world in two. In all likelihood you were a Marxist if you fought for a class, a dangerous person to be. But Marx never really defined class yet, Marx, definitely the Marxists all through the twentieth century, “owned” the term “class”, signifying someone’s position in the process of production. Marx and the Marxists were preoccupied with the rich, the capitalist class or in their lingo, the “bourgeoisie” on the one hand and the workers, the exploited class, or again, in their lingo, the “proletariat” on the other. The history of the “hitherto existing society” for them, and as is clearly stated in the Communist Manifesto, was the history of class struggle (Marx and Engels 1998), which was supposed to end in the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie and the world transformed into a socialist, and eventually a communist, one. And it nearly did! But, that’s another story, neatly buried in the twentieth century (and the Communist Manifesto now sells for $0.01 on Amazon.com!).

The World Bank or the economists of the World Bank variety would have none of that. Indeed, they were the ones the proletariat fought against. To them, not only were the words bourgeoisie and the proletariat “dirty” words but so was also the word “class”. One could be branded a “communist”, an offensive even fearful term, if one talked about “class”, “class consciousness”, “class struggle” or even “class analysis”. But today the World Bank and the World Bank variety of economists are clamoring to become class-analysts, indeed competing to come up with the analysis of “class”. Well, the “middle class” to be precise. They are still not concerned with all classes, only the middle class for now.

Interestingly, however, the middle class of today was the historical “bourgeoisie” of the Marx’s conception and later the petty bourgeoisie, meaning small bourgeoisie, small owners, lower level managers or supervisors of production (see for a concise definition: Communist League – Britain n.d.), and the term the “bourgeois” continues to be used in many European countries, including in Britain (Daley n.d.) , albeit, sometimes in a derogatory manner, reflecting the same notion of the middle class. Similarly the “proletariat” was the “working class” of those days and again a section of the working class today is often merged with the middle class, as in the USA, thus blurring all distinctions between

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those two supposedly contending classes of yester years. The issue, therefore, becomes very intriguing as to why so many economists, and the World Bank (sometimes referred as the Bank below) in particular, are putting their hands into the pot labeled “middle class”? Knowing the nature of the Bank and its economists, it will not be too farfetched to imagine that there must be some honey at the bottom of that pot. This paper is, hence, a study of this sudden interest among the World Bank economists in class analysis and how they are laying claim to the term “middle class”, indeed, hijacking it away from its legitimate owners, the Marxists, but more correctly, the sociologists. Marxists didn’t much like the “middle class”.

Middle class in sociology

In much of the history of Europe the bourgeoisie were seen as the middle class, or the third estate, the merchants and traders, often, just the city dwellers, placed between the land owning aristocracy, the nobility, and the toiling peasants. The nobility, through the Middle Ages in Europe, owned the land (land lords or feudal lords) while the peasants, called the serfs, were landless and worked for the nobility. The bourgeoisie as merchants and traders developed along with the growth of the bourgs in central and western Europe into cities and by the seventeenth century turned into a formidable force because of their wealth and began to play an important role in the politics of the time, mostly teamed up with the monarchs against the feudal lords to preserve their interests. By the end of the eighteenth century they were a progressive social class and supplied the poets, novelists, scientists, philosophers and political activists, responsible for bringing about the French Revolution, turning against the monarchy by this time.

By Marx’s time (mid nineteenth century) the bourgeoisie had grown to become the owners of industries and exploiters of the workers, the erstwhile peasants, in those newly established industries. Gradually, with the growth and development of the industries the bourgeoisie also swelled the ranks of the mangers and other professionals forming what is the current middle class. Similarly the wealth and position of the workers also enhanced in the twentieth century and some of them (skilled or in supervisory capacity, the petty bourgeoisie) with their high income, if not wealth or education, soon joined ranks with the others in the middle class, and often got to be lumped with the middle class in some class analyses.

Though extremely sketchy, that was more or less the history of the middle class in Western Europe. Economists of the World Bank variety, the so called free market economists, were not much interested in that. They “mostly ignored the discussion of the social class and specifically the middle class” (López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011). It was the sociologists who made it one of their central concepts. Class, often social class, thanks to Max Weber (1964), the German sociologist, was made into a major part of the study of the stratified society. Class was seen by Weber more or less in the same manner as Marx, being shaped by the market forces. He identified three aspects of class: “(i) a specific causal component of actor’s life chances (ii) which rests exclusively on economic interests and wealth, and (iii) is represented under conditions of labor and commodity markets. The possession of material resources, accumulated by advantage in the marketplace, results in distinctive qualities in terms of the standard of living” (Shortell 2014).

1 Sometimes this group was also seen by Marx as the petty bourgeoisie as they were turned into wage labourers by the bourgeois production process. “The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers”. (Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels: ‘Manifesto of the Communist Party’, in: Karl Marx: ‘Selected Works’, Volume 1; London; 1943; p. 208).
Although seen in economic terms, the theory of class in sociology goes along the lines of the hypothesis: “people who have a similar location within a system of property relations will also develop other important similarities: similarities of thought, values, style, behavior, and politics, for example” (Little 2008). So, for Marx people of similar class are likely to further develop a “similar class consciousness” which translates into “a similar framework of thought” and, as such, would share a similar political motivation and engage in collective action together (Little 2008). This was what class consciousness implied and would propel the proletariat towards class struggle. For Weber, this similarity translates into similar “style of life” or standard of living for people with similar “life chances”. So that, class is a combination of factors that develop around one’s economic position in society and separates him into different social classes depending on that economic position.

However, class is only one aspect of social differentiation. Power, the ability to control the actions of others, and status, the notion of prestige and honour bestowed upon the members of the society, again, as defined by Weber (1964), are the other dimensions of the stratified society and are intertwined with the notion of class. Sociologists not only elaborated on these Weberian notions but later came to identify other aspects of stratifications, like gender, race, age etc., which contribute to a larger concept of “social inequality”. Occupation is often seen as the key to the stratification system. Stratification in terms of occupation was noted in the USA as early as the mid 19th century. Thus, class represents a group of people with similar occupation, status and prestige in the society. Therefore, class in sociology is often measured in terms of the “occupational-prestige-rankings” or ranking in terms of how society values and honours an occupation. Middle class refers to occupations with high prestige rankings like those of the professors, judges, doctors etc. Also, class for the sociologists is largely a matter of subjective opinion, how people see themselves and in relation to others. People are simply asked to identify the class they belonged to, and thus, sociologists identify the three major classes, the upper, middle and the lower, more or less reflecting the prevailing notion among the members of the society. Often these are further subdivided into upper, middle and lower as in “upper” middle class, “middle” middle class and “lower” middle class etc.

As early as 1913, when statistician T.H.C. Stevenson identified the middle class for the UK Registrar-General’s report he defined it in terms of occupations like those of the professionals, managers and civil servants etc. From 1990 “social class” in the UK came to be formally identified in terms of the occupations and “the most common definition of the middle class remains occupation based” (Questia n.d.). In 1951, sociologist C. Wright Mills (1956) conducted one of the first major studies of the middle class in America. According to his definition, the middle class consists of an upper-middle class, comprising of the professionals “distinguished by exceptionally high educational attainment and high economic security” and a lower-middle class of semi-professionals. Modern sociologists define the American upper-middle class “using income, education, and occupation as primary indicators” (boundless.com n.d.) and include such occupations as lawyer, physician, dentist, engineer, professor, architect, civil service executive, and civilian contractor. Many members of the upper-middle class have graduate degrees in law, business, or medicine, required for their professional occupations. Educational attainment is, thus, a distinguishing feature of the upper-middle class. Lower middle class, though less so, also hinges on some education and consists of semi-professionals (Gilbert, 2002; Thompson and Hickey, 2005), school teachers, nurses, skilled workers etc.

**The world variations of the middle class**

But the notion of the middle class becomes complicated when looked globally, for the simple reason that other societies have used various other categories besides income, education and occupation to define this class. Even in the USA, the idea of middle class is not solely based on income. An ABC
News poll in 2010 found that being “middle class” meant more than “specific income levels” (Yen 2012) to people and at least two-thirds of adults said that “being middle class meant owning a home, being able to save for the future and afford things like vacation travel, the occasional new car and various other little luxuries” (Yen 2012). Denis Gilbert (2002) in his analysis of the American class structure uses nine key variables: occupation, income, wealth, prestige, association, socialization, class consciousness, power, and social mobility. Thus, wealth, education, family environment, inheritance, upbringing, cultural association or social network, manners, social values and even the ways of speaking, dressing and holding the fork featured in delineating the middle class. The Wikipedia lists some of these notions as:

- Achievement of tertiary education.
- Holding professional qualifications, including academics, lawyers, chartered engineers, politicians, and doctors, regardless of leisure or wealth.
- Belief in bourgeois values, such as high rates of house ownership and jobs which are perceived to be secure.
- Lifestyle. In the United Kingdom, social status has historically been linked less directly to wealth than in the United States, and has also been judged by signifiers such as accent, manners, place of education, occupation, and the class of a person's family, circle of friends and acquaintances.
- Cultural identification. Often in the United States, the middle class are the most eager participants in pop culture whereas the reverse is true in Britain. The second generation of new immigrants will often enthusiastically forsake their traditional folk culture as a sign of having arrived in the middle class.

Hence, the concept of the middle class becomes very complex and income rarely features in these definitions and never as the single delineator of class. In a recent study (Savage et al. 2013) of the British society with a very large sample of 161,000 people class was defined more in terms of economic, social and cultural capitals following a recent trend set by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who finds that “individuals are differentiated by their possession of economic, cultural and social capital in different quantities and proportions – the three forms of ‘capital’ being in principle independent of each other” (Radice 2014). On the basis of these, the study identifies not three but seven classes in the UK, the “elite” at the top followed by the “established middle class”, the “technical middle class”, “new affluent workers”, “traditional workers”, “emergent service workers” and “precariat” (precarious proletariat) at the bottom, each endowed with varying amounts and combination of the three sets of capitals.

Of these, at least three, the established middle class, the technical middle class, and new affluent workers could be combined as the current middle class in the UK. The "new affluent workers" are “a young, socially and culturally active group with mid levels of economic capital” is followed by the "technical middle class", "a small, distinctive new class group which is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital". On the next rung is the "established middle class", described as “the largest and most gregarious group”, with very high scores on economic, social and cultural capitals. It is the largest group in UK comprising of a quarter of the population, with household income of £47,000 and some "highbrow tastes.“ (Sam Jones and agency 2013).

Outside of Britain the middle class is also marked by its preoccupation with the human, cultural and social capitals, imbued in the children by their parents. This has been true of the middle class in
Bangladesh up until the 1980s\(^1\). The concept of the middle class in Bangladesh, the *maddhaya bitta*, literally “middle wealth”, often called the *Bhadralok*, used to be prefixed by the word “educated” and even “educated-urban” to point to the distinctness of urbanity, referring largely to Western (bourgeois) values, expected of them as opposed to the traditional rural values they were supposed to be free from. It was a small group of city dwellers, mostly in Dhaka, who defined its culture, largely secular, and values and norms. Professors, engineers, doctors, lawyers, the higher echelon of the government bureaucracy, some senior level bankers and a few officials from the commercial sector comprised this “educated–urban-middle class” in Bangladesh. Educated families in the rural settings would also emulate these cultural norms and values somewhat. Education was not only the key to the entry to this class, a good education, preferably university education, from the University of Dhaka, was largely the pathway to this class. Besides education, certain sets of values and cultural capital, rather than income or wealth, were the mainstay of this class, few had any wealth and nearly all were salaried professionals. Business and industries were few in the country and were all very small scale and always considered to be of a lower status. Even the “Commerce” department at the university, schools and colleges was where students with poorer grades studied.

The parallel of this middle class in West Bengal in India is also called the *Bhadralok*. Indeed, the term, meaning sophisticated, originated there during the early colonial times and referred to the Westernized higher caste Hindus and the *Bhadralok* were the first to gain entry into the professional occupations, primarily because of their English education. They were an educated and highly ‘cultured’ group of people “distinguished by their refined behavior and cultivated tastes but not necessarily by wealth and power” (Ganguly-Scarse and Scarse 2009). Though a lot has changed in recent times and they have lost much of that high status, they continue to invest in their children’s education and “maintain a veneer of their high status by engaging in writing, music, and the arts.” Similarly, Ganguly-Scarse and Scarse also note that, “Significantly, across India, in each region or state, one finds clear class hierarchies interceded by cultural nuances defined by ethnicity, culture and education” (Ganguly-Scarse and Scarse 2009). The notion of middle class, in West Bengal and the rest of India, thus, is not a matter of wealth or income, it is intertwined with aspects of culture and even caste. Like in Britain where “it is possible to be "middle class" culturally and quite poor”, known as “genteel poverty” (Daley n.d.).

Similar complicated cases of middle class are also found in South East Asia. Quoting various sources Victor King (2008) notes that defining the middle class is a complex and confusing process. It is complicated by the attempt to translate the Western notion of social stratification in non-Western societies. Thus, he notes that, in South East Asia there are three distinct middle classes, the new middle class (salary earning professionals and administrators), old middle class (small proprietors and self-employed) and the marginal middle class (white collar and small proprietors). In Singapore he shows that there are “four” middle classes, upper, middle, lower and poor middle classes. He also notes that the some middle class Filipinos are actually performing menial jobs abroad (King 2008).

In China also, a multiplicity of middle classes has been reported by Li Chunling (2013) who notes that the impression of the middle class in China is that they are “businessmen, managers and intellectual elites who enjoys high income levels and engage in conspicuous consumption”. Li Chunling (n.d.)

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\(^1\) The character of the middle class began changing from the 1980s, largely because of an exodus of the members of this class to the developed countries, also a few from this class availed the political and economic opportunities presented by the newly emerged country and moved up to the upper class, while a different group of people, fresh from the rural areas, mostly lacking in quality education and sophistication, migrating to the cities in huge numbers, have come to claim the middle class position and have drowned the remaining few from the older middle class. Education (in terms of degrees) and occupation (essentially business), still matter but are no longer the defining factors, while income and wealth, mostly freshly acquired, feature prominently among this newly forming middle class, fast replacing older values and secular culture.
elsewhere identifies four different factors in designating the middle class in its current setting. These are income, occupation, education and consumption. The study feels that the middle class “is a mixture of four groups with different economic condition, social status and social-political function”. These are the capitalist class (private entrepreneurs), new middle class (professionals and managers), old middle class (small owners) and marginal middle class (routine workers). Interestingly, majority of the capitalist class and old middle class are descendants from the “farmer class”. Also, the middle class in the public sector is found to be “very different in social, economic, political characteristics from its counterpart in the private sector”. Thus the new middle class, he notes, could be further divided into two groups: new middle class of public sector and new middle class of private sector (Chunling n.d.).

The notion of the middle class is, thus, far more complex than even the notion of class, either in the Marxian or in the Weberian sense of the term and each society has its own preferred combination of traits to designate this class. The middle class has a special position in the system of stratification in every society since it has often been identified with nearly all kinds of social, political, cultural and scientific developments, refined tastes, higher education and cultural values and is, therefore, held at some kind of high status or respect. It is also distinguished from the money earning upper class as much as it is distanced from menial jobs. Neither wealth nor income has much role to play, although a certain amount of booth are a prerequisite and may have shaped membership of this class in the past. It may thus be the past wealth or income that allowed this class to acquire the education and the cultural traits they are known for but current scramble for wealth or income beyond a reasonable need to maintain the “standard of living” is seen more as a vice, demeaning for one to pursue. The middle class people, thus, may suffer in poverty, as in the West Bengal of India, but would pride themselves because of their heritage, education and cultural tastes.

A personal anecdote
But before I get to how the World Bank and the free market economists vulgarize these notions of the middle class, a personal anecdote is in order. Very recently I was invited by my house help, socially designated as “maid servant”, to her house in a nearby slum, to the first birthday celebration for her grandson. Defying some cultural norms, in my very liberal outlook, I decided to attend. What I met there confused me as a person and more so as a sociologist. First, the slum I expected was not there. In place of dirty, muddy, stinking roads and thatched houses on bamboo stilts with dirty water flowing underneath, I came upon a row of houses with low tin roofs and brick built walls, tin walls in some, very closely built with narrow passages in between from which you could see the insides of the houses. Nearly all the houses looked clean, were lit with electric bulbs, some with power-saving halogen ones. Sound of television program was coming from many of the houses and the churning of ceiling fans could also be heard from some. My host family, who lived in a two moderate sized rooms, with a small veranda, made me sit in the smaller room with clean and costly looking bedspread, probably draped in my honour, on a large wood-framed bed. The room had a small table with four chairs, a television was set on a stool in another corner and I could see a refrigerator in the other room, old looking but larger than the one in my house for my single person’s needs. Nearly eighty people were invited for dinner that night, far more than I could have dared to invite.

Some of my surprises were answered when I came to know that besides the child, the family had five adults, cell phones in their hands, all working temporary menial jobs, and the combined income per capita per day added to substantially more than $2, the upper poverty line of the World Bank. They had lost all land in their rural home before the family migrated to the Dhaka city some 12 years ago. The rent of the house was about a $120 dollars per month, a very high rate for those two rooms, while
the kitchen and the toilet had to be shared with others. The invited children wore festive clothes, all looked as it would in any well to do neighbourhood except that this was crammed for space. Granted that it was a better off slum, close to a very posh residential area, and probably most of the residents worked in those posh houses earning far more than the residents of other slums in the city, but none of these fitted with my preconceived ideas about the slum and my “humble” maid servant, who by any definition in my culture and society will be seen as belonging to the hapless “lower class”.

It was obvious that they had graduated from poverty but where could I place them and the others in that “slum”, in the social hierarchy of my society? And with that question in my mind I decided to look further and was shocked by the discovery that the World Bank and its economists have already branded them as the “middle class”. But that was only the beginning, other shocks were on their way as I delved deeper into the question.

**World Bank’s middle class**

The effort by the economists and the World Bank to define the middle class probably originated in their honest bid to understand the future of the millions, if not billions, who are expected to graduate from poverty or have already done so, as the Bank so ceremoniously claims to be, by its efforts. That is, what happens when the poor begin to make more than $2 per capita per day? Of course, since many of them would be and are already earning more than that amount, as in the above case of my house help, it is not a mere distinction between earning $1.99 and $2.01, it is the totality of their living condition. The first question the Bank, therefore, faced was where could these people be placed as a social category? Obviously, they are not “rich” but they are no longer “poor” either, by the Bank’s own definition, which the World Bank was at some pains to demonstrate over the last couple of decades, anything above $2 a day per capita takes one out of poverty, so by default they must be the “middle class”. What else?

And, almost reminiscent of the numerous press releases on the success of the World Bank in “eradicating” poverty, a November 13, 2012 release reads: “New World Bank Report Finds 50 Percent Increase in Middle Class in Latin America and the Caribbean over Last Decade”. You are informed, exactly as a typical announcement of poverty eradication read, that “Latin America and the Caribbean registered a 50 percent jump in the number of people joining the middle class during the last decade, which was called by economists (of the World Bank variety, obviously) an historic achievement…” (World Bank 2013, emphasis added). And you also learn that “the middle class in the region grew to an estimated 152 million in 2009 compared to 103 million in 2003, an increase of 50 percent” (Sabaté 2012) or about 49 million people in only six years! How wonderful, and the Bank must be credited for that too!

Anyway, this number is only a drop in the bucket as compared to the other claims by the Bank and some economists about the “middle class” status elsewhere. They are talking in billions! Accordingly, a staggering 1.2 billion people are claimed by the World Bank economist, Martin Ravallion (2009), to have entered the middle class, and four fifths of these are from Asia and half from China alone. Paul Mason (2014) similarly claims that the middle class “has grown from 600 million to 1.4 billion”. “Over the next two decades, it is estimated that the middle class will expand by another three billion people, coming almost exclusively from the emerging world” (Mason 2014). Ali and Dadush (2012a) go even further and argue that this “level has now been achieved by more than 4 billion of the world’s 7 billion people”. Kharas projects that the global middle class will rise from 2 billion today to 5 billion by 2030 (Rosenbaum 2013). India alone will have “more than a billion middle-class citizens by 2025” according
to World Bank economist Ejaz Ghani (Mustafi 2013). Even Africa’s middle class “is expected to grow from 355 million (34 percent of Africa’s population) to 1.1 billion (42 percent of the population) in 2060.” (Ncube 2013). Whatever may be the reality, it almost appears that each claimant is trying to outdo others by quoting ever larger numbers rather than performing any serious academic exercise.

With those many people in the middle class, the world really needs a way of identifying who they are. And because they are in the middle there must be some below and some above them too. And this is where the problem starts, how to define the “middle” and where are the upper and lower cutting points? This is where the economists, without a valid definition or a proper understanding of the middle class, begin to mess up things for themselves. Sociologists, of course, have worked past this problem long ago by asking people’s opinion or, often, more objectively, assigning ranks (also by the people) to the occupations people are engaged in. Not that they did not try to put numbers and dollar amounts to the middle class but found the numbers, even the occupation-prestige-rankings, to vary with time and within and among societies, depending on who is ranking who and when. Income has also been used but never as the sole determinant of class location. While, the Marxists, the original owners of the concept of class, were never much bothered by those in the middle, claiming that during the crunch time (the final conflict) those in the middle will have to move either up or down into the ranks of the two fundamental classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The economists, not sensitive to these complications of defining the middle class noted above, exactly in the same manner as their previous mess up with measuring poverty and inequality (see Islam 2005; Raghavan 2002; Pogge and Reddy 2003; Reddy and Pogge 2002) through income and/or consumption, promptly took to the similar measure and have since created all sorts of confusions, again, for themselves only. Others are doing fine without the economists’ definition and measurements, but I am afraid, not for very long. I expect the World Bank and the economists to impose their newly hatched out definition, if they can agree on one (see below), on the world, its governments and policymakers, researchers and academicians alike, as they so forcefully did earlier with the definitions of poverty and inequality.

Defining (or measuring?) the middle class, the economists’ way

Thus, by sticking to the definition of the upper threshold of poverty at $2, the World Bank economist Ravallion (2009), who championed the poverty measurement too, came to define the middle class in terms of a range of income that falls between $2, the upper poverty line in the developing countries, and $13, the poverty line of USA. Why the USA, with so much poverty there, (1.5 million households with 2.8 million children still live on less than $2 per day per person (ETS 2013), even below the world poverty line, among 15% of the total population or over 46 million who live below the $13 poverty line) and not some other country remains unexplained. Also, does the middle class in the rest of the world with $13 lead a life similar to the poor in the USA? In any case, Ravallion is not the first to confuse the notion of middle class with income or expenditure in purchasing power parity (“PPP $”) terms. Banerjee and Duflo (2008) based on their study of 13 developing countries came to define the middle class, after considering various other options, as “two groups of households: households whose daily per capita expenditures valued at purchasing power parity are between $2 and $4, and those households between $6 and $10. These are the groups that we will call the middle class”. (What about those earning $5? Where would they go?)

Following them other economists soon joined the fray, all trying to be the first with an acceptable definition (meaning, either income or expenditure) while they negate others’ definitions and measurements with sophisticated equations and as large a data base as they can master. Thus, we
now have a whole lot of definitions, equations and measurements, which, more than anything else, only goes to show how confused these economists are. These income or consumption figures, or any set of numbers, can be manipulated through a complex looking equation to generate some results, these may even be reliable, but without a valid and generally accepted definition of the “middle class”, these are just some meaningless sets of numbers.

However, like in the studies of poverty earlier, they also raised the question of “relative” and “absolute” middle classes. (Does one have to be a “relative” middle class before one can become an “absolute” middle class?). Some economists like Easterly (2000) and Birdsall, Graham and Pettinato (2000) take a relativistic view and define the middle class “in terms of a range of income spread around a median of the country or region, normally between the 20th and the 80th percentile”. Birdsall, Graham and Pettinato (2000) define the middle class as households in a range between 0.75 and 1.25 times the median of the household per capita income distribution, while Davis and Huston (1992) use a 0.5 to 1.5 range around the median. Some have used 75% to 125% (Pressman 2007 in Luxemburg Income Studies) others like Blackburn and Bloom use a range as broad as 0.6 to 2.25 (Eduardo Lora and Johanna Fajardo 2011).

But like in the case of poverty most, including the World Bank and the OECD or ILO economists, prefer an “absolute” measurement for marking the middle class and making them comparable across countries and regions. This is true of both Ravallion and Banarjee and Duflo studies. But there is a lot of confusion regarding what should be the lower and upper limits of the income bracket, what that income can or cannot buy, with each using different basis and data sets, all selected arbitrarily or through some concocted logic, using this or that country as the benchmark, with no two studies concurring so far.

The World Bank uses an absolute definition, with income equal to the mean income of Brazil to reflect the income of the developing countries and that of Italy for a poorer industrialized country, or between USD4000 to USD17000 per year in 2000 purchasing power parity terms (Kharas 2010), which comes to roughly about $12 to $50 per capita per day in 2005 ppp. One of the earliest measures was offered in 2002 by World Bank economist Branko Milanovic and Hebrew University professor Shlomo Yitzhaki, who proposed to measure the middle class with daily incomes between roughly $10 and $50 a day, after adjusting for purchasing-power parity (Ali and Dadush 2012b). On the other hand Kharas and Gertz (2010) have used a range of $10 and $100 daily expenditure per person, “defined by excluding those individuals who would be considered rich in Portugal and poor in Luxembourg (the poorest and richest among the industrialized countries, respectively” (in López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011 p 6). If you are not perplexed by these just wait for more below.

López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez from their own study of some Latin American countries like Peru, Mexico and Chile propose a middle class as falling between incomes of $10 to $50 per capita per day in 2005 ppp. They argue that it could be extended to $100 but that will only lower the number of Latin American elites from 2.2 percent to .05 percent. These researchers define the middle class within Latin America as those who are “not rich but are still economically secure” – or have less than a “10 percent chance of slipping back into poverty” (López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011). Earning $10 to $50 a day, or at least $14,000 per year, would put a family of four into the middle class. A household making less than $4 a day is considered poor, while those earning from $4 to $10 are said to be economically vulnerable (Albert Sabaté 2013; see also Birdsall, Lustig and Meyer, 2013). Today, the middle class and the poor account for roughly the same share of the Latin America and the Caribbean
population – 29 percent and 31 percent respectively – while the economically vulnerable now make up the majority or 38 percent of the total (López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011).

Asian Development Bank (2010) uses an absolute definition of per capita “consumption” of $2–$20 per day and finds (in 2008) nearly 1.9 billion or 56% people of “Developing Asia”, meaning in 22 countries of Asia, including India and China, as the middle class. However, the majority of the Asian middle class still falls in the $2–$4 range (my house help is in there somewhere). African Development Bank (AfDB), also defines the middle class (in 2011) with daily “consumption” between $2 and $20 and accordingly there are 350 million, or 34% of the African population in this middle class (ABS Staff 2013). However, this is further divided by the African Development bank with $2-$4 as belonging to the “floating middle class” that may easily fall back into poverty (ABS Staff 2013). David Cowan, a senior economist for Africa at financial services group Citi, argues that a more widely accepted definition of “an emerging market middle class consumer” is someone earning at least $13.70 per day (ABS Staff 2013). The ILO economists from 61 household surveys across the world came to define the “the developing middle class” as a group of people earning between $4 and $13 a day and this group has grown from 600 million to 1.4 billion (Paul Mason 2014).

These ought to be enough to bemuse, if not amuse, anyone. What the economists are doing, in the absence of a clear notion of what a middle class constitutes, let alone its position in society vis-à-vis culture, history, politics, even economic wellbeing, is groping in the dark for a ledge to anchor themselves. Fortunately, some even among the economists do not agree with these definitions. Mason (2014) argues that “in world terms they’re not really middle class at all” since $13 a day upper limit just happens to be the poverty line in the US in 2005. Ravallion (2009) also agrees that the middle class defined by the standards of the developing countries are “still poor by the standards of rich countries”, which is true of the 200 million people he calls “middle class” but earning $2 to $3 only. Similarly, AfDB argues that World Bank’s definition is a “useful measure” to count how many people have been “lifted out of poverty”, but they are not a part of the middle class and argues that “someone earning $2 a day is not likely to be able to afford consumer goods such as washing machines and televisions” (Jaco Maritz 2013). López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez define the middle class within Latin America as those who are “not rich but are still economically secure” – or have less than a 10 percent chance of slipping back into poverty (López-Calva and Ortiz-Juarez 2011). Luis Felipe López-Calva (2012) thus concludes that they are not poor, but not middle class either, at least not yet. Rosenbaum (2014), therefore, argues that “things considered vital to a middle-class lifestyle, such as electricity and clean water, are not necessarily obtained just because someone has a larger household income”. Shimelse Ali and Uri Dadush (2012) also note that many of these people “can buy a cell phone but have no access to a regular power supply”. They, therefore feel that the World Bank “measure is clearly too low”.

The premise that middle class living standards begin where poverty ends, that is at $2 as put by Ravallion (2009 ) or between $4 and $6 by Banarjee and Duflo (2008), is not accepted by some other economists either. Luis F. López-Calva and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez (2011) challenge the view “that people above the poverty line are actually part of the middle class”. One of the sources of support Ravallion (2009) uses is the Chinese case. Quoting China’s National Bureau of Statistics, Ravallion sets $2.24 for rural and $3.47 in urban areas as the minimum required to be in a middle class or Xiaokang. There were accordingly 500 million Chinese in this class in 2005. But Li Chunling (n.d.) puts this figure for urban middle class at a much higher level of about $12 per day per capita (or 28,272 yuan annually) and about $9 for a family person per day per capita (or 20,715 yuan annually). Asian Development Bank (2010) puts India’s middle class (earning between $2-$20) at 25% of the
population or about 300 million but estimates by India’s National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) cuts it by half and puts it at 153 million (Meyer and Birdsall 2012). Christian Meyer and Nancy Birdsall (2012) revise the figure further down and puts it at a mere 70 million by their estimate of $10 - $50. Similarly, while studying Latin America Birdsall, Lustig and Meyer (2013) find the group with income between $4 and $10 as vulnerable ones and argue that they do not belong to the middle class. Kharas (2010) also rejects anyone earning less than $10 to be included in the middle class. These counter arguments merely increase the confusion rather than clarifying them.

So, who are the middle class?

The global middle class
In reality, the middle class the World Bank and these economists are actually looking for isn’t the middle class with only $2 in their pocket. The World Bank, therefore, distinguishes between $2-$9 and $9-$13 groups as does the African Development Bank who divides the middle class (income between $2-20) into one with $2-4 per day as belonging to the “floating middle class”, and those above. This lower income group constitutes “about 60 percent or nearly two thirds of the African population”. The report thus argues that someone earning $2 a day is not likely to be a consumer of goods like the washing machine, television or a car although “many people earning $2 a day are able to afford a cell phone” (Dadush in Rosenbaum 2014). In Bangladesh, for instance, the current number of cell phones exceeds 110 million in a population of 155 million, or about 71% coverage. Even if we subtract multiple possessions of about10 million phones, this is still close to 65%, while the percentage of population above the $2 poverty line is only 23%, meaning that many below this poverty line in Bangladesh are also users of cell phones. A Guardian article, therefore, questions the reality of this “new middle class” life in Brazil, Morocco or Indonesia (as examples of life in Latin America, Africa and Asia respectively). It notes that the “word comfortable does not spring to mind” when one talks of the middle class in these countries, “it means often living in a chaotic mega-city, cheek-by-jowl with abject poverty and crime, crowding on to makeshift public transport systems and seeing your income leach away into the pockets of all kinds of corrupt officials, middlemen and grey market people” (Mason 2014).

Research firm Ernst and Young (2013) similarly, argues that “this definition (of the middle class) is not very helpful for companies dependent on sales to those with large disposable incomes; they require a more realistic estimation of the number of people entering their target markets. For most businesses, a much more useful definition of middle class is people earning between US$10 and US$100 per day. At this level, consumers start having the kind of disposable incomes that will allow them to buy the cars, televisions and other goods that have been the staples of bourgeois life in the West for 60 years. People in this income bracket can be considered a “global middle class” — middle class by the standards of any country.

Hence, besides the debate over the “absolute” and the “relative” there is also the debate about the differences in measurements between the “developing countries only” and the “global” middle class. The “absolute” definitions generally propose a standard measure, like that of the poverty measurement, to be applicable across countries as a unitary measure (or definition) of the “global middle class”. Thus, Homi Kharas (2010) after an exhaustive review of literature has proposed an absolute measure for the “global middle class” with income level between $10 and $100 per day in 2005 ppp ( or between $3,650 and $36,500 annually). This range falls between the poverty line of Italy and Portugal as the lower limit while the upper limit is chosen as “twice the median income of Luxemburg”, the richest advanced country. Defined this way, he notes, “The global middle class excludes those who are considered poor in the poorest advanced countries and those who are
considered rich in the richest advanced country”. (How about the poor in the rich advanced countries like the USA, with $13?) Kharas proposes this range as the global standard for the middle class as opposed to the middle class in the context of the developing countries only, which falls between $2-10 (Banarjee and Duflo 2008) or $2-13 (Ravalion 2009) or even $2-$20 for ADB or AfDB etc.

A confused class
But in any case, there seems to be no agreement among the economists. Nancy Birdsall (2012) with a very appropriate title in her blog, “Oops: Economists in Confused Search for the Middle Class in the Developing World” notes the extent of this ambiguity. “So far,” she writes, “there is no agreement among economists on the appropriate income/consumption thresholds to identify the middle class – not even on whether it is relative or absolute income that matters, nor on whether the identification should be based on a country, a region, or a global standard” (Birdsall 2012). The economists, therefore, without the proper understanding or even the knowledge of how society works, are just a confused lot, trying to enlighten others who could very well do without these baffling definitions.

But more importantly, and as noted above, these are all arbitrarily assigned, doesn’t matter how much they are coated with complex econometric models. The base countries are selected for some weird and, perhaps, personal reasons; the income brackets chosen by some outlandish logic, while relative, absolute or global labels are applied by some bizarre judgment. And at the end of it all there is no basic agreement among the institutions like the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the OECD, ILO etc. and their respective group of economists.

I am not even raising the question of the accuracy of the measure, particularly of the 2005 PPP used as the basis of most of these measurements. Although Kharas (2010), who uses the same measure, does and notes that “serious questions remain about the significant changes that have resulted from the 2005 measure, as compared to previous estimates” (Kharas 2010). Even though the measure was constructed after a study of 146 countries and for 1000 goods and services, the prices for which were often adjusted upward by almost 40% in countries like India and Bangladesh, while in case of China, prices were taken from the richest part of the richest cities, totally ignoring the majority of the rural population (Kharas 2010), effectively rendering the estimate useless, if not false!

Therefore, it is evident that the economists, without a clear cut definition or even the proper understanding of what the middle class constitutes, are just talking past each other. Eric Rosenbaum (2013) notes that “some of the early studies of an income threshold for the developing world's middle class show how far apart the experts can be”. Several of the prevailing definitions of the new middle class don't even overlap at any point on a quantified spectrum. Christian Meyer (quoted by Rosenbaum 2013) argues that there is not only no consensus, they are just a “mess of confused definitions”. The assumption in all cases is that the income of certain PPP $ across the world buys the same (or similar) goods and services for the middle class, notwithstanding the fact that the middle class life style in every society, culturally and historically, are far divergent, and vastly different from the dissimilarities noted in the experience of poverty, which the economists had brought down to the single measure of $2 ($1.25 for extreme poverty). Having or not having those two dollars made such a difference in life that it could hardly be captured across countries and regions. While here, for the middle class, the economists are trying to fathom the difference in the living standards which, at the very least, are internally highly heterogeneous (Atkinson ajnd Brandolini 2011), and span over $48 or even $98 by their definitions, yet they feel confident that they have captured the difference!
While some like Ravallion (2009) and Banerjee and Duflo (2008) are defining the middle class in the developing countries without making any allowance for the numerous differences in the notion of the middle class in these countries, others are merely thinking in terms of a “global” middle class or “one size fits all”, simply on the basis of income, which sociologists and others in society do not even consider as important enough. Economists like Luis F. López-Calva and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez (2011) consistently find that two of the clearest association with the “concept of middle class are greater levels of education and wage employment” and not just income. Luis Felipe López-Claiva (2013) argues further that, “regardless of which definition is used, the measurement of middle class is dependent on a particular period and place, and it is determined by several factors, such as history, culture and the development stage of a society”.

Hence, those economists who are sensitive to the problem of defining the middle class feel that it is not for the economists to deal with the notion of class. Atkinson and Brandolini (2011) wonder “whether a pure income characterization of social class is analytically satisfactory” while arguing in favour of a measure with a combination of the “personal incomes”, “position in the division of labour” and “ownership structure”. “In fact, being middle class has always been a slippery business”, they quote Beckett (2010) as saying that, “having servants, renting a good property, owning a good property, owning a business, being employed in one of ‘the professions’, how you speak, how you use cutlery – at different times, all these have been regarded as essentials of middle-class life” (Beckett 2010). They feel that the income based definition of the economists is far from the layman’s perception of the middle class, which as we noted above are far more complex and differ from society to society. Hence, Atkinson and Brandolini (2011) designate the analysis of social class as the “purview of the sociologists” and not of the economists.

Honey in the pot
So why are World Bank and the economists poking their noses in the business of others, trying to deal with a concept better left to others? Could there be other hidden agenda? Some studies do point in that direction. The banks, economists and business organizations seem to be more concerned with the money the middle class people will be earning rather than the middle class itself. For instance, the research firm Ernst and Young (2013) blatantly claims that “it’s not really an issue of “class” at all, but rather income and spending power” (emphasis added) of this middle class that they are interested in. It is just that “people with more money buy more stuff” (Rosenbaum 2014) and some people in the developing world are earning more money these days. Ali and Dadush (2012b) unreservedly declare that measuring of the middle class “isn’t just an academic exercise … it carries real world implications”, and that in reality the “economists and market analysts are mainly interested in the size of the middle class as an indicator of a population’s ability to rise from poverty and purchase items that go beyond bare necessities” (emphasis added).

Homi Kharas (2010), likewise, admits the same. Of the four recognized contributions made by the middle class according to Banerjee and Duflo (2008), as in the development of democracy, as entrepreneurs, as builders of human capital and as consumers, Kharas finds greater reason to define the middle class solely in terms of consumption, as the “consumer class”. Quoting Murphy, Shleifer and Vishny (1989), Kharas argues that since industrialization is costly and so is international trade, “there must be a domestic market of certain size to overcome these costs” and that “only happens if income is concentrated in a middle class”. In the current economic scenario, he finds the middle income countries to harbour such prospects of this global consumer class. His study of the middle class, thus, focuses squarely on China and India, whose (combined) 2.5 billion people are “converging
with the West in terms of living standards”. According to his calculations there are, thus, currently 1.8 billion people of the world in this consumer category (Kharas 2010).

Ali and Dadush (2012b) concludes that the “only question” that needs to be known as far as this rise of the middle class is concerned is “how high it will go and how fast it will get there”; given the present trends, “a massive population wave will join the middle classes by 2030” (Augusto de la Torre and Jamele Rigolini n.d.). And by all accounts, the numbers are only going to grow so that by the year 2030 “two billion new people will join the world middle class” according to the banking giant Goldman Sachs who identify the middle class “as the global middle class – those with incomes between $6,000 and $30,000 per anum (Wilson and Dragusanu 2008). The research group Ernst and Young (2013) claim that “Over the next two decades… the middle class will expand by another three billion people, coming almost exclusively from the emerging world”. To be more precise, “When the number stood at 1 billion, it was primarily divided among the U.S., Europe and Japan. By 2030, however, the developed middle class will no longer be in the majority, or even splitting the pie fifty-fifty” (Kharas quoted by Rosenbaum 2014).

More to the point is that in PPP terms the world GDP in 2009 was USD 63 trillion “by 2034, 25 years from now, the global economy may be (as large as) USD 200 trillion in PPP dollars” (Kharas 2010). And more notably, as Kharas puts it, such a world is going to be very different from the one today. It will be “significantly wealthier, with per capita incomes averaging USD 21300 as compared to USD 8000 today”. Such a world is no longer a place with poor Asians in it. It will be a world reminiscent of the world before the industrial revolution with China and India dominating the world economy. Ali and Dadush (2012b) argue that consumer spending in the developing countries is already “increasing at about three times the rate in advanced countries” while the economic centre of gravity is shifting to Asia, which “by 2034 could account for 57 per cent of global output” with three “giant economies, China, India and Japan”, leading this resurgence. Even other countries of Asia like Indonesia and Vietnam will be a part of this charge and countries like Thailand and Malaysia “could have economies larger than France has today.” It is likely to be a world with undreamed of number of “consumers” in it (Ali and Dadush 2012b).

So that, the big business and the industries producing middle class consumer good, if not the World Bank or the economists, are salivating at the prospect of capturing this huge number of “buyers”, who will become the driving force of the global economy of the future. “Economists are hoping that this growing cohort of consumers can help to keep the floundering global economy afloat” while “companies accustomed to serving the middle-income brackets of the Western democracies will need to decide how they can effectively supply the new bourgeois of Africa and Asia and beyond (Ernst and Young 2013. Emphasis added to point to the sarcasm there). So, they need to know how many “consumers” there are (or will be) and how much they can “spend” on what products, that’s all there is to it, that’s the sole reason for this sudden urge among these economists and the World Bank for class analysis, that’s the honey in the pot! No wonder, it is largely the big business and the international banks that are funding these studies of the middle class. Eventually the big business will make this new middle class “pay” through their noses for this privilege of being in the middle class, as it has done to the middle class of the developed world.

Hence, there is another side, a sad tale, to this story!
The other middle class

The consumption leader of today’s world economy, the USA with about 21% or $4.4 trillion of consumption, is failing. Many studies have pointed to the lack of real growth in the middle class, and the economy in general, in the USA. The middle class in the USA is a spent force it can no longer support big business or remain as the driving force of the global economy. In key respects, notes Eduardo Porter (2013), “the standard of living of most Americans has fallen decidedly behind”. By the measures of social and economic well-being, the United States have slipped compared to even other advanced countries, which are not doing too good either, to the extent that “America has been standing still for a full generation, with the typical household income in 2012 remaining roughly the same as the typical household income a quarter of a century ago, at $51,017” (Porter 2013). Add to this the continuous rise in the cost of living, including health care per person, which has doubled, and the price of education. Nearly two-thirds of the people with bachelor’s degree depended on loans to get through college, compared to 45 percent two decades ago, while the average current student loan debt in the United States in 2014 stands at $32,250 …” (Snyder 2014). As a result, the “net worth” of a middle income American has actually gone down by 6% from 1988 (after adjusting for inflation). And by all accounts the economic problems since the 2008 recession have taken the wind out of the “sail” of consumerism in America. “It’s going to be hard to maintain strong economic growth with such a large proportion of the population falling behind”, New York Times (NYT) quotes Steven Fazzari of Washinton University (Schwartz 2014).

Schwartz (2014) in NYT notes that the “post-recession reality is that the customer base for businesses that appeal to the middle class is shrinking”. Michael Snyder (2014) in The Economic Collapse blog, notes, “The death of the middle class in America has become so painfully obvious that now even the New York Times is doing stories about it. Millions of middle class jobs have disappeared, incomes are steadily decreasing …” Rapacki (2014) shows that “53 percent of Americans now make less than $30,000 yearly; 1 out of 4 part-time workers live below the poverty line; the average credit card debt is $15,279”. Snyder (2014) similarly, using the NYT article sums up a few sobering facts like, “Some of the largest retailers in the United States that once thrived by serving the middle class are now steadily dying”; “Seers and J.C. Penny are on the verge of bankruptcy”; “Median household income in the United States has fallen for five years in a row”. Also significant are the facts that in 2008, “53 percent of all Americans considered themselves to be ‘middle class’” now (in 2014) it is only 44 percent who do and again in 2008 (Rapacki 2014) “25 percent of all Americans in the 18 to 29-year-old age bracket considered themselves to be "lower class", in 2014, an astounding 49 percent of them do”. But more importantly, Snyder (2014b) notes, “As disposable income decreases, major retailers are closing thousands of stores all over the country. Some are even calling this “a retail apocalypse””. The whole scenario is best illustrated by the fact that the “Overall, U.S. consumers are $11,360,000,000,000 in debt (Snyder 2014b)!

These facts are enough to show how the “income” of the middle class in the USA has been siphoned off by the big business which is now ready to “jump ship” and look elsewhere for their future profiteering. When the middle class in the USA and other developed countries cannot consume enough to run the global economy, fresh pastures are needed. The obvious focus, thus, falls on the new and upcoming middle class in the developing world. By 2030, Ernst and Young (2013) projects that “two-thirds of the global middle class will be residents of the Asia-Pacific region, up from just under one-third in 2009”
Another personal anecdote
But before I get to that global middle class, another personal anecdote is in order. A friend of mine, who has worked much of his life for international organizations like the World Bank and lived abroad, whenever he visited Bangladesh and me, he would ask me if I had bought a car. Of course, with a professor’s salary at the University of Dhaka, I was far from buying even the bare necessities and had no prospect of ever buying a car and would always answer in the negative to my friend. He would let out a sigh, probably in pity mixed with frustration that he failed to inculcate some basic values in me. On one such occasion, about twenty years ago, I asked him back, “Why do you keep nagging me about buying a car?” He smiled and declared, “Either you own a car or you are a proletariat!” All my life I had prided myself as belonging to the middle class, as did my parents and their parents too, so I should have been offended by his remark but I decided to excuse him since he understood little about the realities of Bangladesh and living abroad with a well paying job probably had a car for each member of his family and expected the same from his friend in Bangladesh as well. That was 20 years ago!

The “Automobile Club”
But it was not until twenty years later, when I started working on this paper, that I came to understand, even if I did not appreciate, his concerns. Like my expatriate friend, Shimelse Ali, Uri Dadush (2012b) in a paper in the Foreign Policy magazine makes a very strong argument to measure the middle class in the developing world by the ownership of cars. They argue that the measurement of the middle class by income data are not adequate, and is actually erroneous, because of the PPP issue discussed above and dependence on household surveys, but the ownership of cars can more accurately define that middle class, they call it “a more sensible measure”. They show that “in the developing world, buying a car is virtually synonymous with entry into the middle class … in these countries, car ownership separates those with the ability to purchase many other nonessentials from those within the wider population” (2012 b). So that the people in the slum noted above are definitely not in the same league (nor am I, by the way). The $2 to $4 or $9 are not the proper measures, these sums may let one buy a cell phone, a TV or even a computer but do not ensure entry into the middle class, not yet.

Ali and Dadush (2012b) argue that cars in circulation per capita rise once income per capita crosses a certain threshold. They suggest this threshold to be about $3,400 PPP, after a study of some 60 countries. They show that during the 1996-2010 period, for countries with average per capita income between $3,400 and $10,000, the average income elasticity of car ownership was 1.9, and argue that in about 70 countries with a population of nearly 4 billion the income varied between $3,400 - $10,000 per capita, this they call the “threshold of affluence”. To Dadush buying a car seems “to be a natural crossing point into middle class” (Dadush in Rosenbaum 2013). Ali and Dadush (2012b) show that in the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) in 2010 alone 14 million cars were added to the circulation. This “figure implies that about 46 million people were added to the middle class” in those countries (in one year!). A Goldman Sachs report (Wilson and Dragusanu 2008) also notes that car ownership shifts as income rises and from about 100 cars owned per thousand people with per capita income around $8000, it rises sharply to more than 500 cars per thousand people for $30,000 plus per capita income. This not only defines the middle class, for Ali and Dadush (2012b), it also shows that the future of the car market (and other consumer goods) is in the developing world and urge policy makers to make a note of this. As I stated above, this is the crux of the matter, this is the honey!

So, buying cars, washing machines, air conditioners, and, perhaps, houses, is the destination (if not the destiny) of this income based new and upcoming middle class! This is the group, the “automobile
club", that is expected to keep the global economy afloat. This is reminiscent of the 1950s and 60s when the development literature used to compare the number of radios or telephones among the population to measure “development”. Someone might, likewise, find a “strong correlation” between having a western style toilet at home and being middle class, after all, it does require certain amount of “income” to be able to afford the western fixtures!

Magazines, which have recently dealt with the issue of this new or global middle class, show pictures of consumers in affluent shops buying air conditioners or other electronic gadgets (may even be toilet fixtures). One shows a carefree angler taking a nap by the river side, with a fishing rod dangling from his hand. But my favourite is the one in the *Foreign Policy* journal in which Mr. Ratan Tata is handing over the key of the “Nano” car (placed in the background) to the members of an “ideal” Indian family of four (father, mother, daughter and son) with a hand written note on the wall in the background announcing the “delivery of the most awaited car starts today”.

That is what “middle class” means to the Bank, the economists and to big business. What they, therefore, identify or define is basically, as Kharash (2010) puts it, a “consumer class” and that’s at best what it may be called. In reality, it is just an “income group” across the world, irrespective of their wealth, occupation, education, cultural values or social and even spatial location, earning a certain amount of dollars (or its equivalent) per day, per person and is able to spend those dollars (or its equivalent) in buying consumer goods. That income may not bracket them with either the rich or the poor but being “middle class” has nothing to do with it since both “class” and “middle class” have entirely different connotations in every society and among academics. Even two World Bank economists, Luis F. López-Calva and Eduardo Ortiz-Juarez (2011), sensitive to the problem, agree that “in the economic literature, the analysis has focused mainly on relative definitions, addressing a stratum of the income distribution rather than an analysis of class” (emphasis original).

There may have been some “honest” effort to explore what lies in the future of those who graduate out of poverty, but, as it turns out, such honesty of the Bank got tarnished soon since it did not take the Bank or the economists to see “dollars” in those same graduated poor as the future “consumers” of the global economy, as did big businesses like Goldman Sachs. Hundreds of millions, by most accounts billions, of people now have “incomes” to “buy” goods and services from big business and industries. Ali and Dadush (2012b) note that as the ranks of the middle class in the developing world swell, “firms in advanced countries will increasingly focus their efforts on selling products to that middle class directly, or selling the machines, software, and business services that firms in developing countries need to meet the needs of their burgeoning middle classes”.

**Conclusion: Multidimensionality of the middle class**

Class and middle class may denote economic positions in society, as in the definitions of both Marx and Weber, but that economic position is not defined simply by income or consumption. Income can accrue from a profession, from inherited wealth or from the arts and sports, it may even be gotten by means not often deemed legal by the society, and that income may put a whole lot of people in the same bracket but not all in that bracket will have similar “life chances” leading to a similar “style of Life” putting them in a particular social class, nor will they enjoy similar “status” and honour in society and definitely not the same extent of “power”. Of course, they are all consumers and buy goods and services, but not all of them buy cars or electronics, some of them may prefer to buy a decent education for their children, a painting for the living room or a ticket to a theater even when they can buy a car or the latest electronic gadgets. That’s what sets the “style of life” and sets classes of people apart also in terms of status and power in society. That’s what separates a doctor from a drug dealer;
a professor from a shopkeeper; an automobile engineer from a taxi-driver even if they earn the same income. That’s what separates the middle class from the rest. So that, if a definition has to be offered or if a measuring instrument has to be constructed to represent the middle class, these distinctions must be taken into account along with the history, tradition or cultural norms and values, while a single global measure may become self defeating, missing far more than it can capture.

It has taken a couple of decades for the academic community to be convinced that poverty is not merely an income phenomenon but is multidimensional, which can be better understood by taking into account a lot of other variables that affect poverty and the life of the poor. Fortunately, the UNDP (2013) has taken heed, based on their previous multidimensional attempts to define human development, they are now using an index called Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), based on a measuring technique originally suggested by Sabina Alkire and James Foster (2007, 2011) of the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), to explain poverty as composed of a number of dimensions like health, education and living standards which are identified with ten different variables ranging from nutrition to the use of electricity and even the quality of floor in a house. The beauty of the MPI is that it can be constructed for any country (OPHI nd.), region or even a city while wholly different sets of dimensions may be used for different locations as has already been done by researchers in countries like Mexico (Foster 2007).

The picture of poverty that MPI catches is vastly different from that of “income poverty” of the World Bank. The rosy picture of eradicating poverty, which the World Bank has been painting for the last two decades, suddenly fades out and a different set of reality is presented by the MPI. The World Bank data, for instance, shows that Bangladesh has been immensely successful in eradicating poverty well before the deadline set by the Millennium Development Goals to as low as 26% in 2013 from about 56% in 1990. The MPI today, unfortunately, shows that 57% of the Bangladeshi population or more than 80 million people are still under multidimensional poverty. The improvement in income has not done much to put a solid floor in their houses or given access to better health or electricity to a whole lot of people!

The middle class anywhere, as has been repeatedly mentioned above, is far greatly multidimensional, immensely more so than the lower class. It is composed of a vastly complex group of people, with multitude of variations in their standard of living, social status, honour and prestige, power, culture, history, tradition, education, occupation, income levels, wealth and property, also tastes, preferences and involvements in multifarious activities, even within one society. To try to capture all of those through “income” alone, across the world, is simply foolhardy, even more pathetic than measuring poverty with $2 of income per day per person. If economists were, ever, dealing with the real societies in real world, they would have known these distinctions, as do the rest of the billions of people, simply as a matter of common knowledge. If anything, therefore, constructing a multidimensional index, not the car index of Dadush and Ali (2012) but more like the “Great British Class Survey”, taking into account economic, social and cultural capitals, or as many such dimensions as practicable for each society or region, might yield a better picture of the middle class for them. But, as would be expected, such a plea will not dent the resolve of the economists. Some like Ravallion (2011) continues to defend the income definition in spite of the evidences presented otherwise.

The Bank and these free market economists, thus, seem to be ignoring all precepts and are bent on identifying the middle class just as an “income group”, without even being sure of what that income or its limits constitute, let alone what different goods and services that income buys and for whom. Being callously uninformed about what class analysis comprises of, they are focusing on just “one
class”, and by disregarding the vast literature on class analysis, the economists of the World Bank and other similar organizations and big businesses are taking over, hijacking, the concept of the middle class, stripping it of all social, cultural and historical connotations and are turning it into a nameless, faceless, listless group of “consumers”, sticking “price tags” or printing “bar codes” on individual faces, and will be, eventually, imposing that definition on the world, as they did earlier with the concepts of poverty and inequality.

World Bank’s definition matters. They have the resources and the manpower to construct such definitions and the rest of the world, including academicians and governments, are dependent on them. But more importantly, in most developing countries World Bank’s instructions translate directly into policy prescriptions and will affect the lives of real people by their billions.

So, beware!

Post Script:

My house help and her family members may have cell phones in their hands and a few electronic gadgets in their house, contributing to the global economy with incomes above $2, but they are a vulnerable lot. They are landless and totally illiterate, devoid of assets to fall back on. Her husband is in a failing health, suffering from tuberculosis, and her daughter-in-law suffers from chronic malnutrition, had a couple of miscarriages earlier and barely survived her ordeal to give birth to a premature second child recently. The “birthday boy” met with a serious head injury in a road accident a couple of months later. Fortunately, a major surgical operation brought back the boy from certain death but landed the family in a “proper slum” this time.

That’s the flip-side of the World Bank’s middle class!

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Research in South African Public Administration: The Paradox of Science, Politics and Economics of a Public Policy

M.P Sebola

Abstract: This article investigates the significance of research in public policy decision and adoptions in South Africa centering its argument on the HIV/AIDS debate of the former President Thabo Mbeki era in South Africa. This paper argues that while the South African government may commission universities and research institutes to conduct studies to determine the impact of particular policy implications, little of these research findings have the potential to influence the government to solve public policy problems. Governments are known to prefer a so-called political-administrative solution to any issue rather than using scientific evidence that does not fulfill a correct economic and political objective. This article uses a literature analysis approach in order to argue the standpoint held by the author on this issue that science based evidence does not supersede the economic and political considerations of a country in policy decision-making. The article therefore concludes that ruling governments only consider scientific recommendations that purports to support their preconceived ideologies before scientific studies are undertaken. Any contradictory recommendation that does not befit the political and economic direction pursued by the government of the day is likely to be discarded. It is indeed the economic and political context of a country that determines the level by which a policy standpoint can be accepted or declined.

Keywords: Public administration, public policy, scientific recommendations, South Africa

Introduction

Government's policy decision is to be based on data that can be scientifically verified (Hunter & Schmidt, 1996; Brynard & Hanekom, 1997; Brynard & Hanekom, 2006) and therefore it can be argued from the onset of this discussion that research has a significant role to play in policy decision-making. This is based on the assumption that governments structures such as cabinets, parliament and other portfolio committees understand that they indeed provide services to human-beings and therefore any decision taken should be in the interest of human life and dignity and that such decision is informed by evidence that can be seen and tested. The use of instinct to govern a country is seen as a sign of ignorance, neglect and risking the livelihood of the modern society. It is considered significant that human society cannot be used as guinea pigs to test the workability of policy choices in either way by governments. These however have not prevented some governments in using their intuitive knowledge in public administration and therefore bringing the country into a complete non-delivery organ characterized by anarchy and public disorder.

Governments have a responsibility to ensure that informed scientific decisions are taken to provide for proper health, safety of citizens, protection of civil rights, social security, international relations and protection of the environment. This article raises the following research question: Is research significant in informing policy-decision in South Africa other than the dictates of politics and economic contexts of the country? Roux (2002) has argued that the role of outside experts in South Africa’s policy research is important because they are in a position to provide an objective answer than public officials in the service, who in regular circumstances base their decision on issues in political interest of the ruling elite than objectively meant for the benefit of the citizens. In answering this question, the author will keep the relevance of this article to the following issues; the significance of research in public policy; public administration and research in South Africa, use of research in public policy choices, research and the South African government affair and whether or not science, politics or economics determines policy choices in government.

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Significance of Research in Public Policy

Arguments are that it is globally acknowledged that advances in knowledge is a major contribution of economic and social development in most countries (Stewart, 1995; Vaughan, 2008), hence that leading to many countries worldwide to consider research to be a significant vehicle of administrative, economic and political development. Admittedly it is acknowledged worldwide that research findings have been used to the benefit of improvement of people’s life (Jones & Walsh, 2008) and to a greater extent it has led to breakthroughs in improved productivity, innovation, economic growth and a good understanding of the world we live in (Olsen, Call, Summers & Carlson, 2008) while at the same time being beneficial to the society. Government provides a variety of services to the public and from time to time they have to ensure that their services are of a fair societal relevance (Schmidt, 2008). Such services are provided in the lines of health, education, safety and security and agriculture. To achieve these services in the most efficient and effective way; science based knowledge become necessary (Mejlgaard, Bloch, Degn, Ravn & Nielsen, 2009:44). The Republic of South Africa and other African countries experiences shortfalls in policy decision and implementation consequently resulting in an unacceptable service delivery backlogs and problems which threatens internal peace and stability. However it can be argued that proper evidence based knowledge is likely to improve the administrative, economic and political environment better if it is well applied and utilized.

In South Africa lack of or unacceptable policy implementation resulted in service delivery protests which caused unnecessary civil disturbances, death and destruction of existing government properties and those of politicians (Tsheola & Sebola, 2012). It is argued that only evidence based knowledge can help countries to introduce good policies and govern better without political, economic and administrative problems. On the other hand most previous studies on similar assertion argue that the relationship between research and policy making and decisions are highly complex (Mills & Clark, 2001; De Connig, 2006), and therefore making it difficult to attach the significance of research into public policy agenda. This however cannot be contested that much from the academic discourses, simply because there are practical examples in government where evidence based knowledge served to solve public problems better than where it was not used. It is, therefore, sufficient to claim that specific studies have indeed on several occasions solved public policy problems (Smith, n.d) and therefore to discard the significance of research in public policy decision making and implementation cannot be completely justifiable in Public Administration discourses.

Health problems worldwide are solved through evidence based research (Gonzalez-Block, 2004; WHO Task Force & WHO Equity Team, 2005; Kyratsis, Ahmad & Holmes, 2012; Orton, Lloyd-Williams, Taylor-Robinson, O’ Flaherty & Capewell, 2011). However and often in many circumstances certain governments have not used evidence based knowledge to deal with societal problems as expected. They have instead preferred political solution to social problems than administratively and economically required. This had happened mostly in cases where the solution anticipated by the studies conducted has more costly implications than what the government can handle with the available resources. In this instance the evidence based knowledge will contribute less into solving political, economic or administrative problem in a public administration environment.

Public Administration and Research in South Africa

The development of a reliable developed research system and the responsibility of science and innovation in South Africa is held by the Department of Science and Technology (SAccess, 2013:5). It is indeed this department that should ensure that universities and research institutes are established, supported and empowered to carry out science activities that would promote new innovation. South
Africa as a country commissions a variety of policy research on annual basis mainly meant for administrative, economic or political guidance or for immediate implementation to solve public administration problems. Some of such research studies are conducted by private and non-governmental organisations, while others are conducted by universities and research institutes.

Admittedly and convincingly, such could be the efforts that promote or better the public policy implementation in the country by the ruling party (The African National Congress). Lundberg (n.d: 2) concludes that South Africa is generally doing well in pursuing and making the right policy choices which could be the reason that makes the African National Congress the most popular political party in the country to date, thus making it a non-loser in the countries general elections. There are however arguments raised at various forums and public spaces in South Africa that the country is not doing well with regard to policy implementation (Kahn & Thurman, 2001: 11-13; Landsberg, n.d: 2; Kahn, 2012:3). Public dissatisfaction is but a challenge that is not peculiar to South Africa, but also a challenge to even the most developed countries. Despite the attempt by the government to satisfy the people, the societies needs remain heterogeneous and cannot be simultaneously satisfied. South African public policies, however, are meant to achieve the good; they face a challenge which might include aspects such as capacity and misalignment of ideal and real public policy implementation environment.

The South African government have in the post-apartheid era adopted funding model for both public research institutions (Universities) and funding support for research institutes and centers (Pillay, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2004:1-20; Schulze, 2008; Mouton, Louw & Strydom, 2013). The purpose and intends of this action is mainly to balance the scientific, political economic and administration logic (Braun, 1998; OECD, 2011:2-3), through specific relevant research institutes, centers and or academic institutions. Research centers in South Africa still physically fall short off within most academic institutions of the country, especially the previously disadvantaged universities which serves the rural African population. The research centers are believed to be able to generate positive research outcomes if established within universities (Sabharwal & Hu, 2013) in the sense that research pushed at those centers cut across faculties and disciplines (Boardman & Corley, 2008) and therefore promoting major research output for the country to use. In South Africa examples of research institutes are but not limited to; Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), Agricultural Research Council (ARC), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South African National Energy Development Institute (SONEDI), Human Science Research Council (HSRC), Africa Institute of South Africa (AISA), National Research Foundation (NRF), Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA).

All these institutes depending on their reason of existence focuses on and not limited to social, political, administrative, safety and security, natural resources management, bio-diversity and technological research. To a particular extent some of them pursue a variety of research areas at the same time. With the exclusion of academic institutions all these research institutes, centers are established in accordance with the countries relevant acts for the specific purpose of the research focus or focuses to be carried out by the institute concerned. It is argued that in South Africa higher education is highly state funded through the Department of Education (Council for Higher Education, 2009:9) mainly with the belief that quality teaching and research at universities will help government to govern and manage the countries resources better. Such move put South Africa in the same footing as Botswana, Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Lesotho and Swaziland in spending most of their budget in higher education for development. The quality of researchers produced by higher education institutions in those countries is likely to help in solving both administrative and political problems in sub-Saharan Africa. That is however possible if funds invested for research is appropriately utilized and applied for the benefit of the country and its citizens.
The use of Research in Public Policy Choices

The use of research in decision-making either administratively or in policy decisions is often contested by many; however, research is believed to be having the potential to identify the best policy development and choices (Dukeshire & Thurlow, 2002:2; Gonzalez-Block, 2004; Goel, Payne & Ram, 2008) which in turn will improve the livelihood of the citizens. This is mostly backed by the contestation of scientific based evidence knowledge as against democratized knowledge (Jones & Walsch, 2008:1-2). The knowledge of the interface between research and policy decision is of utmost importance in modern public administration and policy decision-making. That will in all probability assist the policy makers, implementers and politicians to take cognisance and fairly balancing their act in dealing with these two aspects of mutual implications.

The use of research results to make decisions is today common in medicine, management and policy decision (Lomas, 2000). It is however also acknowledged in various literature that dealing with policy issues and using evidence based knowledge is too complex (Dhaliwal & Tulloch, n.d; Lardone & Roggero, n.d:1; Boydell & Lander, n.d:1; Smith, n.d: 1; Almeida & Bascolo, 2006) because there are other problem related issues with significant effect on the use of research in order to make sound and helpful decisions. A variety of such issues are but not limited to politics, resources and a mismatch of the roles of researchers, policy makers and implementers in this context. It is known that politicians will always prefer a political solution (a solution that pleases the mass) to issues than using science to inform them of a right policy decision-making. That has however lead to decision-makers accusing researchers of poorly communicated products while researchers accused decision-makers of political decisions that resulted in irrational outcomes (Lomas, 2000). Policy-makers on the other hand operate in an environment that differs from the implementers to the extent that Stone, Maxwell & Keating (2001, 5-9) noted that policy makers and researchers often ignore the significance of implementers in their space of work. In some instances policies formulated are not only unclear, but also lack proper expectations and the policy process (Grebmcar, nd: 455-459; Tottle, Bronfmann & Langer, 1999). This may also pose a challenge in a situation where implementers do not have the capacity to use and interpret the given data to inform their implementation plans.

The success of a research data to inform policy decision or implementation is highly depended on various factors. Bowen, Erickson, Martens & Crocket (2009) are of the opinion that it is indeed the availability of resources, political context, values, community experience and capacity that may determine the success of using research to make a rational decision on policy matters. This therefore continues to justify the assertion that the relationship between research and policy-decision-making is highly complex in both the political and administrative environment of public administration. Like all other countries of the globe, South Africa faces a similar challenge when coming to use research for decision-making which is either to be used for health, safety or other matters of governmental significance. The conflict of interest among the variables (politics, science based evidence and economics) are known to be competing factors in policy decision-making.

Research and the South African Government’s Affair

The use of research in public administration of South Africa is as confusing as it can be in any other country when it comes to policy adoption and implementation. To this extent it can only be argued that the use of research in public administration for decision-making cannot be a conclusive solution to policy implementation problems. It is however accepted that it should be in the interest of policy makers to ensure that the use of research results guarantees good value for use of public resources
(Lyall, Bruce, Firn, Firn&Tait, 2003). Research results can arguably be used to provide guidelines in attempting to find solution to policy problems. As articulated by Ganann (2012:12) it is evidence based approaches that can help in increasing policy effectiveness and informing risk assessments of policies to be adopted. And often there are descending views against particular research assertions and findings that support a particular policy imperative. It is however not known why contestations by the dissidents’ views against the orthodox views are always responded to with arrogance and irrational tones than calm and attention. Are scientists not supposed to provide a rational answer to queries irrespective of who posed the question? In a situation where a rationalist approach is preferred it is argued that scientific evidence should take precedence over all other issues (Brock, 2010). However, the weakness of this approach could be highly linked to information gathering which cannot be guaranteed at different stages of data collection for research. But often as it may happen especially in the political environment; politicians have to choose whether the decision is administratively sound, efficient and economically effective or whether it has the potential to sustain a political trust from citizens. Balancing a weight of satisfaction between the two is often difficult to be attained by politicians and public administration practitioners.

In some instances however some private research companies had their findings contested by political results. In South Africa for example, a research company Markinor (PTY) Limited has often before any post South African national elections were held issued survey results that suggest that the African National Congress (ANC) is losing popularity among the south African citizens and predicting a high reduction of loss by the ANC from the electorates, but instead in the same manner it becomes clear that the ANC instead acquires more votes than in the previous elections where such estimates were not made. In the same note similar private research companies will present findings that predict losers to be future winners. That however ultimately put the credibility of research findings to influence policy; to be in a manner that is highly contestable from the practical public administration environment. In keeping this article relevant to the discussion, the author decided to use an example of a policy choice in South Africa where research results and the need for political, administrative and economic efficiency supersedes scientific evidence by the South African government and therefore rejecting the scientific discourses of HIV/AIDS and the policy direction pushed for it.

The Mbeki HIV/AIDS Policy Dilemma

Mbeki’s era of office with regard to research and HIV/AIDS policy is but remembered as an era of governments’ unscientific, neglect, irresponsibility and denialism that caused the country unnecessary death rates that could have been avoided (Pearson, 2001:1; Glaser, 2010: 11-14; Pillay, 2012; Roux, 2013: 56-58). This was informed by global scientific studies that put South Africa’s HIV/AIDS statistics on top of countries of the globe. The response by President Mbeki on this matter was however viewed from the perspective of ignorance by his opponents who are thought of as undermining African intelligence on handling own issues of critical concern. Being in the same position of seeking scientific clarity from the position occupied by an African leader (Thabo Mbeki) of his thought; that could have been the only possible response the global village could have expected from a rebel of politics of western ideals against the African continent. Also this issue should not be viewed outside the context that such dissident view could have only been expected in South Africa because of the fact that it has been concluded that of the twenty five top “think tanks” in sub-Saharan Africa, thirteen of them are located in South Africa (Tawfik, 2010:4) thus putting South Africa in an advantage position to argue publicly against any suspect thinking about the western political agenda against the African continent.
President Thabo Mbeki was believed to be a visionary African leader whose ideals challenged the West by setting a political and economic agenda of the African continent. Without arguing for or against the recklessness associated with the responses and the incorrect message and interpretations accorded to the sentiment expressed on this debate, one would argue that such could have been better argued from the perspective of politics and economics rather than using science as a scapegoat. From time to time as it may be argued that anyone accused of having a dissenting view against HIV/AIDS issue was never accused of on grounds of rationalism, but rather on the basis of recklessness talking about the epidemic that is attempting to wipe the entire globe. Bethel (2000) argues that it is indeed politics that guides the HIV/AIDS policies in governments rather than science as evidence. This debate should be understood from the perspective of political and economic contestation between the Western and the African political and economic ideals in which medical scientific evidence is used as a scapegoat of the real underlying critical issues of concern. The international media coverage on the issue (print and audio) has portrayed Mbeki as a reckless and negligent President who gambled with people’s life by failing to avail the drugs on time. The scientific articles written on the same subject of which influenced his thinking was not talked of in the same media, neither did the same media tried to probe the credibility of medical scientists who influenced his ideals.

Statistics South Africa’s (2005: 21-29) studies on mortality and causes of death in South Africa in the period 1997-2001 revealed that HIV related deaths were in actual fact the least of a cause of deaths in South African population. Instead tuberculosis was a major killer of South Africans followed by cerebrovascular diseases. A further report by Statistics South Africa (2010: 25-35) still revealed that in the period (2001-2008) a major killer of South Africans continued to be cerebrovascular diseases followed by tuberculosis and HIV continues to be listed as a minor cause of mortal fatalities in the country. The diseases named as major killers are however labeled as opportunistic infections that cannot be dissociated from the scourge of HIV/AIDS (TAC electronic newsletter, 2013). Conclusive evidence on this matter does not exist as it is highly unreliable considering the manner in which such data is recorded, analysed and interpreted by scientists. If scientific results are indeed a guide of the scientific community or rather a guide to the orthodox scientists’ one would argue that the dissidents (in this context Thabo Mbeki and his denialists allies) have been unfairly criticized because their arguments were mainly based on scientific evidence which the orthodox scientists do not conform to or subscribe to since such evidence was said to be coming from pseudo-scientists.

The questions and answers required about the causal link between HIV and AIDS in Africa were never answered by the orthodox scientists who instead dismissed such as ignorance and denialism. Scientific evidence which we believe the same orthodox scientists believe in revealed that in Western Europe and Northern America’s improved public health had little to do with use of newly developed drugs as a medical solution, but rather had everything to do with improved health nutrition and living conditions of the people (Mhlongo, n.d:1-16; Mhlongo, 2003), it should therefore be concluded that the orthodox scientific viewpoint of the causal link between HIV and AIDS indeed may require both drugs and nutritional solutions than a toxic drug with the potential to aggravate the medical situation of victims suffering from both poverty and inequality.

The Hidden Political and Economics of the HIV/AIDS Policy Issue in South Africa

In South Africa the constitutional perspective provides that all citizens have a right to health care services. Not only are South Africans having constitutional privilege of free access to health services and medical treatment, but equally all individuals of foreign origin irrespective of their importance are
covered by the same constitutional principle. And yet out of all this inclusive constitutional privilege the country is still facing a challenge of dealing with poverty and social equality of its own people. On the other hand it becomes difficult for politicians to argue their reason of failing policy implementation on bases of scientific evidence but rather most of them resorting to political discourses. It is on that base that the Durban Declaration (2000) composed of more than 5000 scientists expected President Mbeki to change his political discourse to a medical one (Mulwo, Tomaselli & Francis, 2012) a move which Mbeki denounced without considering the reputational risk to be associated to his political credibility (Clark, 2000; Jones, 2002; Nattrass, 2005) basing his argument that only poverty in Africa is a problem than the virus concerned. This kind of political agenda could in the continent be raised by Africans of independent thought whose purpose is mainly to defend the image of the Africans in the continent than subscribing to scientific evidence which in their opinion was meant to belittle the African society. Geshekter, (2007) also viewed the debate from the perspective in which the African populace is medically undermined through western orthodox science which seems to belittle the sexual behavior of Africans and at the same time painting them as promiscuous beings. Politics on this issue plays a significant hidden role and that does not come to the fore so much when such contestations are played on the global space.

In Zimbabwe for example Makamani(1998) noted that the Zimbabwean government controlled the issuing of HIV/AIDS statistics which had for some time showed to be lower in reporting than what the independent researchers found about the level of the epidemic in the country, and therefore non-governmental organisations were cautioned not to conduct research on their own without governments monitoring so that they can provide similar statistics. The debate on science cannot be dissociated from the political debacle because in case where science cannot reach a consensus it is understandable that politics should take supreme (Weinel, 2009:1). The issue of the economics associated with policies was never put in the forefront by any politician or medical scientists in Africa on this debate. The arguments on policy implementation are often dodged on the basis of factors that are suspected of having little to do with the real issues of contention on the matter of discussion. In the HIV/AIDS argument policy in South Africa the matter of discussion were either politically or economically influenced in responses and genuine questions remained unanswered.

The so called dissidents of the HIV/AIDS debate with their controversial questions were never provided with answers asked but were rather arrogantly responded to as either pseudo-scientists, denialists or dissidents while the same accused view the orthodox scientists and reactionary group against them as serving a particular economic or political agenda of the pharmaceutical companies that are launching a genocidal drug (Mulwo, Tomaselli & Francis, 2012) aimed to exterminate the African society. The dissident’s scientist such as Prof. Mhlongo (a SouthAfrican Medico based in Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA) Duesberg&Rasnik (the Americans) and South African magazine editors Rian Malan and Martin Welz were but labeled as individuals that lack credibility to debate on HIV/AIDS issues (Geffen, 2004) and such counter arguments were raised for clarity of the debates (Galea&Cherman, 1998) in which personal individual attack was made against any dissidents viewpoint. Both the opposing views either by the so called pseudo-scientists and orthodox scientists are argued from empirical evidence provided by studies conducted on similar issues of debate where such issues of the debate are divergent of each other. The matter that remains unresolved is whether or not this debate is political or economic. It remains safe to conclude that science-based evidence in this context is used as a scapegoat for political and economic agendas of the global superpowers and the manner in which Africa is failing to make its voice on the international platform about the manner they want to conduct their political and economic agenda’s.
Politics, Science or Economics of Policies?

It is a known fact that empirical research can only be used to support the existing policy agenda (Whoolfrey, 2009) or the ideology of the government in power. One of the major constraints of policy adoption or implementation in developing countries can be linked to lack of capacity that also suffers from insufficient resources which could be technical, skills and financial. When resources are a problem of policy implementations, governments in developing countries have always hidden behind political answers because of being in fear that providing economic answers could be politically costly to their constituencies. In South Africa it was argued that President Thabo Mbeki’s denialist stance on HIV/AIDS saga was not influenced by economic costs, but rather by medical scientific studies countering the medical orthodox views on the issue of debate. This is however arguable since most African leaders and Mbeki included have questioned the economic motive of western pharmaceutical companies on the issue (Bethell, 2000; Cullinan, 2003: 82; Nattrass, 2005; Heywood, 2010:11) and to a larger extent the estimated costs for providing ARV’s during the Mbeki presidency was calculated at 47 US dollars per annum should he decide to allow such drugs to be provided in public hospitals. Additionally the former President was himself a renowned orthodox economist who could not have preferred to save the life of orphans and terminally ill unproductive HIV/AIDS victims who were going to be a financial burden to the state. As it can be argued the responses on this issue had little to do with science and its related studies.

Not only is the political leadership of developing countries that failing to convince even the average intellectual that the issue of contest here have little to do with evidence based science, but also the west are not capable of convincing the Africans that their interest in the debate had little to do with politics and economics than evidence based science. The whole debate of this science based arguments have indeed paraded Africans on the global village as irresponsible sex mongers that can only be saved by therapeutic medical methods of the west while at the same time remain indebted to such medical suppliers at high costs. African countries have or are compelled to put billboards in their own city’s advertising themselves as carriers and transmitters of HIV/AIDS, hence to be viewed and perceived as such wherever they travel across the globe. Such is basically what orthodox scientists of our era needs to be remembered of to such an extent that if an African of an opposite school of thought ask a controversial question; he is either perceived as a denialists or dissident of medical science and therefore an ignorant individual. It is therefore safe to conclude that politics and economics rule supreme in any policy debate and that evidence based science is but a scapegoat of policy decisions. In South Africa when President Jacob Zuma took over from former President Thabo Mbeki; his first reaction was to satisfy the anti-Mbeki group on the issue by ordering that ARV’s be made available to victims at an early stage. That was indeed winning a political game with less effort. Organized groups such as TAC stopped public protests, but individuals and families affected continued to complain about the difficulty of accessing such drugs in public hospitals.

In South Africa the opposition of the ruling administration (ANC) has often questioned the use of child support grant as a means of poverty alleviation rather than creating jobs for the society. That was also amid allegations that the child support grant as a social security means may encourage among the youth to indulge in risky sexual behavior, alcoholism and drug abuse. In order to counteract that opposition thinking the Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency and UNICEF (2012:1-115) conducted a study that dispute the myths by the opposition. The study instead concluded that the Child Support Grant in South Africa is more beneficial to the country and is not comparable to any poverty alleviation programme ever considered by the government and have managed to reduce risky sexual behavior, pregnancy, drug abuse and gangsterism. Such studies including the one conducted by Gutthre (2002) cannot be exempted from political biasness since the
key informants were either parents as caregivers or child headed family caregivers which are the ones that are accused of abusing funds that are supposed to benefit the beneficiary children.

Looking at the political standpoint upheld by the South African government that poverty is a problem than health or that there is a correlation between poverty and poor health condition in the country, then there is no any type of evidence based study that will discourage the governments’ mandate of poverty alleviation. It is difficult to conclude that in the government administration environment, evidence based knowledge is likely to be applied in a truthful manner than as a guiding principle for administration. As Makamani (1998) argued the problem of HIV/AIDS policy in Zimbabwe is that it is handled through foreign means and principles than local ones and therefore making it difficult for the solution to the epidemic to be found. This article therefore concludes that while science based knowledge is significant, but it has limits of application because governments consider options that are aligned to political and economic costs than what science may dictate. Whether it makes sense or not science must fit the economics and the ideology of the ruling party if the relationship between such variables is to be maintained.

Conclusion
This article put in the front the debate on policy as adoptable through verifiable data. The HIV/AIDS policy was used as an example that policy adoptions and their persuasions have economic and political hidden tones than to depend on evidence based knowledge achievable through scientific studies. The argument of contestation in this was mainly based on the scientific influence on the solution to HIV/AIDS in South Africa as opposed to the stand upheld by the President on the same debate. It is in actual fact good policies that put governments into power and it is in fact the incorrect handling of policies that removes governments from power. As this article argue it is difficult to clear the world wide orthodox scientists that opposed South African president Mbeki of his views on HIV/AIDS of having operated from a mind exempted of economic and political hidden agenda as much as it is also difficult to completely clear the President from economic and political hidden agendas of protecting African against the west.

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Empowerment of Muslim Women in India: A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract: Muslim women’s disempowerment are commonly believed to be permanent and laying in their religion, laws and cultural practices. Hence, it is widely propagated that Muslim women can not be empowered so long as they follow codes of Shariat and MPL remain in existence. This culture essentialist discourse on Muslim women’s empowerment is neither scientific nor empirical. It is mere reductionism. Such a discourse overlooks the discrepancies between laws and practices as well as undermines the significance of existential condition and political disposition in the empowerment or disempowerment of women. Embedded poverty, high illiteracy, constantly increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes are some of the major causes of Muslim women’s disempowerment.

Keywords: Empowerment, Muslim women, Muslim Personal Law, sharia, divorce, insecurity

Introduction

‘Empowerment’ is a buzz word. It is employed in media, on television, in policy documents as well as in academic, political and legal circles. As the focus of empowerment is on the well being of individual and group, one could find discourse on empowerment of groups like ‘scheduled Caste’, ‘scheduled tribes’, ‘backward castes’, ‘minorities’, women etc. and individuals such as differently abled persons, bonded and child labourer, sex workers, homeless persons, stateless citizens and many more unprotected and vulnerable individuals. The phrase ‘empowerment of women’ was in vogue since the emergence of women’s liberation movements. United Nations Organization (UNO) declared 2001 as the year of women’s empowerment. India too recognized the same year as the year of ‘women’s empowerment’.

“The scholarly discussion of empowerment has been context driven rather than theory driven.” Writes Andre Beteille (1999:589). Every scholar invokes the word according to the ideology and goal he or she pursues. Therefore, the meaning and aims of empowerment differ from one situation to another. However, the idea of empowerment is being derived from the values of ‘equality’, ‘liberty’, and ‘freedom’ and from the principles of democratic polity such as ‘equity’ and ‘social justice’. The idea and consciousness of empowerment is advanced and popularized by movements that emerged the world over for the protection and promotion of individual and group rights. Consequently the idea of empowerment has taken a hold over the mind of increasing number of people in the last few decades which is expressed through multiple forms such as highlighting causes and extent of deprivation, alienation, marginality, vulnerability etc., articulation and demand of various ‘Rights’, protest against society and political disposition for denial and violation of articulated ‘Rights’ and so on. The call of empowerment is thought to be panacea of ills like squalor, misery, inequality, deprivation, vulnerability, marginality etc. by which many people and groups are afflicted. It is a means to struggle for achieving the goal of exploitation free socio-economic and political order. Hence, empowerment is used to transform social relations, social institutions, laws and public policies.

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Issues that figure prominently in the discourse of women’s empowerment are broadly of three types. One is related with the status of women in societal values and in social institutions like family, marriage, and religion. The other is concerned with forcing governments to formulate and implement policies and programmes for the welfare of women. And the third issue aims at pressurizing government to enact such laws which enhance their security both in private and public life, protect them from vulnerability and enable them to fight against social barriers as well as to access and participate in public life. These are not disjointed issues but intertwined with each other. One is the logical corollary of another. However, all are not value free and uncontested issues. Most contentious are issues related with marriage, divorce, child bearing, appearance in public places, and many more associated with beliefs and customary practices. For example, abortion right to women is a contentious issue in many Muslim and Catholic dominated countries. Man and woman are not allowed to ‘live together’ in India without marriage. If they are living in such a way, they will be considered husband and wife, ruled Supreme Court of India in its recent judgment. The list of such issues is comprehensive both in India and abroad. In addition, some ideas of ‘Feminist’ scholars for empowerment of women like ‘marriage is necessary evil’, ‘family enslaves women’, ‘religion promotes women’s exploitation’, etc are considered non-human views by many individuals and groups. In a nutshell, ideas and issues aiming at bringing about change in values, institutions and practices for the empowerment of women are vociferously raised and powerfully resisted the world over. Indeed, many customary practices and social structures may be found as barriers to women’s empowerment. They do not merely prevent women from having access to public opportunities but also make women’s welfare programmes and laws for their protection and rights ineffective.

This paper reflects upon issues of Muslim women’s empowerment, emanating from ‘Muslim Personal Law’ (MPL), from government’s policies for the welfare of Muslim women and from communal violence which frequently occur in India. Any attempt to analyze the status of Muslim women and the issues of their empowerment is impeded by dearth of empirical data. Although a large body of information and analysis about the status of Indian women on various indicators of human development is grown, there is a paucity of disaggregated data on women’ status. Neither the Census of India nor large scale sample surveys provide community-wise data on all indicators of women marginalization. Hence the extent, forms and factors of Muslim women’s deprivation and disempowerment are not exactly known. The dearth of empirical data about the status of Muslim women and communalization of gender issues led scholars to focus disproportionately on issues related with MPL such as ‘triple divorce’, ‘polygyny’ and unequal share of women in parental property. Whereas issues emerging from their socio-economic and political condition as well as from their increasing insecurity are undermined. Contrary to empirical realities Muslims and Muslim women are depicted as monolithic category and their life condition is seen in terms of religion. And religion of Islam is projected as conservative and oppressive to women’s liberty and empowerment. In a nutshell, the defining factors of ‘Muslim women’ identity and status “are popularly believed to be segregation, the male privilege of unilateral divorce, high fertility, ubiquitous veil, and conformity to the strict confines of womanhood within a fundamentalist religious code.” (Hasan and Menon, 2004: 3)

MPL and Sociological Realities
In this section we do not intend to discuss status of women in Islam, sources and varieties of Islamic laws and jurisprudence and provisions of MPL in entirety. Our aim is to highlight empirical reality of Muslim women in regard to divorce, the most controversial issues in the discourse on MPL and empowerment of Muslim women.
Constitution of India permitted religious and tribal communities to retain their Personal and customary laws, prevailing before independence. However, the constitution directs the state (Art. 44) to formulate and implement Uniform Civil Code (UCC). As the UCC has still not been formulated, every religious community has its Personal Law in regard to family, marriage, inheritance and related practices. Personal law of every community contains some provisions which may be interpreted against the spirit of constitutional values. Nevertheless MPL has been a focal point of debate which very often is charged with intense emotions and communal politics. Some groups of women activists forcefully advocate abrogation of all personal laws as they believe UCC, based on modern principles of equality and justice is a pre-requisite to women’s empowerment. While others are in favour of women friendly reform in personal laws as they think it is a difficult task to repeal personal laws in a plural country like India which accorded constitutional legitimacy to customary practices of tribal and other communities. MPL has also been a dominant issue of Hindu-Muslim politics. Hindu right wing outfits vehemently attack MPL as they want to impose Hindu Civil Code in the country. For them MPL is a threat to national pride and unity. The attack on MPL, denigration of Islam and portryal of Muslims as enemy of women’s empowerment intensified from ‘Shah Bano Case’ controversy and thereafter the enactment of ‘The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce)’ Act by the Parliament in 1986. Muslims responded to these attacks by highlighting merits of Islamic values and laws for protecting and promotion of woman’s dignity and rights; by projecting MPL as a symbol of Muslim identity and by asserting their constitutional rights of religious and cultural freedom. They formed a voluntary organization called ‘All India Muslim Personal Law Board’ (AIMPLB) in 1972. In short, the issue of MPL has been communalized and politicized to the extent that any voice of meaningful reform in it is either ignored or opposed. Even AIMPLB finds it difficult to unite Muslims of different shades and opinions on various issues of reform.

Civil matters were mainly controlled by customary practices until the enactment of ‘Family Laws’ in the late 19th and early twentieth centuries. Broadly two factors led to the enactment of such laws. First, Colonial rulers were interested in the imposition of state’s hegemony by enacting uniform laws for the country. It was economically beneficial and administratively convenient to them. Secondly, many customary practices were attacked and the demand to introduce reform was raised by socio-religious reform movements, emerged among different communities of the country during 19th and 20th century. Hence, Family Laws of various communities including Muslims emerged.

Iqbal A. Ansari writes that “The Muslim family laws relating to marriage, divorce, dower, maintenance, succession, inheritance, wills, legacies, adoption, guardianship were enacted during the period of British rule in India, especially in the first three decades of 20th century. Prior to these enactments the judiciary in British India decided family cases between Muslim parties in accordance with the laws of the State, the customs and usages of the people concerned and the provisions of the Islamic Sharia. Customs and usages sometimes took precedence over the written law of the Sharia. Thus, for example, the Mapillas of Malabar, the Cutchi Memons, and the Muslims of the Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Kashmir had their own customary laws and usages regarding succession and inheritance which were contrary to the Sharia (Ansari 1979: 87).

In course of time laws of various socio regional Muslim communities were enacted with the view to make them compatible with the provisions of Sharia. For example, The Mapilla Succession Act, 1918; Mapilla Wills Act, 1928; Cutchi Memons Act, 1920; Cutchi Memons Act, 1938 and North-West Frontier Province Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1935 were enacted to undermine customary practices. These laws paved the way for the enactment of the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act or Act XXVI of 1937 that had all India jurisdictions.
In the statement of objects and reasons of Shariat Application Act 1937 it is stated that: “For several years past it has been the cherished desire of the Muslims of India that customary law should in no case take the place of Muslim Personal Law. Explaining the background of this desire, it further said: The status of women under the so called customary law is simply disgraceful. The Muslim women organizations have condemned customary law as it adversely affects their rights, and have demanded that the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) should be applicable to them. The introduction of Muslim Personal Law will automatically raise them up to the position to which they are naturally entitled”.

Much has been written about MPL. Most of the writings are either legal or emotional and polemical. Neither the provisions of MPL are comparatively analyzed nor are their empirical reality explored. Virtually no comparative legal and empirical study of MPL is available. MPL contains many provisions of marriage and divorce but only few (i.e. oral and triple divorce, polygyny and alimony after divorce) have been controversial. Very often these provisions are highlighted to propagate that Muslim man has unlimited rights of marriage with more than one woman and unbridle power of divorce to his wife/wives whenever and wherever he like it most. And a Muslim woman is projected as a helpless person who always lives under constant fear of being arbitrarily and unilaterally abandoned by her husband. She is a mere chattel. Thus, it is stated:

A Muslim man can have up to four wives at a time with no legal protection to the woman against the exercise of the privilege. The law does not admit polygamy as a cause for seeking divorce by a Muslim woman. Of course, the corresponding right of a woman to have more than one husband in any circumstance is inconceivable, much less granted under law...A man can divorce at will just by uttering the word 'I divorce you' three times, anywhere, anytime without any witnesses. He is also not required by law to give any maintenance to the wife beyond the period of iddat, which is three months and a few days. If a man divorces his wife, he is obliged to pay mehr, a sum of money agreed upon at the time of marriage. This provision is also taken as security for Muslim women against easy divorce. But as long as the right to have four wives continues to be enjoyed by a man, he need not divorce his wife, if he does not wish to pay mehr, he can simply discard her or ill-treat her, while still taking another wife...so at every stage Muslim Law is fettered with inequities, with the women in every case being less equal (Bhatty, 1976: 102-4).

Commenting on this statement Lucy Carrol, an internationally acclaimed expert of MPL, says: ‘This is not scholarship, it is polemic. It is also factually incorrect as far as Muslim women in India are concerned’ (Carrol 1983:208). While Imtiyaz Ahmad, a noted sociologist known for his works on Indian Muslims, observes : ‘she shows little awareness of the possibility that the dismal picture she draws of Muslim women may not conform to existing reality and the inequities she draw attention to may not be so severe in practice’. (Ahmed 1976: xix). What is empirical reality? Are Muslim women being divorced in a way as it is projected?

Divorce is a social fact and, therefore, its causes and consequences should be understood in a social context. Explaining divorce solely in terms of law is reductionism. For, it undermines the significance of social factors in marital stability or instability and overlooks the discrepancy between law and practice. Indeed divorce is the product of a long process of marital discord, resulted due to adverse economic condition, disloyalty to a marital alliance, physical handicaps, psychological disturbances, etc. William Goode writes:

Of course divorce is one of the major solutions for an intense degree of marital disharmony and is to be found in most societies and nations. Yet I know of no contemporary society, primitive or industrialized, in which divorce actually valued. Divorce has its consequences for the society, the kin networks and the individual. And the consequences are tedious when not awkward, and burdensome when not destructive (Goode 1970: 139).
Every society wants to have stable family system and, therefore, creates social barriers to minimize both the propensity to and action of divorce. These barriers are of different types such as “the emotional, religious and moral commitment that a partner feels towards his marriage or towards his children, the external pressure of kin and community, of law, the church and other associational membership” (Levinger, 1970:108). As the effectiveness of these social barriers is not static and uniform, divorce rate varies from one group to another and within a group from time to time. Explaining the pattern and causes of divorce in a stratified society, Goode writes:

where there is a well developed stratification system, it would seem likely that the lower class (or caste) does not count on the stability of marriage, that the marriage itself cost less, less is invested in it than in the upper strata, the kin ties are less important and, therefore, the ambiguity created by divorce would not be taken so seriously as in the upper strata (Goode 1970:113).

Indian sociology and social Anthropology did not pay due attention to the study of divorce. Nor did Census of post-independent India and large scale surveys provide community-wise data about the phenomenon. However, available sociological evidences show that incidence of divorce and remarriage after divorce or death of a spouse were rare in higher castes and upper class while they frequently occurred among poor and people of lower castes until very recently in India. Such a pattern of marriage and divorce prevailed both among Hindus and Muslims. Bhatty who frequently attributes divorce to the single factor of law, herself observes in a village of eastern U.P.: “divorce permitted by Islam carries a strong stigma among the Ashraf, but to much less degree among the Non-Ashraf. In Kasauli I found that divorce, remarriage after divorce and marriage of widows were more frequent among the Non-Ashraf than among the Ashraf” (Bhatty 1980:203-4). Many changes have taken place in the practice of marriage and divorce during the last few decades. Middle class people, of both higher and lower castes, and those living in abject poverty are increasingly becoming unstable at marital relations, leading to constantly rising incidence of separation, desertion and divorce.

Madhu Jain reports: “divorce has now, in fact, gone democratic, fashionable, and mundane. Even school teachers, receptionists, petty traders, government servants, insurance agents and of course, housewives fill the courts” (Jain 1986: 86).

Incidences of divorce among Muslims have not been static and uniform. They differed from time to time and within a time from one community/class to another. Census of India, 1931, the last census to provide community-wise data, compiled statistics on ‘widowed persons’ which included divorced persons who remained unmarried. The percentage of such persons was less among Indian Muslims as compared to percentage of the whole country and of major communities. This is shown in following table no. 1.

It is evident from the table that the percentage of widowed male was 5.4 while it was 15.7 for females in the country. Muslims had only 4.4 percent of widowed males and 12.9 percent of widowed females. If we compare Muslims with Hindus the difference widens further as there were 5.7 percent males and 16.9 percent females widowed among Hindus. Even if one assumes higher rate of divorce among Muslims, the data show that Muslims were managing divorce and widowhood more effectively than the other community.
Table No: 1. ‘Widowed’ Persons in 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Unmarried</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Widowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India Excluding</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burma</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>33.8</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jains</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikhs</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1961, the Census of India conducted a survey of 587 selected villages with a sample of 133775 families, covering a period of 50 years, on the incidence of marriage with consanguineous and affinal relations in different parts of the country. The data of the survey show highest incidence of divorce among Muslims (6.06 percent), followed by Hindus (3.21 percent), Buddhists (3.07 percent), Jains (1.68 percent), Sikhs (0.91 percent) and Christians (0.47 percent). Adultery, barrenness and extreme poverty were found to be the main causes of divorce in most of the villages (Basu, 1985: 33). The survey reports that there has not been persistent trend of divorce in all religious communities over the period of 50 years. Incidence of divorce consistently increased in the first three decades while it declined in the two decades prior to the survey. As the first three decades was a period of social and political instability, it had adverse impact on marital relations. (Govt. of India, 1973: 4). It must also be noted that Muslims of villages were and still are extremely poor and landless, many of them have lost their marital partner due to partition of the country.

On the contrary data of some empirical studies of urban Muslims, conducted in the late 80s, show 1 percent divorce rate among them equal to National average. In his study of fertility behavior among Muslims of Kanpur city, M.E. Khan found only three cases of divorce among 330 couple respondents. The data was collected from Muslims concentrated wards representing all sections of the population. He writes:

> Though divorce can be easily obtained, its frequency is very low among all sections of Muslims. People view divorce with disapproval and social pressure forbids individuals to go in for such an extreme action. In our sample three cases, less than one percent, of divorce was reported. A widow or divorcee can remarry after completing her period of iddat. Widow remarriage is quite prevalent and encouraged by all sections of Muslims (Khan 1979:33).

Similar findings were also reported by Shibhani Roy in her study of Ashraf middle class families in Delhi and Lucknow. The investigation was conducted in the most populous Muslim areas and was based on a sample of 300 families, 150 each from Delhi and Lucknow. The respondents had white collar jobs, their income ranging between Rs.400 to 1,000 per month. She found only three cases of divorce in the entire sample. The causes were social and varied. She explains:

> In the first case the woman was divorce the very next day of her nikah due to her physical deformity. In the second case the husband was not of a balance mind and could not provide for his wife and children regularly. The woman after having two children realized that her husband was incapable of looking after the family. Moreover, the man used to keep away from the family for months together. The girl’s parents were sympathetic towards her and brought their daughter back to their home. Later the woman signed the divorce paper and succeeded in
getting her husband’s consent. But to get the possession of her children, she had to forego mehr. In these two cases the women were educated up to middle school. The last case is of a graduate girl who had to divorce her husband due to his infidelity. In this case the woman demanded her mehr worth Rs. 75,000/-. The divorce case went from the lower court and ultimately she won her case, the court granted her one-third of mehr money. Thus, woman being educated could face the situation with courage and determination (Roy 1979:90).

Sushila Jain in her study of Jaipur Muslims also found three cases of divorce in the sample of 375 respondents; 350 respondents (86.7) were married while 10.7 percent and 2.6 percent were unmarried and widowers respectively. Not only numbers of divorce cases were equal to that of reported by two studies cited above, causes of the divorce were also similar and reported in the same language as was used by Shibani Roy (Jain 1986:88).

The findings of these studies are verified by the data of large scale survey of Muslim women (detail of which is given below). The Survey reports that “of those who are married, over 85% remained married till they are widowed; and less than 1% of all women, urban and rural are divorced according to both the NFHS and the MWS. It would be correct than to say that, for the better part of their life (45 years on average), the unvarying norm for the majority of the women is their marital status (Hasan and Menon, 2004:97). It is further stated that “close to 98% of women remain married for the better part of their lives. Divorce, desertion, separation and widowhood accounted for less than 5% of the single women in our sample, not including those who have never been married.”( Hasan and Menon, 2004:237).

These evidences amply demonstrate that divorce is generally not valued by Muslims. If it occurs, its causes are mainly social. Not only husband pronounces divorce to his wife but wife also seeks divorce from her husband. In addition, frequency of divorce is not as much as it is believed. It is equal to national rate of divorce. Even if frequency of divorce is found to be high in some Muslim communities/class, evidences suggest that they manage after effects of divorce by the practice of remarriage after divorce or death of a spouse. In a nutshell, divorce does not appear a major cause of family disorganization and women’s destitution among Muslims. We do not intend to defend the provision of ‘triple divorce’ nor do we oppose reform in MPL.

Our argument is simple and empirical. Government of India enacted laws and introduced changes in existing civil and criminal laws for protecting women from exploitation and violence and for enabling them to raise their status. But many laws appear to be ineffective in making women empowered. For example, dowry demand and bride harassment are not curbed despite ‘Dowry Prohibition Act’. Family and social pressure generally prevent women from claiming their share in parental property despite their legal entitlement for it. Cumbersome laws of divorce have failed to arrest the growing trend of marital disharmony and divorce. In such a prevailing situation how can one expect empowerment of Muslim women by mere reform in MPL or imposition of UCC? No doubt, laws are made or reformed to enable people but they can not be enabled to avail the benefits of laws so long as existential condition of marginality prevails. Thus real issues of Muslim women’s empowerment emanate from their existential condition than from MPL.

**Existential condition:**

It is common knowledge that Muslims, constituting about 15% population of India, are the largest but highly marginalized minority community of the country. Spread over the length and breadth of the country, their majority population resides in most backward states like Uttar Pardesh(UP), Bihar, Bengal, and Assam. Most of them, being landless in villages and property-less in urban areas, eke out their livelihood by engaging themselves in petty and menial occupations. Subjected to many forms
of organized and unorganized torture and violence, they are compelled to live in dingy lanes, in dark rooms and in ‘ghettos’, deprived of civic amenities. Indeed, they are educationally most backward, economically impoverished and politically powerless community of the country. Being unable to reap the benefits of developmental process and remained virtually outside the net of government sponsored schemes of welfare, they have been continuously lagging behind other ‘socio-religious communities’ (SRCs) as per the findings of all individual researches, organizational surveys and Government appointed committees/commissions. A ‘High Level Committee’ (HLC), set up by Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt. of Indian early 1980 under the chairmanship of Dr. Gopal Singh to enquire into the condition of religious minorities, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), found Muslims most marginalized and educationally backward community of India. Their condition further worsened as reported by ‘Prime Minister’s High Level Committee’ on Muslims set up under the chairmanship of Justice Rajendar Sachar in 2005 and vindicated by findings of ‘National Commission on Linguistic and Religious Minorities’, constituted by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment under the chairmanship of Justice Rangnath Misra in 2005.

The condition of Muslim women is worse than that of Muslim men. A survey, with a sample of 10,000 households from 40 districts in 12 states with a large Muslim population, was undertaken by Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon in 2000 to explore the existential condition of Muslim women and compare it with that of Hindu women. However, 9541 households were interviewed, 80% of them were Muslims and remaining Hindus, the sample size for Hindus was appropriately weighted to enable inter community comparisons. The proportion of urban rural household selected was 60:40. The survey was conducted with a theoretical framework of social inequality and, therefore, Standard of Living Index (SLI) was employed to categorized surveyed households into five categories i.e. low, lower middle, middle, upper middle and high. It was found that Muslims have very low SLI (14.1%) less than even the ‘Other Backward Classes’(OBCs) and well below upper caste Hindus. The all India SLI underscored the lower standard of living of Muslims, below that of the Hindu Lower castes and significantly less than that of the Hindu upper Castes. Thus, on the whole, they were just slightly better off than the SCs population. (Hasan and Menon, 2004: 20-21).

The Survey found Muslim women most illiterate (57.55%), the percentage of illiterates among them rose to 84% in rural North. Although educational status of south Indian Muslim women was reported to be better than that of their counterparts in North India., it was below educational status of Hindu women. Illiteracy level of Muslim women was found lower than that of SC, ST and OBCs. However, their level of middle and secondary education was found slightly better than that of SC and ST women. But they lagged behind SC women in higher education. Overall “Muslim women across are more illiterate than Hindus – 59% of them have never attended school, less have completed it; in short, Muslim women fare more poorly than the average Hindu women in education. Very few Muslim women study beyond the primary stage and even fewer beyond the age of 15 years.” (Hasan and Menon, 2004:233).

‘Work Participation Rate’ (WPR) of Muslim women was also found to be lowest. Less than 15% of them “report themselves to be working. With the exception of those in a higher economic stratum, the regional picture , too , reflects the national trend of low women’s work participation-the proportion of non working women is huge, irrespective of place of residence or region. The one notable difference between Muslim and Hindu women in the Survey is that two thirds of Muslims are self employed or engaged in home based labour, probably the most exploited category of work other than bonded labour. Occupationally , they are in the informal sector, self employed in low paying often semi skilled home based work, causal labourers, and domestic workers, all of which would be categorized by poor
working conditions and low wages.” (Hasan and Menon, 2004:234). “In some key areas Muslim women are not even equal to women in the Hindu community. The difference can be seen most sharply in the socio-economic status of Muslim households, occupational distribution, asset structure and education. The standard of living of Muslims is generally poor and in comparative terms much below that of Hindu upper castes, lower even than that of OBC. Hindu-Muslim disparities in socio-economic status are statistically significant and constitute a major source differentiation in women’s status” (Hasan and Menon, 2004:232).

Educational backwardness and economic impoverishment are inter-twined. They are major cause of many socio-cultural disabilities. But why do Muslim women lag behind even to SCs women in education and work participation? The common perception is because of their religious beliefs and cultural practices. This stereotype is demolished by the findings of the Survey which reports that “socio-economic condition of households most certainly affects the prospects of school enrolment, that is the poorer the household the less likely that they will be able to send their children to school” (Hasan and Menon, 2004: 3). As majority of Muslim women belong to poor households, they probably prefer to engage their girl child in household work instead of enrolling them into schools. It is revealed that, “In the North zone, financial constraints are much more important for Muslims (proportions similar to all-India) than they are for Hindus, underlining once again the poverty of Muslim households in this part of the country, and this provides the most powerful explanation for the poor levels of Muslim women’s education in the North” (Hasan and Menon, 2004: 57). Contrary to the commonly held belief, the Survey does not find the practice of veil (purda) for Muslim women’s low WPR. It is observed that “it is probably more useful to look not at religion or at purda or conservatism for Muslim women’s work status, but at low education, lack of opportunities, low mobility, and domestic responsibilities as important inhibiting factors.”(Hasan and Menon, 2004: 235).

Being most illiterate and impoverished citizens of India, Muslim women deserve affirmative action for their empowerment. But neither have they been provided reservation facility nor any meaningful policy is formulated for their welfare. They are virtually neglected and unprotected citizens of the country. Indeed, reservation facility to SCs enabled them to leave Muslims and Muslim women behind in education, mainly in higher education and in work participation, especially in regular salaried employment and white collar occupations. Reservation is a catalyst for change and empowerment.

Government welfare schemes are another mechanism for ameliorating the condition of marginalized individuals and groups. No doubt many welfare schemes for the welfare of women have been devised in post-independent India. But the benefits of these schemes did not percolate down to Muslim women. They have also been deprived of welfare schemes exclusively designed for raising their status. For, either these are insubstantial or implemented ineffectively. For example, ‘Area Intensive’ scheme was launched in 1992 for promoting primary and secondary level of education in 325 Minority Concentration Blocks/tehsil of 89 districts of the country. Opening of ‘multi stream residential schools for girls was one of the components of the scheme. State governments and voluntary organizations, through which this centrally funded schemes was supposed to be implemented, did show little concern to translate the scheme into reality. The fund of the scheme was either diverted to other purpose or lapsed. Only a few multi stream residential schools for girls were opened, that too in South India (Anita Nuna, 2009). Thus, it is evident that the real source of Muslim women’ disempowerment lie in their lowest level of education, economic impoverishment and deprivation of welfare schemes. Their endemic illiteracy and poverty made them vulnerable to many patriarchal beliefs and practices. Hence, government protection-reservation and welfare schemes exclusively for them-is urgently needed for their empowerment.
Everyday Insecurity:

“Hindu-Muslim riots and anti-Muslim pogroms have been endemic in India since independence. They have occurred and recurred in many cities and towns throughout the country, but especially in the northern and western parts. Their frequency and intensity have fluctuated from time to time and place to place but hardly a month passes in India in which a Hindu – Muslim riot does not occur that is large enough to be noted in the press. But there are also many such events on a smaller scale that occur much more frequently. Indeed, it is likely that not a day passes without many instances of quarrel, fight and fracases between Hindu and Muslim in different places in India, many of which carry the potential for conversion into large-scale riots in which arson, looting, and killing may take place”. Writes Paul Brass.

In every incidence of Hindu-Muslim violence, no matter who engineers it and who initiates it, Muslims are the worst sufferers as per the findings of every enquiry committee/commission appointed by the government and non-government organization. They are brutally assaulted, tortured, maimed and killed. Their women are molested, paraded naked in public and gang raped. Even still born baby is reported to be beheaded after continuously raping a pregnant woman for hours in ‘Gujrat Carnage’ of 2002. Their hard earned property is looted and houses are razed to the ground. Law enforcing agencies, instead of curbing the violence, are reported to be discriminatory against Muslims. Some incidence of communal violence appeared to be supported by the state and assume the form of ‘Muslims cleansing’.

Rapidly growing communalism and communal violence are increasingly forcing Muslims to compact in dingy lanes, in congested mohallas/wards and in slums, bereft of civic amenities and educational facilities. Muslim concentrated localities are heavily populated by poverty stricken and diseases afflicted people and hopeless unemployed youths, many of whom are vulnerable to drug addiction, gambling and crime. They are what Seabrook and Siddiqui (2011) called ‘People Without History’. In such an unsecured social environment parents see security of their young daughters in marriage. Those who desire education for their daughters become hopeless due to lack of opportunities within their localities on the one hand and; on the other, are unwilling to send them outside localities because of perceived or real insecurity. As a result a large number of Muslim girls remained uneducated and married in tender age.

Everyday insecurity also make Muslim women, both educated and uneducated, reluctant to work outside their localities, resulting into their low work participation and dwindling prospects of regular salaried employment and mobility.

Violence is discontinuous but hate propaganda, prejudices and discrimination against Muslims are not. Muslims, like any helpless and continuously victimized minority community, are responding in different ways to their increasingly demonizing images and everyday insecurity. Some are taking refuge in religion while others are asserting their identity in public spheres. Some are reactionary and conservative, the first target of this response is women who are believed to be both guardian and symbol of group pride and identity in Indian society. Their freedom and liberty are opposed and patriarchal codes for everyday life behaviour are prescribed to them. Opposition to reform in MPL may also be seen as a product of growing communalism. Even a sensible and meaningful voice of reform in MPL is seen with suspicion and fear. For, imposition of UCC and scrapping of MPL is one of the agendas of Hindu right wing social and political organizations.
Conclusion

Preceding facts and analysis amply demonstrate a complete mismatch between ‘constructed’, ‘projected’ and commonly perceived images of Muslim women and that exist in reality. Causes of Muslim women’s disempowerment are commonly believed to be permanent and laying in their religion, laws and cultural practices. Hence, it is widely propagated that Muslim women can not be empowered so long as they follow codes of Shariat and MPL remain in existence. This culture essentialist discourse on Muslim women’s empowerment is neither scientific nor empirical. It is mere reductionism. Such a discourse overlooks the discrepancies between laws and practices as well as undermines the significance of existential condition and political disposition in the empowerment or disempowerment of women. Available empirical evidences explicitly show that incidence and patterns of divorce among Muslims are similar to other communities despite dissimilarities in the laws of divorce. Practice of veil is not found a cause for low WPR of Muslim women. Statistic and analysis of declining female sex ratio in Indian population reveal that girl child is more safe in Muslim families than in families of other communities. (Vani K. Borooah, 2005). Indeed, embedded poverty, high illiteracy, constantly increasing everyday insecurity and deprivation of welfare schemes are some of the major causes of Muslim women’s disempowerment. This is not to defend MPL in its present form. It requires changes. However, changes in MPL or even imposition of UCC will likely be ineffective in making Muslim women empowered so long they remain illiterate, poor and insecure. Therefore, immediate needs of Muslim women are to implement their ‘Fundamental Rights’ such as Right to education, Right to work, Right to safety and security to life and property, Right to social justice and so on.

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Social Struggle of the ‘Empowered’ Women in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Over the last few years women empowerment in Bangladesh has acquired centre attention in country's development arena. Research findings portray that women in rural areas of Bangladesh are showing outstanding performance in both their personal and professional lives and therefore have become a role model for many developing or least developed countries. However, there is hardly any authentic research on the socio-economic condition of the urban educated professional women of Bangladesh. Although it is assumed by many that women with professional success are empowered, there is no significant study that endorses this preconceived notion of the people of Bangladesh. Keeping this void in mind, this study endeavors to understand the social and familial status of educated and professional women residing in Dhaka city of Bangladesh. From 135 survey-questionnaires and 12 case studies, this study reveals that financial solvency cannot be considered as single most important indicator for women to be considered as empowered.

Keywords: Women empowerment, social struggle, women in Bangladesh

Introduction

Over the last few decades women empowerment in Bangladesh has achieved central attention in the world development arena. This can be accredited to the successful implementation of the microcredit program and Nobel Prize winner Professor Muhammad Yunus. Innumerable studies have shown that women are performing well to improve their standard of living in rural areas of Bangladesh (Amin et al. 1998, Chowdhury and Alam 1997, Ackerly 1995 & 1997, Hashemi et al. 1996). In fact empowerment of women and microfinance are often pronounced together that depicts clear dominance of microfinance model in the process of empowering women, as well as its impact on the rural and urban poor of Bangladesh. It is widely agreed among policy actors of development and many feminist activists and scholars that Bangladeshi women have made significant achievements through the model of microfinance and the ready-made garment (RMG) industries since the 1990s (Mahmud 2003, Kabeer 2001a, 2001b, and 1999, Goetz and Gupta 1996).

The issue of empowerment in Bangladesh was raised first by Alam and Matin in the year 1984 (Nazneen et al. 2011). Alam and Matin wrote an influential and critical article analyzing the women in development (WID) discourse in Bangladesh that initiated a huge wave in next few years. The article investigated various studies and policy documents produced by the feminist scholars, donor agencies and the government of Bangladesh. It uncovered the conditions under which these were produced, and by whom. However, neither of these writers coined the term ‘women’s empowerment’; rather they addressed the issue of the advancement of women, their status and condition, etc. and more specifically ‘women’s emancipation’. After the new millennia started, ‘women’s empowerment’ became an entrenched concept, surprisingly used across women in development (WID), women and development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD) consistently. All three groups started to promote the idea with interventions, policies and programmes. This focus on women’s empowerment partly reflects the changes in the discourse of international development and the mainstreaming of WID and GAD. Perhaps it is also a result of the changes and challenges that Bangladeshi women have experienced which Alam and Matin noted. (Nazneen et al. 2011)

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However, having portrayed a very positive and progressive image of the rural women of Bangladesh, it is likely to create an impression that the situation of the urban women, particularly those who hold a white-collar job along with a good academic degree, is also satisfactory and progressive. Again, if satisfactory and progressive are two abstract adjectives that need to be explained with proper measure, we can formulate the idea in a different way. The perception is that if women in rural areas, who generally have no significant academic degree – and as a logical outcome – no well-paid job, are backward and subordinated and therefore going through a lot of struggle, then women in urban areas with all these desired achievements, e.g. education and well-paid job, are manumitted and therefore empowered. The showcased success of microfinance model, which is in fact economically oriented, in empowering women, mostly in rural areas though, added more color to this preconceived notion of empowered-urban-white collar women.

Holding this position in mind this paper has been prepared with an attempt to understand the social and family status of empowered women professionals in Bangladesh as well as to learn of their social struggle. To explain the issue a few indicators have been identified. The major indicators are gender roles, equality and equity, decision making (both shared and personal) and sharing psychological and financial consciousness (Cook 1993).

The Notion of Empowerment

Empowerment has different definitions to different people and often receives a mix of reactions. Especially, when the word empowerment is tagged with women, a look of amusement, surprise, hopelessness, stress, even witt may appear on people’s faces. In Bangladesh and some other countries, a common assumption persists that the word empowerment actually disempowered women in many ways in their regular life process (Islam 2004), and while anecdotal, it cannot be ignored. The reason behind this might be either one of the following two grounds or both. First, the model of empowerment did not fit well in the process of development, or second, the audience and their cultural set are not prepared enough to accommodate this model. However, the reason might also be something entirely different but that is not the focus of this paper. Rather, focus of the paper is an effort to challenge the preconceived notion that women are empowered if they acquire an academic degree and a white-collar job and are thus released from social struggle.

Studies agree that Empowerment is not only about opening up the access to decision making and mobility or economic stability of an individual, but also includes the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space (Rowlands 1995). Empowerment is sometimes described as the ability to make choices and the involvement of being able to shape what choices are on offer. Empowerment corresponds to women challenging existing power structures that subordinate women. As such, what is seen as empowering in one context may not act similarly in another (Oxaal and Baden 1997).

The dominant – and indeed officially stated – narrative is that substantial progress has been made regarding women’s rights and status, though there are persistent and emergent obstacles to women’s empowerment (Government of Bangladesh 2005, World Bank 2008). Here, the interesting point is how a country like Bangladesh, which is labeled as one of the poorest countries in the classic patriarchal belt (Townsend and Momsen 1987, quoted by Nazneen et al. 2011, p. 8), made these substantial achievements and ensured the first round of victories for women’s rights (Government of Bangladesh 2005). Huge amount of literature is available regarding the empowerment of rural women but very few works can be found about the empowerment of well-educated and highly-paid working women and the
scenario of their social struggle in Bangladesh. This paper, hence, focuses on the empowerment of the urban educated and employed women.

**Woman: a Corporate or a Mother?**

Some studies depict that most employed mothers juggle the heavy burden of employment and *unpaid* housework and childcare because traditional gender role expectations persist around the world, and child-care as well as housekeeping remain principally women’s responsibility (Collijn *et al.* 1996, Rimmer & Rimmer 1997). It has also been found that, housework and childcare tasks may possess characteristics as demanding as those of paid employment (Schooler *et al.* 1984) and performing such tasks regularly may be associated with chronic pressure which may result in generalized psychological distress (Pleck 1985, Schooler *et al.* 1984). In fact, domestic demands may contribute at least as much as occupational factors do to women’s health and well-being (Bartley *et al.* 1992, McBride 1990).

Education has been considered as one of the key indicators of women empowerment in Bangladesh and its surrounding areas since almost the beginning (Kandpal *et al.* 2012, Sharma 2007, Kamal and Zunaid 2008). However, it has different outcomes depending on different socio-economic levels and their respective priorities. If we look back, we see that the education of girls and women in England since 1790 was class based (Purvis 1996) and the syllabus women followed was quite different from the mass where the participants were men and boys (John 1986). During 1830s women in England were educated at home or in small institutions and the academic content was very low and basically focused on domestic science, cooking, laundry, needle work, and sewing. Gradually, due to industrial revolution that enriched the standard of living, gave rise to a competitive world environment, lessened dependency on parents, husband and children, forced to shift the attention from domestic skills to paid work (Pamela 1988, Gomersall 1988, Jordan 1999, Delamont 1978).

Since basic institutional training followed less competitive modules, women do not automatically get access to white-collar jobs. Initially, women were involved as Governesses, midwives and nurses (Elaine 1972, Tuke and Tuke 1939). In the course of time, women began to take forefront places and now women are equally competing with the men in the professional world alongside their unpaid works and challenges. Due to multi-tasking and demand both at home and work place, women face immense stress in both of the places (Wallston *et al.* 1987, Karasek & Theorell 1990).

The dominant traditional beliefs regarding women always claim that women’s place is at home and it includes marriage, motherhood, etc. but excludes paid work. In contrast, nontraditional beliefs prioritizes paid career. However, women who are simultaneously involved in both are, in majority cases, victims of stressful situations and the perception held by other women (Plutzer 1988, Thornton *et al.* 1983, Thornton & Freedman 1979). Attitudes towards appropriate gender-role-behavior have been found to be affected by age, education, work experience, mother’s work experience, and mother’s attitudes towards gender roles (Buschman and Lenart 1996, Cook 1993, Klein 1984, Thornton *et al.* 1983, Lueptow 1980, Thorntorn & Freedman 1979).

**Measuring the Challenge of Working Women**

Karasek’s *job demands control* (JDC) model is a good effort at explaining the situation that has conflicting demands and multifaceted challenges. They considered both of the factors – job demands as well as home and personal life demands – in their model (Karasek & Theorell 1990). It is stated in the model that the level of stress an individual experiences depends on both the personal and
organization level demands. Although most of the studies on the JDC model have focused on stress at work (Karasek & Theorell 1990), there are a few others that have studied the non-work stress also (Karasek et al. 1987, Landsbergis 1988). Stress is common in many life situations and this model may be generalized to non-work environments such as the home (Barnett et al. 1987). It has been established that generally women have a heavier burden of housework than men do (Beckwith 1992, Pleck 1985), and that most feminine tasks (such as preparing meals, cleaning up after meals) are done on a daily basis with little control (i.e. discretion) (Barnett & Shen 1997). Thus, from the standpoint of JDC model, it has been theorized that women’s domestic and family role is also stressful because they often combine high psychological demands with low control (Kushnir and Melamond 2006).

If we turn to marriage we see that equal role of both partners in decision-making is a major component of this. Mirowsky (1985) argued that in marriage the psychological benefits of greater personal control may be counteracted by the need for reciprocity and mutual control, and he developed a method to assess mutual control in terms of decision-making equity. The study considers the major decisions e.g. where to live, where to go on vacation, whether the wife should work, and whether to relocate because of the husband’s work etc., are taken by whom, by husband, or by wife, or by both? Similar domains are included in a measure developed by Hibbard and Pope (1993).

These measures, which indicate how many important family decisions are made jointly, are simplistic. They largely neglect two domains that are fundamental to most of women’s roles: housework and childcare. These have been documented as being central to the woman’s burden of responsibility (Dean 1992) and psychological distress, particularly when the children are young (Thoits 1986). Since women generally do childcare and housework, it is likely that they have greater decision control in these domains than their husbands do. However, in reality, apart from personal decisions about own life, only few other decisions or in some cases no decision can be made by the women in Bangladesh (Kabeer 2005, Kandpal 2012). Many studies also showed that women in both managerial positions and clerical jobs (who provide management support services) are considered to be in relatively highly stressful environments with a high burnout risk (Frankenhaeuser et al. 1989, Lam et al. 1987, Pretty et al. 1992). Managers, however, are likely to enjoy a higher level of decision latitude (perceived personal control) at work (Kushnir & Melamed 1991) in the working environment but the situation at home is not very different than other working or non-working women.

We find a seven-item-scale of marital satisfaction in Spainer (1976) where he showed that marital satisfaction depends on the following indicators: a) the way money is handled in your relationship, b) the things you and your partner do together when you go out visiting or for entertainment, c) the amount of affection in your relationship, d) the way chores around the house are performed in your relationship, e) the way you and your partner deal with in-laws, f) sexual relations in your relationship, and g) religious beliefs in your relationship. We utilized this scale to workout a four-page questionnaire to administer for this research.

**Methodology of the Study**

The present study has a non-experimental research design, and it examines the nature and behavior of the variables as well as the relationship between several variables. The data have been collected from several selective leading organizations. The organizations are telecommunication companies (Airtel, Banglalink, Grameen Phone Limited, and Robi), multinational corporations (MNCs) (British American Tobacco, Unilever), international development organizations (DFID, UNDP and World
Bank), leading national and international banks (AB Bank, Bank Asia, City Bank, Dhaka Bank, Eastern Bank Limited, HSBC and Standard Chartered Bank), and leading public and private universities (East West University (EWU), Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), Jahangirnagar University (JU), North South University (NSU), and the University of Dhaka (DU)).

Data have been collected in two phases. First, three post-graduate students were selected based on their experience to conduct the first phase survey. The first questionnaire was a very brief one containing a few questions in it. A simple random sample survey was conducted to identify 500 students (both male and female) and they were asked to make a list as well as to rank five of their desired jobs. Based on their feedback the following professions were chosen for selecting our respondents for the second phase.

Table 1: First Phase Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization Types</th>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>51.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Banks</td>
<td>121</td>
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<td>Multinational Companies and Media</td>
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<td>International Organizations</td>
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<td>Private and Public Universities</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>500</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second phase, one representative from each organization was selected using personal reference based on the first phase survey result with his or her consent of being the contact person. That contact person distributed the four page questionnaires following the criteria listed below. These criteria have been set to control the effect of other variables perceived in the previous works and also to identify a particular group that has been mostly left out.

- Aged within 25 to 40 years.
- Have to be married with child/children.
- Monthly gross salary is minimum 40,000/- BDT (Forty Thousand Bangladeshi Taka).

These criteria have been set to control the effect of other variables perceived from the previous study and also to ensure that the collected data is representative of specific group of professional women who have been mostly left out and then the findings could be measured more specifically. (Bryman 2004)

The second questionnaire is a four page self-reporting one comprising 3 scales and a few other measures to address the local specificity and the focus of the study. Questions have been set in order concerning the issue of understandability and user-friendly-ness. Three scales have been utilized on the basis of the past studies of Spainer’s (1976) seven item scale theory of marital satisfaction, Karasek’s (1987 and 1990) job demands control (JDC) model, and Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Viert’s (1996) satisfaction with division of domestic labor and marital satisfaction.
A pilot study was conducted and necessary changes were incorporated into the questionnaire as per necessity based on the pilot study. The sample size was initially 150, however, a set of 135 respondents finally have been selected and analyzed from five different types or organizations. Some 15 respondents have not been counted due to not filling the questionnaire properly. As per the result shown in table 1 the sample were collected in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of Organizations*</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Banks</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multinational Companies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Organizations</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Universities</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Categories of organizations were identified based on the respondents’ choice

The organizations that are mentioned by the respondents have been chosen under each category. We also conducted ten in-depth interviews taking two participants from each category to test the reliability of the study. These respondents were introduced by the concerned contact persons from each group of organizations.

The question contains a number of personal issues that all the respondents might not be comfortable with to answer – this might be one of its limitations. However, a consent form was supplied to the respondents to ensure authentic response. Another could be that the survey questionnaires which each representative distributed to her familiar group may hold the potential of unintentional bias. No male respondents have been taken in this study and all female respondents are working-women.

Results and Discussion

The purpose of the present study is to understand the situation of urban-educated woman who holds a white-collar job and, hence. assumed empowered. It argues that the common perception regarding this particular group of women is an illusion and romanticized. The models of empowerment tasted success on certain levels that blurred the limitations and consequences of the same models on certain others. Critiques argue that the conventional model – if applied with no concern of contextual situation – may enhance the challenges and struggle of women compared to their same-gender others or male counterparts.

From the data we see that women with a white-collar job go through a lot of social struggle that is no less than that of women who do not go out for work. We cannot say exactly how they differ since we did not compare these two groups in our study. However, from the previous studies, we can easily identify that a highly paid employment opportunity does not necessarily empower women unless other issues are solved along with economic freedom. From this study we see that though traditional values
see men as providers, almost all working women share the household expenditure with their husband (Table 3). In fact nearly eighty percent of the respondents share fifty percent or more of their household expenditure (Table 4) and that in many cases require their full income.

### Table 3: Nature of Financial Involvement at Family Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Expenses</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only husband</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Financial Involvement of Women at Family Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Household Expenditure by Wife in %</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75 and above</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subscribing to Spainer’s scale of marital satisfaction, we see that in majority of cases women do not possess a healthy marital relationship that can reduce their added stress because of working outside. For example, forty four percent women do not know their husbands’ income and eighty one percent women are unaware of the savings of their husbands (Tables 5a and 5b).

### Table 5a: The Way Money is Managed 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Know Husband’s Monthly Income</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5b: The Way Money is Managed 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aware of Husband’s Savings</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the other hand, if we look at the situation of women at home when they come back from the office, it is still the same household that has a mother working days and nights and a ruler who has all provisions. On one side of the picture, men welcome bounties through their wives’ job while denying the traditional role of a man but on the other side, when it is about their wives, they remain highly traditional, and wives cannot come out of their set gender role ideology. This non-cooperation affects women in two ways. First, it adds the burden of a number of tasks that literally makes the life of a woman difficult and second, it alienates women from her existence and creates lack of identity and huge psychological distress. A woman then is reduced to a woman hence guilty. Table 6 and 7 support this notion of multifold stress where we see husbands are not extending their cooperation and support while their wives are doing so.
Table 6: Sharing of Domestic Labor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Husband when Returns Home</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping child/children with their studies (along with TV)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Husband’s Participation in Child Rearing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Spent with Children</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only when necessary</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefly every day</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sexual and marital satisfactions are two other important indicators that according to Spainer (1976) and Karasek (1990) reduce the stress in women. Our study reveals some striking information, which are highly indicative and supportive of the argument proposed here. We see that the intimate relationship of the respondents is inadequate and in some cases shows unhealthy situation (Table 8) and most of the women do not enjoy quality time with their husbands (Table 9).

Table 8: Intimate Relations between Husbands and Wives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Intimacy</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once a Week</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a Month</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few Times a Week</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice a Month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Intensity of Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Time with Spouse</th>
<th>Respondents’ Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Only When Necessary</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a Week</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Remember when was it last time</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot explain</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyday</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In-laws’ support is another vital aspect in women’s social struggle, especially in Bangladesh where the bondages are quite strong and require good concentration. From the current study we see that women generally lack a lot in this respect (Table 10), even during crucial situation, e.g. pregnancy (Tables 11 and 12). Combining all these, their marital life has become the synonym of liability in many cases (Table 13).

Table 10: Support Women Enjoy from In-laws
Support from in Laws | Respondents’ Number | %
--- | --- | ---
Supportive | 28 | 21
Indifferent | 31 | 23
Not supportive | 76 | 56

Table 11: Assistance during Pregnancy from Husbands and In-laws

| Assistance During Pregnancy (both husband and in-laws) | Respondents’ Number | % |
--- | --- | ---
Regularly* | 103 | 76
Hardly | 27 | 20
Never | 5 | 4

Table 12: Assistance after Child Birth from Husbands and In-laws

| Assistance After Child Birth | Respondents’ Number | % |
--- | --- | ---
Hardly | 105 | 78
Regularly | 22 | 16
Never | 9 | 7

Table 13: Factors Keeping Marriage Intact

| Factors Keeping Marriage Intact | Respondents’ Number | % |
--- | --- | ---
All three | 45 | 33
Children | 35 | 26
Society | 32 | 24
Love | 19 | 14
Don’t Know | 4 | 3

Conclusion
It seems from the above discussion, the initial proposal in which the assumption was that the way economic engagement significantly empowered the rural women, it will empower the urban women too who hold a white-collar job and thus their life will be less stressful – is not factual. This study strengthens the idea that empowerment is not only about opening up the access to economic capability of an individual, but also an ability to make choices and to be able to shape what choices are on offer and sharing responsibilities. This study compliments the previous studies, which depict most employed mothers juggling the heavy burden of employment and unpaid housework and childcare because traditional gender role expectations persist around the world, and child-care as well as housekeeping remain principally women’s responsibility and over the period of time it did not change notably. Rather we can say that highly-paid women’s job lessens men’s responsibilities and relieves them from more financial involvement along with other social and family accountabilities. And in women’s case it is quite the opposite and tragic. Instead of getting relief from the stress and being empowered, women’s economic engagement invites more stress and frustration to their life.
Apparently they look empowered in the economically deterministic perspective that is dominant in the model of empowerment and frequently prescribed by the national and international agencies. Although women’s economic engagement fairly reduces their stress and ensures empowerment, it is limited to a particular level and to certain extent only. However, on the higher level the response is critically challenging for them that gradually alienates women from their family, society and workplace.

References


Female Entrepreneurship in Bangladesh: Constraints, Motivation and Success

Munsura Rahmatullah\textsuperscript{1} and Farhana Zaman\textsuperscript{2}

Abstract: This article attempts to examine the small enterprise in three regions (Dhaka, Chittagong and Rangpur) of Bangladesh at two levels: the individual and the enterprise. This paper aims to investigate the constraints female entrepreneurs face during their initial stage and continued operation of their business, and the work-family conflicts they face. It also looks at the reasons for starting a new business and their success factors. Field study method is applied in an effort to develop case studies of successful female entrepreneurs in Bangladesh; hence the focus was on in-depth research as opposed to having a large sample size. The Likert-scale\textsuperscript{3} was also used to measure the work-family conflict. The initial problems faced by the female entrepreneurs seem similar to those confronted by female in other countries. However, the findings shows lower levels of work-family conflicts among Bangladeshi female entrepreneurs who seem to differ with other countries in terms of their reasons for starting a business and succeeding in the venture.

Keywords: Female entrepreneurs, small enterprise, work-family conflict, Bangladesh

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is recognised as the engine of growth in economies world wide. Over the past 20 years female owned businesses grew dramatically in number, revenues and employment. For example, in Norway and Canada nearly 60-65 per cent of the new businesses were started by females (Broehl, 1982; Comper, 1991; Gatewood, 2004). Females are increasingly turning to entrepreneurship as a way of coping with the “glass ceiling” that seems to prevent them from reaching to management levels in organisations (Morrison et al., 1987). Others find that entrepreneurship provides them with greater satisfaction and flexibility (Broehl, 1982; Belcourt et al., 1991). This phenomenal trend also has been seen in many Asian countries such as China, Indonesia, Singapore, and India (GEM, 2008 and ILO, 2012).

Entrepreneurship has become an important profession among the women of Bangladesh today at various levels of the society, both in the urban and the rural areas. The reason for the interest varies according to the different classes of the society (Storey, 2008). Where women of the poorer sections of the society, especially of the rural areas, have been forced into off-house income through entrepreneurship for economic solvency; the women of the middle class families, who have always lived restricted lives, have today, ventured into entrepreneurship as a challenge and an adventure into a new world of economic activity. On the other hand, many women have taken up entrepreneurship and become businesswomen not necessarily to earn and survive and raise the living standards, but to form their careers and become professionals in order to establish their rights through the development of a sector and thereby contribute towards the progress of the society and the nation (Abir, 2007).

However, the entry of female into business is a recent development trend in the orthodox, traditional socio-cultural society. Though the exact statistics is difficult to get, 30 years ago, the share of business set up and operated by female members was only less than 1% which is lower than the numbers observed in the advanced world (Baumol, 1993).

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\textsuperscript{2} Department of Sociology, Jagannath University. Email: fzaman_soc@yahoo.com
\textsuperscript{3} A method of ascribing quantitative value to qualitative data, to make it amenable to statistical analysis. A numerical value is assigned to each potential choice and a mean figure for all the responses is computed at the end of the evaluation or survey.
A number of research in USA, Canada and Scandinavia indicate that the constraints or barriers facing by the male and female entrepreneurs are different. While general models of entrepreneurship proposed by Cooper, and Dunkelberg (1981) may hold true for both genders, entrepreneurship is an activity that is situational and culturally bound (Alam et al., 2011). The role of female has traditionally been seen by both male and female to be wife and mother. This perspective combined with lack of work experience and managerial experience confronted by females (Fisher et al., 1993), may result in differing market entry choices in the case of female entrepreneurs. Females bear almost all household responsibilities which are ultimately leading towards increased family conflict.

While many studies in western nations examined the above issues in the context of women entrepreneurs, very few studies have focused on female from developing nations in general and that for Bangladesh in particular. Female entrepreneurship is an important aspect of economic development for any nation. While there have been several studies on female managers in South-east Asia (Alam et al., 2011), very few studies are on female entrepreneurs identifying their constraints and success. This study enriches the literature by examining female entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. It investigates the initiation stage and current problems confronted by female entrepreneurs in mainly three regions: Dhaka, Chittagong and Rangpur. This study also looks at their reasons for starting a new venture and the determining factors that lead to their success as entrepreneurs.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Entrepreneurship has been approached from various perspectives by scholars of different disciplines, including economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, history and political science (Bjerke, 2007). On the other hand, the field of female entrepreneurship is in an initial stage of paradigm development. According to GEM (2011) and Khan (2004), the individual studies on female entrepreneurship are fragmented and unrelated and describe only small segments of the female entrepreneurial population. The theoretical tools developed in other areas are frequently applied that are weak in validity and reliability. Cooper’s (1991) framework identifies three groups of influences that affect the start-up and growth of new venture: antecedent influences (i.e. the background factors such as family influence and genetic factors that affect motivation, skills and knowledge), incubator experience (i.e. the nature of organisation that the entrepreneur was employed in just prior to starting a new venture- the skills learned there), and environmental factors (e.g. economic conditions, access to venture capital and support services, role models etc.). Brush & Hisrich (1991) explores the relationship between the Cooper’s (1991) “antecedent influences” on women entrepreneurs including: personal background, educational and occupational experiences, motivations, skills and knowledge and the growth of their venture (Kirzner, 1997).

Prior research indicates that male and female differ on some of the factors. As examples, females have greater difficulties in acquiring venture capital, financial resources and skills (Aldrich, 1989; Hurley, 1991). They also have fewer informal support systems and networks (Barber et. al., 1989) as well as less direct, relevant experience than men (Stevenson, 1986). Other constraints faced by female entrepreneurs include being accepted as female in business, lack of a role model, lack of professional interaction, difficulties in gaining the confidence of their clients and suppliers, lack of adequate training, and lack of related experience (Hisrich, 1989; Kent, 1988; Timmons, 1986; Belcourt et al., 1991).

A considerable number of studies have found that conflicts between personal life and career pursuits are the most significant barrier that female entrepreneurs face (Belcourt, et al., 1991; Abir, 2007).
Spouses are generally not very involved in their wives' businesses, are not supportive of them and expect them to continue with their household duties despite the demands of their business (Goffee and Scasse, 1985). This is not surprising for until recently females were confined to private and domestic roles. But the role of entrepreneur does not conform to the traditional roles that females are expected to play in society. These issues, and others, may result in more family conflicts for females than their husbands (World Bank, 2012).

Major studies of western nations reveal that although the main reasons for establishing an enterprise are similar for male and female, some differences have also been found. According to Lavoie (1992), potential for financial gain is not the primary motivating factor for female entrepreneurs rather they are more likely to initiate a new venture for the challenge and opportunity for self-fulfilment. While the others (Bjerke, 2007; Birth, 1999 & 2001; Berard & Brown, 1994) have suggested that females are more likely to start an enterprise for control over the quantity and quality of the work and as a way of coping with the "glass-ceiling". Most probably for these reasons Abir (2007) and Storey (2008) assert that women entrepreneurship is not an easy task in Bangladesh. "Becoming an entrepreneur is an evolution of encountering, assessing, and reacting to a series of experiences, situations, and events produced by political, economic, social and cultural changes" (Casson, 1997).

It is thus evident that almost all of the research on this issue is done in the developed world. Given the differences in economic, cultural and technological environment between a developing nation like Bangladesh and the developed world, it is likely that some of the findings are not applicable to the developing world in general and that of Bangladesh in particular. For example, the research in developed nation does not consider religion as a constraint but religion is a big factor for women in Bangladesh. The women of Bangladesh have more social responsibility than their counterpart in the developed world. Given the complexities in the social environment and administrative structure, women's entrepreneurship in Bangladesh is more challenging.

Study Objectives
This study aims to investigate the female entrepreneurship development of Bangladesh from the perspectives of birth, growth and success. Thus, more specifically the study aims to explore:
1. the profile of female entrepreneur of Bangladesh on the basis of both functional and indicative approaches;
2. the constraints/barriers confronted by the female entrepreneurs with an emphasis on the type and nature of their family conflicts as well as a few other constraints;
3. the factors contributing to their success; and
4. finally, the study attempts to recommend some policies to reduce the hindrances and to pave the way of their success.

Research Design and Methodology
Research Design
Research design provides a frame work for collection and analysis of data (Yin 1989). This study uses a descriptive design, given that it aims to describe what exists with regard to exploring the rationale for the provision of entrepreneurship development, specifically women entrepreneurship development in Bangladesh. However, it goes beyond the scope of a descriptive study as it aims to explore and analyze the descriptive results by responding their questions. In addition, it adopts the interpretative method with the intention of providing further meaning to the results by responding questions. The framework of the study contains both description-what things are like, and explanation-why are they
like that. Hence, this study is constructed within descriptive and analytical designs, as a case study design framework with cross-cultural data. The research tool was a questionnaire, which was developed and distributed among sample entrepreneurs, institutional representatives, etc.

Research Method

Quantitative measurement is perceived as more accurate, valid, reliable and objective than qualitative measurement due to the former’s scientific nature. However, this does not mean that qualitative research is less valuable or reliable. Research methods include specific instruments, quantitative research such as structured interviews and participant observation. These techniques include the need to listen and observe people from the chosen sample (Casson 1997).

This section presents an overview of data collection methods based on the field studies conducted by the authors in 2004 and 2009 in Bangladesh. A sample of 25 female entrepreneurs who were in operation for at least 6 years (from the list of Borrowing Bank’s and Chamber of Commerce and Business Association) and employed at least 5-7 workers (according to the definition of Small enterprise by Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industry, BSCIC, a government agency), were included in this study.

The list of entrepreneurs was created by the researchers with the help of women association, bank’s borrower list, and local chamber of commerce (business association). Each case begins with making a profile of entrepreneur and enterprise and followed by the questions on: start-up decision and formation process, present status, and future prospect of their business. Finally, the questionnaire ends with the questions on intrinsic and extrinsic constraints and success factors of their business. The researchers contacted the respondents by physical visits and telephone. The interviews were 2-3 hours in length, and were followed by visits to their production sites in order to gain a better insight about their operations. An open-ended questionnaire was used to guide the interviews for both qualitative and quantitative data. This process is an effort to develop case studies on female entrepreneurs of the regions of Bangladesh; hence, the focus was on in-depth research as opposed to having a large sample size (Yin, 1989). At the end of each interview, the respondents were requested to provide their views on removing existing constraints and making their path smoother. Investigation on the area of work-family conflicts (parent, spouses and homemakers) were measured by Likert scale using five different statements. The items measured time and strain based family conflicts for measuring the barriers at the initial stage and the time of interview. A list of important barriers was submitted and subjects were asked to check as many as were applicable.

The regions were chosen based on the concentration of particular industry led by the female entrepreneurs. As the types of small business varied widely from manufacturing to servicing and from traditional to nontraditional, mostly formal enterprise is taken as samples. Type of industries and institutions are as follows: a) handloom and garments; b) bidi (local cigarette made by hand), c) nursery, d) food and e) IT. A total of four samples of entrepreneurs were selected from each sector of industry. The institutional samples were taken as: i) two- from financial institutions; ii) one- from Grameen Bank (of Nobel Laurent Professor Younus) and iii) two-from support provider. They are as follows:

1. two (2) financial institutions sponsored by the government
2. one (1) non government organizations (NGOs)
3. two (2) support system providers (government and NGOs)
In the field studies, some of the questions by different officials and executives are used without attribution. This procedure is necessary due to the sensitivity of the data. There were two options, either to promise confidentiality or to be satisfied with the partial responses. The first alternative was chosen because it was important that the respondent felt free to express what they expected and experienced during their period of operation. However, it was possible to specify few names of the interviewees and their whereabouts in this paper, which would largely compensate for the above shortcoming.

To supplement the primary data, literature review is done extensively which reveals that all most all of the research on this issue is done in the developed world. Given the differences in economic, cultural and technological environment between a developing nation like Bangladesh and the developed world, it is likely that some of the findings are not likely to be applicable for the developing world in general and that of Bangladesh in particular. For example, the research in developed nation does not consider the religion as a constraint but the religion is a big factor for women in Bangladesh. The women of Bangladesh have more social responsibility than their counterpart in the developed world.

**Analysis and Discussion**

As can be seen from Figure 1, the majority of women entrepreneurs (60%) studied were operating their business as private limited companies that were wholly owned by them. Around 31 per cent had partnership with spouse and the rest with others.

The women were mostly young with nearly 70 per cent being under 45 years of age. More than 90 per cent were married over 8-10 years. They were fairly well educated with over 51 per cent holding a university degree. Very few (35%) had previous experience of any type before they started their own business. Most of the women entrepreneurs are engaged in manufacturing business i.e., involved in the manufacturing of garments, leather goods and food items (See figure 2).

It is noteworthy that over 52 per cent of the respondents had a parent and/or spouse who were a business owner. Most (66.78%) operated their business as a sole proprietorship; of the rest only three were in partnerships with their spouses.
Some of these findings are similar to those found in other nations but there are some interesting differences. The respondents in this study had extremely low previous work experience level.

![Figure 2: Type of Business](source: Field Study 2004 and 2009)

However, several had families with business connections. The proportion of married women in this sample is also considerably higher than those found in other countries. For example, several studies in other countries indicate that women entrepreneurs are less likely to be married (Bowen and Hirsch, 1986; Shim and Eastlick, 1998; Stevenson 1986) than their male counterparts. Also, the number of women operating manufacturing firms is higher than that found in most western studies (Buttner and Moore, 1997).

**Determinants for Initiating Business**

The women have now become aware of the socio-economic rights and have ventured to avail the opportunities initiated for them. Rural Bangladesh is now a changed scenario for the women who have gathered courage to break barriers and enter the off-house working force as entrepreneurs and workers- a situation not accepted by the society in the recent past (Stanworth and Curran, 1989).

It is evident that women face significant difficulties in doing their businesses (Khan, 2004; Ahmed, 1997). The situation is no different in the current study. Almost 15 (60%) of the respondents (the respondents are usually poor and their partners are unemployed) were motivated by the financial reason. The findings of developed countries (USA, Canada and few European countries like Norway, Sweden) grossly contradict this as majority of them are attracted by pull factors like independence, self esteem need etc. (Gatewood et al., 2003). Rest of the 40 per cent are motivated by their interests, i.e., started as a hobby, their prior experiences and particular skill and family influences etc. Another notable motivating factor next to monetary interest is benevolent attitude among the entrepreneurs that seem to be the urge to do something for the wellbeing of the other people i.e. generating employment (Schumpeter, 1979).

Studies from other countries especially developed nations indicate that individual “push” factors such as dissatisfaction with jobs is a significant motivating factor in the case of women entrepreneurs (Berard & Brown, 1994; Charest, 1995). Similarly one of the “push” factors here is primarily related with their jobs especially “glass ceiling”. But unlike their western counterparts, these women did not start their business at the peak of their childbearing years as found by Belcourt et al. (1991).
The findings of the current study differ from the studies of other nations which indicate that women are motivated more by the need for achievement, challenge and self-determination (Buttnner & Moore, 1997) than monetary reasons. Balancing work and family does not seem to have been a major motivating factor for these women. Only one woman mentioned the time flexibility that having your own business would offer as a reason for starting her enterprise.

**Start-up Phase and Current Constraints Faced by the Woman Entrepreneurs**

The women in this sample faced problems similar to those faced by female entrepreneurs in other nations. Cash flow problems were the most commonly stated issue with inadequate working capital, promoting the business, lack of managerial experience and lack of time as mentioned very frequently. Since most of these women (51%) used their own funds borrowed from spouse/family to set up their business, problems associated with inadequate working capital are to be expected. While 43 per cent had taken loans from a financial institution, for a significant proportion (38%) this was only a part of their original investment and not the primary source of funds.

**Table 1: Start-up and Current Constraints**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Expressed by the Entrepreneurs</th>
<th>Start-up Phase</th>
<th>Current</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash flow</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortage of Capital</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Related (product and services)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Related</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Relation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Managerial Experience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Issues (Mainly family related)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A Sample of 25 Entrepreneurs
* Source: Field Study 2004 and 2009
Like the cases of other countries, a significant proportion of women (66%) had no previous experience in business—either as employees or as owners. This may account for many of their start-up problems. In response to the questions about their serious current problems, the majority replied cash flow, followed by marketing relation and employee management. In case of training, most (43%) wanted marketing-related training. These findings are not very different from the findings of other countries.

**Work-Family Conflicts**

The women entrepreneurs in this study did not feel that having their own business affected their roles as spouse, parent or homemaker very much. As can be seen from Table 2, these women experience very low levels of work-family conflict in their spousal or parental roles. For example, the mean value of the five variables measuring their relationships with their partners was 2.3 (a lower score indicates lower conflict level); the corresponding figure for the parental role was again closer to the mid-point (2.54). Of the roles examined (i.e., spouse, parent and homemaker), the highest level of conflict was found in the homemaker role (3.1 out of a 5 point scale). It should be noted that all these women had someone to help them with their household chores—either a part time or a full time maid. Even with such help, many of them felt that they had no time or energy to handle their household chores. What could account for the lower level of the role conflict in this study may be due to the high amount of spousal support. Most of them (over 74%) said that their spouse was either happier or very happy with the level of commitment that they had their business and over 70 per cent said that their spouse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Family Conflict in Relation to Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Husband –Wife Relationship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves relationship*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeps me from spending time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries interfere with relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too tired to do things with spouse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage suffers due to business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother – Children Relation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes it hard to have good relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours interfere with time spent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irritable; not as good as parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have energy to be a good parent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes me a better parent*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role as Homemakers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties to follow household task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to do much at home due to time spent on business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worries interfere with ability to do household task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have energy to do household routines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes it easier to get regular work done*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¤ lower number than the mean of 5 variables or mid-point 2.5 indicates lower levels of conflict
¤ reverse coded
¤ Source: Field Study 2004 and 2009
offered them emotional support. Thus, even though their partners did not offer much help with the household chores or with childrearing, the women were overall happy with the level of support that they received from their marital partners. This is also reflected in the fact that five of the women rated spousal support as a key reason for their success. Even among the others, many stated that a woman cannot hope to succeed without support from her spouse.

Another factor that may have contributed to the high degree of spousal support that these women enjoyed might have been the stable, satisfactory nature of their marriages. As mentioned before, most were in the fairly long lasting and happy marriages with over 80 per cent stating that they were “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their marital life. Another possible reason for the lower level of role conflict that these women experienced might be the fairly high level of the extended family support that they enjoy. Many had highly supportive parents and in-laws and 25 per cent had at least one extended family member staying with them. This may have reduced the burden of childcare for these women. The lower level of the role conflicts is reflected in the high level of satisfaction with life in general (4.3), their marriage (4.1) and their role as a parent (3.8). Most of these women were also highly satisfied with the way their business was progressing (mean=4.1) with over 80 per cent reporting either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with progress of their venture.

**Reason for Success**

The study also looked at the self-reported reasons for success of these women entrepreneurs. In response to the success factors, the most common reason as reported seems to be personal qualities such as “hard work and perseverance”. Product-related factors such as “providing a quality product”, “uniqueness of offerings” and “variety of products offered” were the most frequently stated reasons behind success. People skills and marketing skills were mentioned by some women. A significant number of women also credited their success to the support provided by their spouses.

![Figure 4: Success Factors](Source: Field Study 2004 and 2009)

While research in other developing countries does indicate that though personal qualities are critical success factors for entrepreneurs, they usually are rated as lower in importance to other factors such as good management skills or having access to financial resources (Yusuf, 1995). This distinction may be due to the differing socio-cultural context within which these women operate. The entry of women into the entrepreneurial world is only a recent development in India due to the orthodox, traditional nature of Indian society. Hence, these women, who are the first to break out of socio-cultural constraints, must have felt that personal qualities are more important than managerial or technical skills (Putta et al., 2013). Being a neighbouring country with almost the same socio-cultural background, Bangladeshi women also possess similar kind of belief.
Conclusion

This exploratory study indicates that there may be both similarities and dissimilarities between the female entrepreneurs of developed and developing nations in birth-grow-success of female entrepreneurship. The study found that start-up problem faced by female in three regions of Bangladesh may be similar but there are important differences in other areas.

The significant differences are evident in all three factors influencing entrepreneurial activities as identified by Cooper (1991)\(^1\). These differences may be due to having different socio-cultural background. Though the lower levels of work-family conflicts found in this study may reflect the stronger family support systems, major constraints evident in the study include lack of access to resources, cultural and social norms, lack of information and supportive networks and lack of knowledge in business skills.

All women entrepreneurs of the sample of this study acknowledge financial sufferings, as they have less access to properties and get very seldom support in this regard from the husbands. Bank credit is related with collateral, which only a very few women can manage. NGOs provide loan at 15-20 percent interest, which is very high.

Because of the above economic and financial reasons this study suggests the following issues must be addressed for the women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh:

- Women Entrepreneurs should be provided collateral free loan as they have no assets.
- Interest free loan should be provided to encourage women entrepreneurs.
- Long term loan should be available.
- An Investment Bank for Women should be established.
- Women entrepreneurs should be freed from VAT at least on mid-term basis.
- Women entrepreneurs should have direct access to finance and other infrastructure and institutional facilities.

Social and cultural norms should be more supportive towards female entrepreneurs. Their double role makes them overloaded and puts them in the pressure of traditional gender role. On the educational front, women should be given proper management education to develop their business skills and to create network among women entrepreneurs worldwide. Goldman Sachs’ 10,000 Women initiative is an example of this.

Creating opportunities and reducing barriers for women entrepreneurs is a must. USAID, GTZ and World Bank are already working in Bangladesh to make the path of women entrepreneurship easier and smoother. Finally, as this study is primarily exploratory in nature, further research with larger samples from other parts of country is required to gather more effective results.

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\(^1\) There are three main factors influence entrepreneurship: a) background (family and genetic) factors that affect motivation, skills and knowledge, b) previous experience; and c) economic conditions. See, more in Cooper and Dunkelberg (1981), A Look at Business Entry: Experience of 1805 entrepreneurs.
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Innovation and the Exercise of Agency in an Informalising Economy: An Analysis of the Lived Realities of Entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market in Masvingo Urban

Nhodo Lloyd

Abstract: The ensuing study dwells on the informal economic activities adopted by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market in Masvingo urban in response to a myriad of challenges afflicting them. It reveals the new socio-economic impediments confronting these traders in light of the formation of the Government of National Unity and the subsequent dollarization of the economy as well as the extraordinary levels of informalisation of the Zimbabwean economy. The findings made herein show that inasmuch as the said social structures are constraining the livelihood capabilities of the poor, the residents of Masvingo are far from being conceptualized as passive victims of their social and economic situation. On the contrary they are exhibiting unique innovative spirit and the exercise of agency to transcend the constraining structures, simultaneously dictating the form and shape these structures can take. In the same vein, it hinges on the various livelihood assets or capitals utilized by the actors in question to strategically deal with their socio-economic vulnerability. To meet the objectives of the study the researcher adopted qualitative methodology and unstructured interviews, Focus Group Discussions and transect walks were used as the main data soliciting techniques. The researcher triangulated the Structuration thesis, the Strain theory and the Sustainable Livelihood Framework in order to explain and understand the challenges and the nature of responses to the challenges bedeviling the residents of Masvingo urban.

Keywords: Informal economic activities, structures, agency, innovation, livelihoods

Introduction and Background to the Study

What is indisputable is my observation that ever since the turn of the new millennium, that is the post 2000 era, the Zimbabwean economy is continuously declining to deplorable levels, culminating in one of the highest levels of informalisation of the economy in recent times. This is attributable to an avalanche of social, environmental, political and economic factors that are insistently haunting the nation. For Mleya in Mutami and Chazovachii (2013) this economy plummeted to the 1950s levels whereby the country’s GDP fell from US$620 in 1998 to as low as US$268 in 2008. To exacerbate the already precarious situation the unemployment rate for Zimbabwe is hovering above 80% and industrial capacity utilization has also dwindled to around 60%. Henceforth, in real terms the Zimbabwean economy is experiencing de-industrialization, which has a ripple effect on the employment rate, in spite of the fact that the country boasts of one of the highest literacy rates in the region. Such an uncouth development is obvious having a knock on effect on the livelihoods of the generality of the Zimbabwean population who used to depend largely on formal employment.

For Nhodo et al. (2013) the aforementioned economic impediments date back to the era when the Zimbabwean Government adopted the abortive Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which had calamitous impact on the livelihoods of ordinary citizens particularly in the urban setup. This economic prescription by the World Bank and The International Monetary Fund (IMF) culminated in industrial rationalization, which entailed massive retrenchments in industry as well as public service, with the ultimate goal of reducing expenditure for the government and industry and in the worst scenario some infant industries closed shop altogether, relegating former employees into the informal sector. Over and above this the poor became increasingly vulnerable as the cost of living skyrocketed.

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owing to the removal of subsidies on such basic provisions as health, education, transport, food inter alia.

This callous state of affairs is not however peculiar to Zimbabwe as countries like Malawi, Zambia, South Africa and Mozambique experienced the far reaching effects of neo-liberalism or Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS). In Zambia Ferguson (2002) observed that the dislocation of the once glamorous economy from the global economy through SAPS resulted in abjection of formal employees-referring to the process of being thrown aside, expelled or discarded from the formal livelihoods. To further buttress this point he believes that this process does not simply imply being thrown out but being thrown down thus expulsion but also debasement and mortification. Through this process, citizens generally lose dignity and esteem, a scenario which also obtained in Zimbabwe during the early 1990s and the late 1990s as the informalisation of the economy reached its zenith. Whereas such findings are illuminating, the said author nevertheless denigrated the Zambian citizens to passive entities and glossed over the capacity of these social actors to respond to the informalised economy through various informal economic activities, which therefore becomes the hallmark of this study.

Inasmuch as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme was largely accountable for the downturn of the Zimbabwean economy. Mlambo and Raftopolous (2006) attribute this sad development to the time when the Mugabe regime unilaterally authorized unbudgeted gratuities and monthly pensions to the militant war veterans for their perceived indispensable role in the country’s liberation struggle from the British colonial masters. The subsequent deployment of Zimbabwean forces to the war beleaguered Democratic Republic of Congo only helped to further compound the already deteriorating situation as this had a huge strain on the national budget simultaneously sliding the nation into a vampire state that invest so much in defense at the expense of other crucial areas such as health, education, agriculture, industry and employment creation, which are nonetheless the pillars of the Zimbabwean economy.

Notwithstanding the effects of the intermediate droughts and the detrimental effects of climate change that continue to besiege the nation, other commentators blame the collapse of the economy on the imperative yet poorly executed Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLP) in Zimbabwe, which entailed reduced agricultural productivity. This is because the Zimbabwean economy is agro-based, henceforth all the sectors of the economy are anchored by the agricultural sector. Of note is the fact that during the period in question Zimbabwe moved from a bread basket, where she used to produce for the Southern African region and beyond to a basket case reliant on importation of food as well as humanitarian aid from the donor community. This is inexorably coalescing against the expansion and growth of infant industries and ultimately formal employment as well as livelihoods of the citizens who are conventionally dependent on formal employment.

This economic quandary however deepened between the year 2008 and 2009, which I aptly conceptualize as the “lost year” in terms economic growth and human development as the economy witnessed an unprecedented level of informalisation and economic decline. This period was characterised by crisis, confusion and uncertainty over entitlements and basic necessities for ordinary citizens particularly in Masvingo urban. It was characterised by a runaway inflation officially soaring above 231 percent and unofficially well above one billion percent. These challenges had a knock-on effect on industry and production as companies either downsized or closed shop altogether as a rational response to the production challenges haunting the nation. Given this background goods and services became unavailable and where they were available they were quoted in foreign currency
which was way beyond the capacity of ordinary Zimbabweans who were subsequently pushed out of formal employment. (Also see Nhodo and Mafongoya 2012) This period also saw the blossoming of the informal market or the black-market, where the prices of basic commodities were extortionate. Given this backdrop, expectations for the revival of the collapsing economy therefore hinged on the ubiquitous but highly contested political settlement known as the Government of National Unity or Global Political Agreement between the conflicting political parties in Zimbabwe, that is ZANU PF and the Movement for Democratic Change formations. This is because for many Zimbabweans, this problem was seen more as a political problem than an economic one.

Although the inauguration of the much anticipated Government of National Unity in 2009 was a welcome development to revive the butchered economy, it only brought piecemeal economic changes but did very little to ameliorate the livelihoods of many Zimbabweans who have remained outside the formal sector. It has been applauded for arresting the runaway inflation but there is still a lot to be done to bring sanity to the economy as well as the much needed job creation. As argued elsewhere in this paper 80 percent of Zimbabweans remain outside formal employment and for those who are still formally employed the majority of them are earning salaries that are way below the poverty datum line which is currently hovering around US$600. Given this level of informalisation of the economy, it becomes inevitable that the majority of the affected citizens are falling back on the informal sector to resuscitate the strained livelihoods.

The ability to resort to the informal economy rests on my belief that these citizens are not tabula rasas. Instead they are knowledgeable, rational, strategic, resourceful and agentic actors who are capable of dealing with their social environment through manifold tactics. Taking a people centered approach as its axis, this study dwells on the challenges faced by ordinary citizens in Masvingo, particularly those entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market, simultaneously focusing on the survival strategies that they are deploying to deal with their challenges. It also looks at the contributions of these strategies to the survival of these entrepreneurs in light of the said economic impediments.

Methodology
This qualitative study was carried out between October 2012 and January 2013. To meet the outlined objectives of this study the researcher utilized qualitative methodology. This methodology was chosen primarily because of its flexibility, which then allowed the researcher to probe deeply into the accounts, challenges and livelihood strategies employed by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market to deal with their strained livelihoods. This virtue could not be realized using quantitative methodology, owing to its rigidity. The flexibility of qualitative methodology also allowed the researcher to perceive social reality as it obtains at the said market place, without the complexities of rigid boundaries imposed by other less intimate methodologies. (See Siziba 2009) In order to construe a holistic picture of the issue in question, the researcher went on to triangulate a number of data gathering techniques within the qualitative paradigm. Consequently unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and Transect walks were used in this study.

Sampling
The choice of qualitative methodology made it imperative for the researcher to use purposive or convenient sampling technique. This is a non-probability sampling technique whereby the researcher following his personal judgment selects information rich cases, that is the respondents who are deemed to be doing well in the area under investigation. This daunting task was made easier by the fact that the researcher grew up in Masvingo urban, henceforth the majority of the respondents were known to him. This advantage also made it easier for the respondents to create the much needed
rapport with the subjects. Through purposive sampling the researcher managed to select a total of thirty five respondents for interviewing. Inasmuch as a larger sample was desirable, it was not feasible to select a larger sample owing to the nature of the study, which is in-depth in orientation. Moreover it is neither feasible nor desirable to have a large sample in a case study like what quantitative researchers would do.

**Research Methods**

In line with the qualitative paradigm, the researcher utilized unstructured interviews as the main data soliciting technique. The greatest advantage of this method that became apparent in the research is the ability to probe deeply into the lives and livelihoods of the respondents, to unearth new clues, to open up new dimensions of the phenomenon and to secure vivid, accurate and inclusive accounts of respondents that are based on personal experience. (See Burgess 1982) These interviews were highly informal henceforth they developed as mere conversations with the respondents. Unstructured interviews were also held with key informants like the council officials with the goal of ascertaining the official position regarding the issue of informal entrepreneurship in Masvingo Urban. Focus Group Discussions were also conducted to corroborate and augment data gathered using unstructured interviews. Thus they brought about the much needed element of multivocality as respondents were encouraged by the environment to speak up on issues affecting their lives subsequently working to augment each other to increase the validity of the findings made therein. Transect walks were also used and they provided an observational insight into the strategies undertaken by the informal entrepreneurs at Chimusana Market.

**Ethical considerations**

All studies that involve human beings ubiquitously call for an adherence to ethical issues, therefore this study was not immune to this professional imperative. Thus from the outset, the research was fully explained to the respondents and they were assured that they will not be harmed since the research was purely for academic purposes. Informed consent was therefore ensured before conducting the research. Confidentiality and anonymity were also observed through the use of pseudonyms so as to avoid emotional, physical and financial harm to the respondents.

**Study Area**

Chimusana market is a hive of activities, accommodating close to 1000 traders. It is located at the margins of the Masvingo Central Business District. (CBD) It was an initiative started by the Masvingo City Council to rectify the far reaching damage inflicted by the Government initiated operation that was meant to deal with the informal economy through the destruction of all illegal informal settlements and informal markets which had became rampant in the city. This was done through the Operation Restore Order, popularly known as Operation Murambatsvina in the vernacular language in 2005. Thus as a tacit acknowledgement of the inevitability of the informal sector the Council of Masvingo moved swiftly to regularize the operations of the informal traders simultaneously fostering sanity in the vender beleaguered city. Designated marketing areas were subsequently created where the occupants are expected to pay rentals, water and electricity bills making this area a quasi-formal market. The city of Masvingo is the oldest and historical city in Zimbabwe, founded in 1890 by the British Colonial Company BCC under the name Fort Victoria. It then changed to Masvingo in line with the Great Zimbabwe Monuments in 1980. The city is the cosmopolitan city for the whole of Masvingo province, thereby making it one of the busiest cities in Zimbabwe. The clientele base for the entrepreneurs at the Chimusana market is drawn from the city’s high density suburbs of Mucheke, Runyararo, Rujeko and the province at large. Most of the traders at Chimusana market however come from Mucheke, the oldest residential area in Masvingo. This is because of the proximity of this suburb to the CBD as well
as the city's small industrial site. The city falls under the agro-ecological region four along the Beitbridge-Harare Highway. The area is a perennially dry region to the extent that agricultural production is very low, such that people derive their livelihoods from off-farm livelihood strategies, which are also dominant at Chimusana market.

**Conceptual Framework**

This section outlines the conceptual framework used to analyze the various responses of the respondents to the informalising economy. In order to present a vivid picture of the responses, the researcher triangulated three interrelated conceptual frameworks that is the Strain theory by Merton, Structuration thesis by Giddens and the Sustainable Livelihood framework By the DFID. The strain theory is of great utility in understanding the structural complications in the Zimbabwean society and how this society responds to such complications. Such responses constitute what Merton terms anomie, a scenario where there is an acute disjunction between the culturally prescribed goal (herein referred to as aspirations) and the socially prescribed means of achieving those aspirations. Members of society respond to this change in multifaceted ways but of interest in this study is innovation that is resorting to alternative ways of achieving social aspirations. Of not is the view that the cultural aspirations of many Zimbabweans is to be successful and the socially prescribed means of achieving this goal is through the education system and getting a formal job thereafter. Notwithstanding the fact that the majority of Zimbabweans are educated the formal sector is conversely dwindling leading to a huge strain on such aspirations. A significant number is therefore innovating through entrepreneurship in response to the said incompatibility between aspirations and the socially prescribed means of achieving those goals albeit it is anomie or normlessness.

In tandem with the major propositions of the Strain theory, Giddens’ Structuration thesis helps to further illuminate the situation at hand. Focus here is on the dialectical relationship between the constraining structures and agency. What it means therefore is that neither structure nor agency has independent existence but they equally influence each other or more appropriately, they constitute a duality. Herein the structure shall be taken to refer to the Zimbabwe’s macro-economic environment and the related structures such as the dollarization of the economy, poverty and the Government of National Unity that has callously failed to provide for the majority of poor citizens, leading to a huge strain on their livelihoods. Agency relates to entrepreneurs at Chimusana market, who are portraying that inasmuch as the said structures are constraining, they are rational, calculative and strategic actors who have the capacity to define and redefine their social environment until it is acceptable to them. (See Nhodo et al. 2013) Consequently, through various livelihood strategies, they are exhibiting rationality that is inevitably needed to transcend these constraining social structures.

In line with the aforesaid standpoint the Sustainable Livelihood Framework posits that any society at any given time is likely to fall under the vulnerability context, which marks a huge strain on people’s entitlements and livelihoods. This context relates to poverty that has engulfed the Zimbabwean society, particularly Masvingo urban. The framework therefore seeks to gain an accurate and realistic understanding of people’s strengths (assets or capital endowments) and how they strive to earn a living through these assets. (DFID 1999) It is also of great utility in understanding the said vulnerability and the way people mobilize a plethora of capitals ranging from human capital, social capital, natural capital, erotic capital, political capital inter alia.
Results and Discussion

Structural constraints in Masvingo and the spirit of innovation through entrepreneurship

As argued elsewhere in this paper, the residents of Masvingo urban, particularly from the poor high density suburbs of Mucheke and Rujeko are facing an avalanche of social-economic problems. These problems are emanating from the macro-economic and political environment that is impacting negatively on the livelihoods of the poor. It emerged that, whilst the industry and industrial production in Zimbabwe is dwindling, the Government of National Unity (GNU) has not helped matters either. More than 80% of the Zimbabwean population remains outside formal employment and to worsen the already volatile situation the Government of Zimbabwe went on to impose a partial freeze on recruitment of employees for all public service ministries except those that are regarded as essential services in 2010. The freeze was subsequently extended to all ministries in 2013, pushing millions of job seekers to the margins of formal employment. This was premised on the desire to reduce the ever increasing government expenditure bill since it is believed that for every US$1 that the treasury receives US$ 0.70 is channelled towards the payment of civil servants and employees of state assisted institutions, thereby crippling other sectors of the economy that are in dire need of funding. This can therefore be added to the growing list of structural factors that are pushing urbanites in Masvingo deep into abysmal poverty, as ¾ of the nation is surviving on less than US$1 per day. For those who are working very few are earning salaries that are above the poverty datum line, which is hovering above US$600 for a family of six.

What is also irrefutable is my observation that these structural constraints are coalescing against the aspirations of many Zimbabweans, who are incessantly being constrained by the said social structures. It also emerged in this study that the cultural goal or aspirations shared by Zimbabweans at large is that of success. This goal however is proving to be very elusive since it means different things to different people, depending on the class of the concerned people. For ordinary citizens however it entails access to life’s basics such as food, shelter, health, education for dependants, transport and other related basic necessities. Thus it becomes the aspiration of young people to be able to meet these requirements upon reaching adult age. The problem however is that the said structural challenges haunting Zimbabwe in general and Masvingo urban in particular have placed a huge strain on the ability of these social actors to achieve their social aspirations. This consequently relates to what Merton conceptualizes as the disjunction between cultural goals and the means of achieving those goals. The prescribed or socially acceptable means of achieving this societal goal in Zimbabwe is through the education system. This explains the robust development of the education system in Zimbabwe as the government was responding to this generally accepted means of achieving the cultural goals or social aspirations of many people in Zimbabwe. Of note is the fact that owing to this response the country is currently boasting of the highest literacy rate in Africa. It is paradoxical that while the education system is continuously producing graduates, the industry and the public service employment market is conversely plummeting leading to a huge strain on the livelihoods of many able bodied Zimbabweans who are traditionally accustomed to survival though the formal economy.

Faced with the aforesaid challenges Zimbabweans are inevitably responding to these challenges through a plethora of strategies ranging from conformity, retreatism, ritualism, rebellion and innovation, (also see Merton 1947) The world over conformity is the commonly embraced strategy adopted by members of society, but in Zimbabwe this has been adopted to a limited extent because generally the Zimbabweans are exhibiting ingenuity and resourcefulness though adopting alternative ways of survival. Conformism is a situation whereby individuals accept the situation and continue to strive for their goals within the confines of the generally acceptable means. Rebellion as emaciated by Merton (ibid) is insignificant in the current Zimbabwean scenario as the respondents in this study downplayed
violent and highly illegal survival options. Innovation as observed in this study was the most fashionable response particularly by the very poor who are maintaining commitment to the said societal aspirations although they devise alternative ways through entrepreneurship albeit in an illegitimate manner. This is because the majority of the entrepreneurial activities embraced by traders at Chimusana Market from a Zimbabwean perspective fall within the realm of illegal activities. This is typified by the crackdown on informal traders by the government in 2005 under the Operation restore order earmarked at fostering sanity in Zimbabwean cities. The municipal police as well as the national police in Masvingo are further cementing this position since they constantly harass and arrest some of the informal traders who are regarded as pathological to the smooth and efficient functioning of the formal economy. Drawing from the Masvingo example, it becomes apparent that innovation is a type of response which is very common among people from the lower classes who are heavily deprived of legitimate means while they still cherish the goal of success in society.

The significance of innovation as a survival option can be captured succinctly by the statement made by one of the respondents who is doing well in the second hand clothes trading at Chimusana market who had this to say,

"Nyika yacho yaoma sakazvotoda kungwara pakubhindauko, chero usigaiti zvinosungisa" (Life is really tough in Zimbabwe, so it takes those with the spirit of innovation to survive as long as what you are doing is not illegal) She went on to say that her business is flourishing mainly because of poverty which has swamped many people in Zimbabwe. This is because many people cannot afford to buy clothes from the formal market where they are very expensive. Given this background many people throng her selling stand to buy clothes to the extent that she makes profit in excess of US$1000 per month. Based on this survival strategy she is able to meet her family and the extended family needs despite the harsh economic environment bedeviling Zimbabwe. Together with her colleagues, she travels as far as Zambia and Mozambique to buy second hand clothes in bulk, for resell, popularly known as mabero in vernacular language.

Trade in pirated DVDs and CDs proved to be one of the most profitable enterprises notwithstanding the legality-illegality thereof. These traders, who are mostly male due to the risks that come with this trade are taking advantage of the fact that the original DVDS and CDs are very expensive in the formal market and are therefore beyond the capacity of many entertainment starved Zimbabweans. It was observed that while the original DVD or CD was costing between US$4 and US$8 in the official market, at the market in question they are selling at just US$1 or even US$1 for two disks. Given this backdrop, trade in these commodities becomes brisk business for the traders at Chimusana market. Inasmuch as this is a profitable enterprise, traders who were interviewed in this study had some misgivings for this trade. They reported that it is a very risk and nefarious trade compared to other options adopted by the traders in this area. This is because they are bearing the brunt of the police who constantly harass them, beating them up and at worst imprisoning them for the violation of copy rights since nothing is remitted to the authentic owners of the products.

In spite of the said risks, Tanaka a young entrepreneur in this niche area said that he ventured into this business after failing to find a job upon graduating with a university degree in Computer science. He is therefore using his computer skills very well, although in a very informal way. Through this business he managed to buy a residential stand in Mucheke, which is currently under construction, he also bought a Toyota Ipsum and is taking care of his two sisters who are in secondary education. Other popular economic activities undertaken by these entrepreneurs include but not limited to trade in agricultural commodities such as fruits and vegetables, poultry products, traditional and modern meals, basic commodities such as cooking oil, soap mealie meal and traditional and modern
medicines. It is also plausible to find everything that you can get on the formal market at Chimusana market at affordable prices. It was ironically observed that a significant number of formal traders are actually buying commodities for resell at this market consequently making it a quasi-formal market. Based on such findings, it is therefore my submission that members of society who constantly find themselves under serious social, economic and political strains inevitably do whatever it takes to meet their social aspirations. They therefore fallback on anomie as the legitimate means of survival are limited.

The Masvingo urban experience inexorably points to the relative nature of anomie or more appropriately deviant behavior. Prior to the informalisation of the economy, most of the said economic activities undertaken at Chimusana market would have been regarded as illegal and therefore punishable offences. This also becomes clear when one considers the perceptions of the colonial and post colonial governments towards informal trade which erroneously regarded them as dysfunctional and there were deliberate efforts by the governments to eradicate such activities. The establishment of such markets as the Chimusana market in this regard signifies a paradigm shift by the post colonial Zimbabwean government since these markets are now recognized by the state and other relevant stakeholders. It was also observed that even the law enforcement agents are now adopting the laissez faire attitude towards illicit economic activities such as trade in pirated DVDS and CDs and the trade in prohibited liquor. This is also a tacit acknowledgement of the ubiquity of the informal elements of the economy. Anomie or deviance is therefore relative in terms of time and location. The findings made in this study are also in tandem with the observation made by The Zimbabwe Human Development Report (2003) that an economy that is malfunctioning is likely to experience high levels of informalisation as affected people try to resuscitate their strained livelihoods through a mixture of innovative tendencies.

The dialectics of Structure-Agency and the survival matrix in Masvingo
As argued elsewhere in this paper Zimbabweans in general and the majority of the residents of Masvingo’s high density suburbs are inundated by a myriad of social economic and political structures, which are constraining them. These structures derive from the collapsing economy, political polarization, dollarization of the economy, the Government of National Unity and poverty in general, which have an inhibitive effect on the livelihoods and capabilities of the urban poor. Of note is the fact that in mainstream research and literature, such actors were speciously conceptualized as passive victims of such circumstances or more appropriately as tabula rasas. Just inasmuch as these structures are constraining, it emerged that the residents of Masvingo urban are far from being reneged to passive entities. Instead they have proved beyond reasonable doubt that they are rational, calculative, strategic and resourceful actors. They are deploying their agency to transcend or circumvent the structures and ultimately earn a living out of the same structures. Thus the many livelihood strategies adopted by entrepreneurs at Chimusana market are a reflection and outcome of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. To further buttress this relationship, it was observed that although the said structures are constraining on the livelihoods of the actors in question, they are simultaneously presenting alternative opportunities which they are manipulating in order to survive the detrimental effects of the economic and political calamity bedeviling the nation.

The strategies adopted by the traders at Chimusana Market as rational actors include trade in second hand clothing, which is arguably the most popular trade, agricultural marketing, occasional cross-border trade, trade in pirated DVDs and CDs, traditional medicines and other commodities that are on demand on the market. The dialectical relationship between structure and agency can also be
captured succinctly by the statement made by another respondent who referring to her predicament said,

“zvakangofanana nembudzi yakasungirirwa, inotofurira payakasungirirwa”,

Implying that their situation is like a tied goat but the rope is long enough for it graze on the immediate pastures. Contrary to the traditional studies where these informal economic activities were merely deployed as a palliative measure or only to keep the heads of the affected people above the water, these activities at Chimusana market are more sustainable and most of the traders have managed to move out of the vicious cycle of poverty affecting poor households in Masvingo. Some of the traders are showing remarkable potential to grow into commercial enterprises given time and appropriate facilities and are currently employing a significant number of employees to assist them in spite of the diminishing employment creation rate in Zimbabwe.

The dialectical nature of structure and agency is also evident in the summersault move by the state working in cahoots with the Masvingo city council and other stakeholders to establish Chimusana market as a designated market place, which also had a legalizing effect on the activities of the once highly unorganized traders. This is augmented by the current position of law enforcement agents towards informal traders in Masvingo in general. Habitually these agents were very hostile but they are now more accommodating and supportive of informal trading. This change of position illustrates the capacity of social actors to structure and influence the form and shape of the same structures that are affecting them. Thus the structure becomes a structuring structure and structured structure in this process. (Also see Ritzer and Goodman 2010) This is also in line with my submission that the entrepreneurs at Chimusana market are living under structures of domination but as social actors, they are resisting, and transforming these structures through various economic activities to survive the volatility of the structures (See Nhodo and Mafongoya 2012). However as researchers we need to avoid the risk of reifying agency like the rational action theorists did. This is because as observed by Giddens (1984) these social actors are not exclusively independent from the social structures as shown in their actions, rather these actions encompass the reflexive monitoring of social actions. Just as their activities have changed the form and shape of the structures they revealed to the researcher that they always acknowledge and respect the role of law enforcement agents and city by laws. Consequently highly illegal and immoral economic activities are shunned, with the goal of fostering sanity at the market place. In addition they pay their rentals and bills timorously which is also a tacit acknowledgement of the significance of social structures. Thus in society neither the structure nor agency can exist independently but the two are dialectically interrelated and influence each other. They actually become two sides of the same coin and should never be analyzed separately.

The significance of livelihood assets at Chimusana market.

Although the exercise of agency proved to be decisive in the survival of the urban poor in Masvingo, it emerged that most of the traders who were successful in this area had managed to mobilize various forms of assets or capitals in this livelihood matrix. These capitals included social capital, human capital, political capital and natural capital. Social capital and political capital were however revered as the standout forms of capital in this business. Social capital entails various relations of trust and mutual consent, established over time among traders or between traders and their customers. In line with this the traders have developed the spirit of reciprocity which is inevitably assisting them to deal with the adversities in their businesses. Consequently an association was established by the traders, whose mandate is to assist members beleaguered by problems in their respective fields. Monthly contributions are therefore made by each member towards the establishment of this social and economic fund. Merry go round is another strategy devised by traders particularly women to raise the much needed capital in their businesses. Traders who were doing well also revealed that they have managed to developed goodwill with their customers and this has helped to create a huge clientele
base for their products. Owing to this goodwill at times they can just sell their products to their customers on credit, popularly known as kunyorwa kumusana and they will pay at the end of the month thereby increasing their daily sells. What this therefore means is that through social capital the traders have inadvertently created a community within the larger society and this community has its own rules and principles that are relentlessly assisting in the success of the traders.

Political capital is probably at par with social capital in terms of the survival of traders at Chimusana market. Many traders are thriving through the use of this capital owing to the volatility of the Zimbabwean political landscape. Thus the various connections and linkages to political parties are used as a resource in the access to scarce resources in society. It was observed that for every member to get a selling stand at this market place, they had to be politically correct or should be a ZANU PF card holder, culminating in what I refer to as the Zanunisation of informal trading in Zimbabwe. Through political capital the traders will also exercise symbolic violence to scare off potential competitors in this trade. Henceforth labeling has become endemic in this area where competitors or perceived competitors are labeled as Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters (MDC is the strong opposition party) and are dealt with ruthlessly. This situation therefore constitutes what is termed the unintended consequences of intended actions. (Also see Giddens 1984) Here the intentions of the traders are to survive but such intended actions have a backlash in that they are sowing the seeds of mistrust and revulsion among the traders. This callous development emanates from the divide and rule policy adopted by the ruling party to win the urban vote which has customarily gone to the MDC ever since its formation. This however does not mean all the traders genuinely support ZANU PF, instead this is just a front stage to politics where they pretend to fully support the party but their backstage shows otherwise or they clandestinely support the rival party. Responding to this issue Mai Munya said,

“This is just a game, as you can see everyone here is ZANU PF but not everyone is a genuine ZANU PF supporter”

A significant number of female traders for that reason joined the ZANU PF Women’s League and they are using this as a tool to access small loans that are parcelled out by ZANU PF particularly towards election time to buy votes. In line with this, some youths at Chimusana Market have strategically aligned themselves to ZANU PF for them to survive in this business. Through aligning themselves they gain access to benefits that are exclusive to ZANU PF Members. These benefits include access to selling stands, access to loans from various banks as well as moral and financial support from the ministry of Youths through the Economic Empowerment and Indigenization policy. To support this position one young trader had this to say,

“What else can we do to be safe in this nation, we simply have to be ZANUPF during the day and MDC at night”

This state of affairs however is not peculiar to the market in question as it is extending to the Zimbabwean society in general. Thus the Chimusana market in relation to politics and economics is just but a microcosm of the macrocosm and the replica of the Zimbabwean political landscape.

Conclusion
The foregoing study dwells on the various challenges faced by poor households in Masvingo urban. These challenges are mainly emanating from the harsh macro-economic environment affecting the Zimbabwean society in general, subsequently leading to the unprecedented informalisation of the economy. This development had a ripple effect on the livelihoods and social aspirations of many Zimbabweans, particularly from the lower classes, who are languishing in abysmal poverty.
Notwithstanding catastrophic impact of these constraining structures, the paper reveals the innovative capacity of the poor in response to the constraining structures. Various informal economic activities adopted by traders at Chimusana market are therefore a reflection of how the poor exude agency and innovation, concurrently mobilizing varies types of assets or capitals to earn a living in an informalised economy. The dialectical relationship between societal structures and agency was also revealed through the ability of the entrepreneurs to change the form and shape of the same structures that are negatively affecting their livelihoods, in order for them to suit their conditions as evidenced by the legalization of the once nefarious enterprise. Contrary to the orthodox perception of informal trade as a palliative strategy adopted by households enmeshed in transitory poverty, the study reveals that the activities undertaken by the traders in question are highly sustainable and have the capacity to match the formal economic activities, particularly in Masvingo urban if proper supporting structures are unveiled to the traders.

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Labour Unions’ Struggle with Neo-liberal Policies in Nigeria

Akeem Ayofe Akinwale

Abstract: Antagonism has become a feature of labour unions’ relations with the Nigerian government. The implementation of neo-liberal policies worsens the situation, thereby hindering industrial peace in Nigeria. As labour unions and government disagree over the implementation of neo-liberal policies, the relationship between the two parties has become hostile with adverse implications for socio-economic development in Nigeria. This article examines labour unions’ struggle with neo-liberal policies in Nigeria via an exploratory research design, involving in-depth interviews and structured questionnaire used to collect data individually from 440 respondents, including members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG). The findings showed that the majority of the respondents (91.5%) blamed the Nigerian government for implementation of neo-liberal policies. Many respondents (96%) observed some negative impacts of privatization and commercialization, including inflation, job insecurity, unemployment, and poor living standards. Most respondents (99.2%) agreed that their living standard had fallen persistently. Many respondents (93%) believed that labour unions would continue to use strikes to express opposition to undesirable policies of the Nigerian government. The majority of the respondents (86.9%) denied the effectiveness of government ban on strikes. Besides the use of strikes, many respondents (73.5%) called for demonstration, mass protests, and collaboration with civil society organisations. The findings reflected labour unions’ dissatisfaction with implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. There is urgent need for a substantial improvement in government’s relations with labour unions to promote industrial peace and development in Nigeria.

Keywords: ASUU, NUPENG, labour unions, neo-liberalism, strikes, Nigeria

Introduction

The public sector of the Nigerian economy has witnessed the persistence of strikes arising from grievances and labour unions’ activism against the backdrop of perceived exploitation of the public. Also, the Nigerian government’s inability to resolve many strikes amicably reveals the relatively low level of industrial peace in Nigeria. The above-mentioned situation started in the colonial era, following the activities of European merchants, whereas the situation escalated in the course of implementation of some neo-liberal policies, including privatisation, commercialization, deregulation, and the globalisation agenda.

As reported by Saleem (2002), neo-liberalism refers to a process whereby private interests control as much as possible of social life to maximize profits. Given its clarity, the above definition is adopted for the present article. There is no doubt that neo-liberalism is analogous to colonialism and capitalism. These are powerful processes that produced social change in developing societies across the world. Colonialism did not only lead to emergence of Nigeria as a state, it also resulted in development of capitalism in Nigeria. Therefore, analysis of neo-liberalism can be enriched with a reference to the interplay of colonialism and capitalism.

Alubo (2004) argued that the incorporation of Nigeria into international capitalism through colonialism resulted in transformations of the Nigerian society, starting from the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914. A capitalist organisation, the Royal Niger Company (RNC), significantly contributed toward the survival of the northern and southern protectorates before their amalgamation.

From one entity in 1914-1946, the colonial government operated Nigeria under three regions from 1946 to 1960. The first indigenous government operated Nigeria under three regions from 1960 to
1963, and four regions from 1964 to 1967. The military intervention in the Nigerian politics started in 1966, and it was followed shortly by the civil war that lasted for three years (1967-1970). Government attempts to end the civil war prompted abolition of regions and creation of 12 states in 1967. Different dictators also seized power and created more states; the number of states and local government areas in Nigeria reached 36 and 774 in 1996, respectively, whereas the military elites returned power to a democratically elected Nigerian government in 1999.

The Nigerian government adopted and implemented neo-liberal policies, first under the British colonial administrators, second under military administrations, and later during democratic dispensations. The Nigerian experience of neo-liberalism began with activities of multinational companies (MNCs), such as the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and the Bank of British West Africa (BBWA).

The Royal Niger Company was a mercantile company chartered by the British Government in the nineteenth century. It was formed in 1879 as the United African Company (UAC) and renamed to National African Company (NAC) in 1881 and Royal Niger Company (RNC) in 1886. The Royal Niger Company began its business operations in the Oil Rivers Protectorate, which became the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893.

The Niger Coast Protectorate was merged with its environs to form the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The concept of Nigeria was officially adopted in 1897 but it became effective in 1914 when Sir Frederick Lugard amalgamated the Southern and Northern Protectorates.

The advent of neo-liberalism led to proliferation of many private sector organisations in Nigeria, including First Bank of Nigeria, PZ Cussons, Unilever, John Holt, Cadbury, Nestlé Foods, Shell, Total, Chevron, Mobil, Julius Berger, and numerous others. These organisations are among the key supporters of implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. However, labour unions have expressed dissatisfaction over the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. Expectedly, workers’ resistance against government policies preceded the official recognition of labour unions, given the 19th-century experience of strikes among different groups, including artisans, labourers, canoe-men, warders, clerks, and railway workers.

Hopkins’ (1966) account of Nigerian labour history includes a record of strikes in the following years: 1886, 1897, 1899, 1902, 1904, 1945, and 1964, respectively. Besides, many strikes have erupted from various labour unions in Nigeria. The Nigerian experience in the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods shows that the scope of labour-union functions is beyond maintenance or improvement of working conditions. It includes expression of interest in and agitation for development of the Nigerian society.

A brief description of some labour unions is necessary here for clarity. The Nigerian Civil Service Union (NCSU) emerged in 1914; it was the first national labour union in Nigeria. Other national labour unions established during the colonial era include the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), the Nigeria Railway Workers Union (NRWU), and the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ). These unions provided a springboard for the establishment of labour unions in other sectors, including the National Association of University Teachers (NAUT), which metamorphosed into the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), among others.
Labour unions constitute a significant group with power to monitor the activities and policies of the Nigerian government. Within the limits of their power, labour unions have opposed policies considered undesirable in the interest of the majority of Nigerians.

The present article deals with labour unions’ struggle with neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. In addition to abstract and introduction, the present article is presented in six sections such as follows: an appraisal of neo-liberal policies, labour unions and their struggle with neo-liberal policies, theoretical framework of neoliberalism and Marxist theory of conflict, methods of data collection, findings and discussions, and conclusion, respectively.

An appraisal of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria
Successive governments in Nigeria implemented different neo-liberal policies, such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Studies on the outcomes of the implementation of neo-liberal policies largely produced negative reports.

As reported by Naiman and Watkins (1990), most African governments that accepted SAP have recorded biting socio-economic crises such as high debt, poor macro-economic performance, the collapse of education and health care systems, and an inability to meet the basic social needs of the bulk of the population. Other African countries experienced similar setbacks following the imposition of SAP in the 1980s as they faced the worsening of structural crises, increasing debts, poor macro economic performance, collapse of education and health care systems, and the inability to meet the basic social needs of the bulk of the population (Naiman & Watkin, 1990).

Like situations in many African countries, the implementation of SAP resulted in the deterioration of living conditions of most people in Nigeria (Olukoshi, 1993). Perplexed by the growing resistance to poor track records of SAP, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed another neo-liberal policy called Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) on African government.

Though the PRS was a supposedly better tailored policy focusing on the needs of individual countries and incorporating local issues and concerns it has denigrated the role of the developmental state without significant improvement on SAP (Zack-Williams & Mohan, 2005). However, situations on grounds show that poverty alleviation strategies present little improvement over SAPs. Though the IMF and World Bank recognised the failure of SAP they have not stopped forcing their imperialistic policies on developing countries.

After the failure of SAP and with supports from Breton Woods institutions, the Nigerian governments adopted other neo-liberal policies, including privatisation, deregulation, and commercialization (Krueger, 2006). The major aim of the NEEDS established by the Nigerian government is to promote privatisation and commercialisation of government owned enterprises, such as Nigeria Airways, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and hotels (Erinosho, 2007).

As a result of implementation of neo-liberal policies, many workers have been laid off. Some workers were retired or retrenched, especially the drivers, cleaners, caterers, gardeners, clerical officers, and domestic servants for senior civil servants. Neo-liberal policies have worsened economic tensions in developing countries (Obiajulu, 2005; Saleem, 2002; Willett, 2005).
Specifically, the adverse effects of neo-liberal policies include low labour education, increasing unemployment, currency devaluation, and erosion of state welfare services. Currency devaluations resulted in declining living standards of workers. States seek to regulate the conditions under which labour power is sold and how it is used (Edwards, 2002). The state power to enforce labour laws effectively has declined in many African states. The continued ideological hegemony of neo-liberalism has greatly weakened the capacity of governments to enforce labour-union rights (Edwards, 2002; Volscho, 2012).

For Hoogevelt (2005), the adherents of neo-liberalism promised support for poverty eradication through debt relief, which is expected to encourage a renewal of commitment toward basic education and health care. Contrary to the above, the experience of debt relief has not translated into poverty eradication in Nigeria. Labour unions usually refer to the rising spate of poverty in their efforts to draw the attention of the Nigerian government toward the living conditions of the general public.

Labour unions and their struggle with neo-liberal policies

Labour unions constitute a vital part of industrial relations system in many countries. In Nigeria, the number of labour unions increased from a few in the colonial era to over 1000 in 1975, during the Military regime of General Murtala Mohammed. In 1976/1977, the Nigerian government restructured labour unions into 42 industrial unions, including the ASUU and the NUPENG.

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) grew out of the Nigerian Association of University Teachers (NAUT) formed in 1965 with membership drawn from academic staff of various universities, including the University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, University of Ife, and University of Lagos. The NAUT’s orientation was mainly for improvement in the condition of service and socio-economic and political development of Nigeria.

ASUU was formed in 1978, following the failure of the Nigerian government to use the oil wealth to promote social and economic development. ASUU made several demands, including improvement in conditions of service, adequate funding of higher education, university autonomy, academic freedom, and broad national issues. In the 1980s, ASUU stood firmly against oppressive and undemocratic policies of the Nigerian government (Anugwom, 2002). The repressive practices of the Nigerian government contributed immensely to the frequency of ASUU strikes in Nigeria. In Anugwom’s (2002, p. 143) remark:

The ASUU has the distinction of being the most strike-prone union, having embarked on national strikes in 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, and 2001. [...] strikes initiated by other unions in the sector have been more or less a reaction to concessions or benefits emanating from ASUU’s struggles. [...] The crisis in the sector may just as easily be traced to the advent of structural adjustment or effects of globalisation.

The above remark clearly shows ASUU’s ability to organise strikes against the Nigerian government in attempts to resist the adverse consequences of neo-liberal policies on the university system. A more accurate account of the frequency of ASUU’s strikes has been presented in Table 1, showing the strikes’ record and duration for 20 years, i.e., from 1993 to 2013.

Like the ASUU, the NUPENG is one of the 29 industrial unions affiliated to the Nigerian Labour Congress. The NUPENG is an amalgam of several labour unions, such as Shell Workers’ Union, BP Workers Union, Consolidated Petroleum Workers of Nigeria, Texaco African Workers Union, Esso
Table 1: Strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (1993-2013)

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<td>17</td>
<td>2013</td>
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Sources: Adapted from Akinwale (2009) and Akinboyo (2013)

Workers’ Union, Union of Shell Operations, and Petroleum Tanker Drivers Union. It was formerly registered as a trade union on 15th August 1978. Its headquarters is at 9, Jibowu Street, Yaba, Lagos. NUPENG’s membership spreads into four zones (Lagos, Warri, Port Harcourt, and Kaduna) for easy administration and operations.

The NUPENG struggled against the excessive use of casual/contract workers in the oil and gas industry, the struggle became popular in the 1980s and 1990s. In its struggle against casualisation, the NUPENG issued an ultimatum to the Nigerian government before embarking on strike in 1991. This led to a tripartite meeting involving the Nigerian government represented by officials from the ministry of employment, labour, and productivity, representatives of employers in the oil and gas industry, and labour-union officers from the NUPENG.

The tripartite actors agreed to solve the problem by recognising the need to unionise contract workers in the oil and gas industry. However, the NUPENG issued another ultimatum to the Nigerian government in April 2001, concerning its readiness to embark on strike to protest against the evil of casualisation. The intervention from the Nigerian government led to organisation of a casualisation seminar in November 2001 during which members agreed on several terms, including unionization of contract workers, conversion to regular employment, and equitable remuneration for all staff on similar jobs. Reality on grounds in Nigeria shows that employers have violated the above-mentioned terms of agreement. It is also noteworthy that the Nigerian government has devised several strategies to weaken the power of labour unions in Nigeria.

The Nigerian government established a labour centre in 1978, i.e., the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), through Trade Union (Amendment) Decree 22 of 1978. In 1989, the labour unions were again restructured into 29 industrial unions under the Nigeria Labour Congress. The function of the labour centre is to coordinate the activities of labour unions in Nigeria. The Nigerian government preferred to deal with one labour union instead of dealing with many unions at different periods. The Nigerian
government created another labour centre – the Trade Union Congress (TUC) – through the Trade Union (Amendment) Act of 2005. The amendment of the labour law can be attributed to government determination to reduce the labour-union power and resistance against neo-liberal policies.

It can be recalled that the NLC expressed its opposition to the controversial loan sought from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1983 by the Nigerian government (Fashoyin, 1986). However, the implementation of the IMF loan and other aspects of neo-liberal policies turned out to be contradictions built into the post colonial production process with adverse implications for labour unions and the Nigerian society. Labour unions constitute a formidable opponent to the Nigerian government because neo-liberal policies resulted in increasing number of people with lack of access to basic education and rising unemployment in Nigeria.

The Nigeria Labour Congress, a conglomerate of 29 labour unions lodged complaints about adverse effects of neo-liberal policies but the Nigerian government remains adamant and carries on with implementation of the policies. As labour unions and government disagree over the implementation of neo-liberal policies, the relationship between the two parties has become hostile with adverse implications for socio-economic development in Nigeria. To weaken labour unions’ opposition to neo-liberal policies, the Nigerian government amended the labour law in 2005.

Like the Nigerian situations, implementation of neo-liberal policies has produced adverse consequences on the labour markets in many countries. Based on their study on neoliberalism and the Australian labour market, Gellecum, Baxter, and Western (2008) reported that the Australian government progressively decentralized wage setting from the national and state level to the industry, workplace, and individual level whereby employees negotiate directly with their employer for their pay and work conditions.

Labour unions played a central role in protest movements that impelled democratic reforms in Africa (Southall, 2003). However, in most cases, labour unions proved incapable of challenging the imposition of neo-liberal reforms. Even in South Africa, the Congress of South African Labour Unions (COSATU) has proved incapable of checking the imposition of market-driven policies, although it has proved somewhat more successful in checking an ambitious privatisation agenda.

Neo-liberal policies have created an environment that is not conducive to successful labour unionism. Leggett’s (2012) review of labour unions’ responses to neo-liberalism are summarised as follows: (1) the American unions are ill prepared for the challenges of the neo-liberal agenda, (2) the Argentinean unions have resisted neo-liberal policies with little success, (3), the British unions have become receptive to neo-liberal policies, (4) the Australian unions have not shown sign of radical opposition to neo-liberalism, (5) the German unions have moved toward democratization in their resistance against neo-liberalism, and (6) the French unions have maintained a strong opposition to neo-liberalism through the values of activist involvement, political demands, and subversive activities.

In addition to the above-mentioned instances of labour unions’ responses to neo-liberalism, Leggett (2012) observed some instances of ambivalence in labour unions’ responses to neo-liberalism in some countries. He mentioned that the China Federation of Trade Unions (CFTU) believed that marketisation and globalisation are good for the Chinese economy but urge for more protective labour legislation. The Indian Trade Union Congress has produced ambivalent responses to neo-liberalism, whereas the Russian unions’ policy on neo-liberalism has been labeled a failed social democratic opposition. The Federation of Korean Trade Unions has challenged neo-liberalism but its militancy
largely excludes the bulk of the workforce, including irregular employees, women and migrant workers. Labour unions’ resistance to neo-liberalism can be more meaningful if they mobilize for mass protest.

**Theoretical framework of neo-liberalism and Marxist theory of conflict**

The central ideas in neo-liberalism and Marxist theory of conflict are applicable to the analysis of the issue of labour unions’ struggle with neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. Neo-liberalism is an ideology that promotes dwindling state control of the economy. It reflects government claims that privatization and deregulation would not only revive the moribund public enterprises but also increase efficiency of the enterprises. In his summary of the central ideas in neo-liberalism, Aborisade (2010, p. 39) noted as follows:

> The basic idea of neo-liberalism is that free market economies will operate smoothly and steadily produce more wealth. [---] The role of the state, therefore, should be restricted to defending private property, upholding contracts, national defence, and overseeing the money supply. In essence, therefore, neoliberals see the existence of public enterprises (PEs) and/or government involvement in the economy as the obstacle to economic development. They, therefore, advocate commercialization and privatization of existing PEs and the promotion of the private sector as the engine of economic growth.

Rosenberg (2010) noted that capital has dominated labour unions during the neoliberal period. In accordance with the above, Volscho (2012) observed that part of the neo-liberal turn involves waging war against labour unions. Like in other neo-liberal state, the Nigerian government has embarked on internal reorganization and new institutional arrangement to improve its competitive position in relation to other states in the global market. The ongoing economic reforms and restructuring in Nigeria follows from the ideology of neo-liberalism, which has become globally dominant in developing countries since 1970s.

Neo-liberalism also lends credence to trade liberalization through removal of all barriers to free movement of trade in the interest of the state. This notion approximates David Harvey’s doctrine of market exchange as an ethic in itself and Louis Althusser’s concept of ideological state apparatus. While neoliberalism is relevant to the explanation of government adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies, Marxist theory of conflict is more suitable for analysis of labour unions’ struggle with neo-liberal policies.

The basic assumptions in conflict theory are as follows: (1) interdependence of units in a social system always reveals conflict of interest, (2) the conflicts of interest results from unequal distribution of scarce resources, (3) latent conflict of interest eventually will lead to overt and violent conflicts among social groups in a system, (4) such conflicts will become bi-polar because a small minority hold power and exploits the majority, (5) the eruption of conflict will lead to social reorganization of power relations within a system.

Marx focuses on violent conflicts processes that could prompt desired social change, as social classes directly confront one another in a system. In his description of Marxist theory of conflict, Turner (1975, p. 621) posited that:

> The more unequal the distribution of scarce resources in a system, the greater will be the conflict of interest between dominant and subordinate segments in a system. [---] This proposition follows directly from Marx’ assumption, that in all social structures, the unequal distribution of power inevitably creates a conflict of interests between super-ordinate holding power and subordinate lacking power. [---] The more subordinate segments become aware of their collective interests, the more likely they are to question the legitimacy of the unequal distribution of scarce resources. [---] The more members of subordinate segments can communicate their grievances to each other, the more likely they are to become aware of their true collective interests.
Awareness of conflicting interests and questioning of legitimacy of the system would lead to organisation of conflict. A key concept in Marxist Theory is relative deprivation, a necessary condition for initiation of conflict. Marx assumes that conflict is inevitable, particularly in a modern capitalist society. The Marxist assumption clearly reveals the existence of conflict at different stages of development of society, given showing that:

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of the feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of old ones. [...] The modern bourgeoisie itself is the product of long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the mode of production and of exchange. (Marx & Engels, 1998, p. 35 as cited in Shang & Hui, 2007)

Marxist theory of conflict gives impetus to labour unions’ concerns about the need to ensure justice and equity by opposing various practices that violate labour rights. Labour unions in Nigeria expressed their concerns about the adverse consequences of privatization and deregulation on average Nigerians, who live in abject poverty. Labour unions have expressed openly their opposition to the neo-liberal policies implemented by the Nigerian government.

In contrast to Freeman and Medoff (1984) argument that unions enhance social efficiency, neo-liberals charge that they distort the operation of labour markets in the direction of monopoly. The gap in the above debate is offset by the provision of voice mechanisms, which raise social concerns of labour importance beyond the workplace (Kaufman, 2004). As agents of civil society, labour unions in many African countries have challenged authoritarian regimes and served as campaigners to promote democracy within the wider society (Wood, 2004b).

Methods of data collection
An exploratory research design was adopted to generate primary and secondary data for the study. The primary data were derived from in-depth interviews and structured questionnaire, whereas relevant documents obtained from literature constitute the secondary data. Forty in-depth interviews were conducted among executives of ASUU and NUPENG at the national headquarters of the unions. The in-depth interviews were complemented by the structured questionnaire used to generate data from the rank and file of the two labour unions. The respondents were randomly selected through the application of stratified random sampling technique in which 500 respondents constitute the sample size, which is a suitable figure for a large population.

Five hundred copies of the structured questionnaire were administered among members of ASUU and NUPENG at the national headquarters of the unions. The questionnaire contained questions relating to socio-demographic characteristics, labour-union perception of neo-liberal policies, and how the unions tackled the challenges arising from the policies. From 500 copies of the structured questionnaire distributed, after several follow-ups, the respondents filled and returned 400 copies of the questionnaires, showing 80% response rates. The analysis of data was subjected to descriptive statistics, including percentage distribution and chi-square analysis.
**Findings and discussions**

The analysis captures the respondents’ socio-demographic background, perception of neo-liberal policies, challenges facing labour unions as a result of the implementation of neo-liberal policies, and strategies for overcoming the challenges arising from the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. The findings were derived from 400 copies of the structured questionnaire filled by the respondents, representing the views of some members of the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU), and the National Union of Petroleum and Natural Gas Workers (NUPENG).

**Background of the respondents**

As shown in Table 2, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (80.5%) were male. This is not surprising given the underrepresentation of women in labour unions in Nigeria, especially in the ASUU and the NUPENG. Most of the respondents (70%) were married; this can be attributed to their status as middle-aged adults. Over 62% were aged at least 40 years.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>SN</th>
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<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>Never Married</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Living Together</td>
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<td>Married</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Widowed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Age (Years):</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than 30</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>60+</td>
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<td>Educational Qualification:</td>
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<tr>
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<td>OND/NCE/Technical</td>
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<td>HND/Bachelor</td>
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<td>Masters/PhD</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Income (₦):</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&lt;50,000</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50,001–100,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100,001–150,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.5</td>
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<td>150,001–200,000</td>
<td>288</td>
<td>72.0</td>
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<td>200,000+</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21.8</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
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</table>
Labour– Union Identification:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASUU</th>
<th>NUPENG</th>
<th>Total</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>232</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</table>

Labour-Union Participation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Regular/Always</th>
<th>Not Regular/Sometimes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>366</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the respondents were literate with at least secondary educational level while those with university postgraduate degrees constitute the majority (63.5%). This finding is expected because postgraduate education is mandatory for members of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), which is often called a union of intellectuals. Also, the NUPENG could boast of members with higher education, given that many graduates have been employed in the oil and gas industry in Nigeria.

The monthly income of most of the respondents (72%) was ₦150,000 – ₦200,000 ($938 – $1250). The income distribution shows that the income of each of the respondent was far above the national minimum wage of ₦18,500 ($115) per month. More than half of the respondents (58%) identified with the ASUU and 42% identified with the NUPENG. This finding reflects higher response rate from members of the ASUU.

Expectedly, an overwhelming majority of the respondents (92%) noted that they participated regularly in labour-union activities. This implies that the respondents would be knowledgeable about labour unions’ struggle with neo-liberal policies in Nigeria, especially if the issue of neo-liberal policies had featured in their deliberations. Data from the in-depth interviews indicated different expressions of knowledge of neo-liberal policies among members of labour unions.

Labour unions’ perception of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria

Table 3 shows the respondents’ perception of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. At 91.5%, awareness was high about close connections between globalisation and the adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. This finding implies that globalisation has induced the Nigerian government to adopt and implement privatisation, deregulation, and commercialisation. However, 96% mentioned their observation of negative impact of globalisation.

Similarly, 91.5% disclosed that privatisation had led to job losses while deregulation had fuelled increase in prices of essential commodities. Almost all the participants in the in-depth interviews condemned the Nigerian government for the implementation of neo-liberal policies without considering the adverse consequences of the policies on the majority of Nigerians.

This finding confirms Obiajulu’s (2005) earlier observation that the implementation of neo-liberal policies has affected workers negatively, as the policies resulted in gradual reduction of the workforce in Nigeria. She further noted that massive retrenchment of workers occurred in the course of commercialisation, concessioning, and privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

She mentioned several organisations that have retrenched many workers, including banks with a record of retrenchment of over 30,000 workers, the Nigeria Railway with a record of retrenchment of
over 7,000 workers, Nigerian ports with a record of retrenchment of over 10,000 workers, and textile industries where many workers have lost their jobs. A large number of workers have also lost their jobs in the power sector and oil and gas industry in Nigeria. The use of contract and casual workers has been rampant in many organisations in Nigeria.

A large majority of the respondents (96.3%) revealed that labour-union voices had been heard on neo-liberal policies, though labour-union benefits from the implementation of neo-liberal policies have been low and insignificant while their losses have been much and significant as mentioned by 82.8% and most of the participants in the in-depth interviews. This finding is consistent with Anugwom’s (2002) report that the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU) identified globalisation as the root cause of crisis in the Nigerian university system. The ASUU has not only confronted structural deficiencies in the Nigerian environment but also challenged the government-imposed neo-liberal policies.

Table 3: The respondents’ perception of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Perception of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Description of neo-liberal economic policies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privatisation/Deregulation/Free Trade</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Programmes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Comments on the neo-liberal policies in Nigeria:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The policies are driven by globalisation</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The policies are not driven by globalisation</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Impact of neo-liberal policies:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive/Good</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative/Bad</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Job value of privatisation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead to job losses</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead to more jobs</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Price value of deregulation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead to price stability</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead to rising prices</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>91.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Labour-union voice on neo-liberal policies:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour-union voice of labour has been heard</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Labour-union voice has not been heard</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Labour-union benefits from neo-liberal policies:</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Much/Significant</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less/Insignificant</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</table>

Labour unions’ challenges from neo-liberal policies

Table 4 depicts the challenges and barriers facing labour unions because of the adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies. Large proportions of the respondents (98.8%, 89% and 88.8%)
agreed that labour-union membership, funding opportunity, and mobilization capacities had been decreasing because of the adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Challenges facing labour unions in the neo-liberal policies</th>
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</table>

Participants in the in-depth interviews provided a rationale for the above finding, disclosing that labour unions have lost potential members through the increase in the rate of non-standard work arrangements in different sectors of the Nigerian economy during the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. Members of the NUPENG articulated their observation of excessive use of casual and contract workers in the oil and gas industry more clearly compared to members of the ASUU.

Regarding the issue of job security, 91.3% mentioned that they were not sure of the stability of tenure of their offices while 79.8% disclosed that labour-union education had not improved because of government adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies. Surprisingly, the majority of the
respondents noted that the Nigerian government did not consult labour unions before adopting the neo-liberal policies.

However, available evidence in literature shows involvement of the erstwhile President of the NLC in the deliberations of the National Council on Privatisation (NCP). In his comment on this issue, Okafor (2009) reported that Adams Oshiomole, the President of the Nigeria Labour Congress accepted a seat on the government-established National Council on Privatisation (NCP). Clearly, this tendency to compromise with the government limited the movement’s ability to secure its demand to the fullest extent.

Generally, respondents expressed their concerns against neo-liberal policies. In this regard, 98.8% noted that their living standards had fallen while 91.5% stated that they had observed negative impact of neo-liberal policies. Besides, 79.5% believed that they were not happy about the adoption and implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. This finding is consistent with Saleem’s (2002, p. 103) observation of a close connection between implementation of neo-liberal policies and increase in the rate of poverty:

Due to the neo-liberalism, there is an increase in both types of poverty, relative and absolute. The ratio of people living below poverty line is increasing along with the increase in the inequalities between the rich and the poor. There is a direct linkage between neo-liberalism and poverty as neo-liberalism only believes in the private interest not in the interest of society.

**Labour unions’ strategies against neo-liberal policies**

Table 5 shows the labour-union strategies against neo-liberal policies. Most respondents (93%) believed that the use of strike was a major weapon against neo-liberal policies. This finding points to labour unions’ use of strike as a major strategy against the Nigerian government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Strategies against neo-liberal policies:</th>
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<th>Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strike actions</td>
<td>372</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-strike actions</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>Non-strike actions against neo-liberal policies:</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobilisation/mass participation</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>41.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstration/Rally</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Networking with civil society organisations</td>
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<td>Political party</td>
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<td>The need for reversal of neo-liberal policies:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Political platform against neo-liberal policies:</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Necessary</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>91.5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unnecessary</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>8.5</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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In his comments on the consequences of strikes, Fashoyin (1986, p. 68) noted as follows:

" Strikes are a nuisance and a destabilizing force in industrial development. Many of them can be too costly to the national economy. [---] Many of the strikes that take place in African countries are too short-lived and insignificant to damage the economy. [---] Despite their short duration, strikes in Africa are a source of concern."

Besides strikes, members of labour unions believed in the necessity of other strategies that could stimulate antagonism against the government on any undesirable actions. Some respondents (41% and 37.8%) considered mass protest and networking with civil society organisations as other potent strategies that could be used against neo-liberal policies. Many respondents (80.3%) considered the need for a reversal of the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. This finding resonates with the previous position expressed in the ASUU’s strike bulletin as follows:

"The insistence of government on abdicating the education of Nigerian people can be explained only within the context of the World Bank agenda. Government must be persuaded by Nigerians to reverse its position on this matter. This means that all our members must educate themselves on the conspiracy of these institutions of domination (ASUU, 2001, p. 1 as cited in Anugwom, 2002, p. 148)"

Also, 91.5% each strongly believed in the potency of labour-union power for agitation, and the use of political platform against neo-liberal policies. A key finding also showed that 91.5% believed that decentralization had weakened the labour-union centres in Nigeria but the majority (82.7%) believed that government attempt to stamp out labour-union right to strike has not been successful.

**Conclusion**

The issues addressed in this article bordered on labour-union relations with the Nigerian government concerning the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. A significant proportions of labour-union members exhibited high level of participation in labour-union activities and awareness of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria. Labour unions have used strikes successfully to call the attention of the Nigerian government toward the challenges arising from the implementation of neo-liberal policies.

However, the labour unions have not succeeded in stopping the implementation of neo-liberal polices. Despite the labour-union struggle, the Nigerian government has succeeded in the implementation of some neo-liberal policies, including privatisation, deregulation, and commercialization. Unfortunately, privatisation and deregulation have contributed to rising rates of unemployment and non-standard work arrangements in Nigeria. This partly explains the rationale behind labour-union advocacy for a reversal of the implementation of neo-liberal policies in Nigeria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Labour-union power for agitation:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ineffective</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<th>Labour-union strikes during neo-liberal policies:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Much/Significant</td>
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<td>Less/Insignificant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<th>Government ban on strike:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Successful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Not successful</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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Available evidence shows that neo-liberal policies serve the interest of international institutions, such as, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organisation (WTO); these institutions regard the implementation of neo-liberal policies as a means to reconfiguring capitalism (Leggett, 2012).

It is therefore obvious that as the implementation of neo-liberal policies results in deplorable socio-economic situations the incidence of antagonism against the Nigerian government would be on the increase. Labour unions and the Nigerian government should freely negotiate and reach an agreement toward mitigating the adverse consequences of neo-liberal policies. The Nigerian government should reconsider its confrontational ideology to strengthen its capacity for the management of the lingering conflicts arising from implementation of neo-liberal policies.

References


Conventional Mass Media and Social Networks in a Democratic South Africa: Watchdogs for Good Governance and Service Delivery?

MP Sebola¹, JP Tsheola² and M. Molopa³

Abstract: Media is one of the most powerful medium accepted in democratic systems for representing voices of the citizenry, in the absence and/or addition to the existing informal and formal legislative provisions. The philosophical fulcrum of this paper is that citizenry participation in decision making processes is an imperative tenet for democratic governance to be “good” and to serve the public interests for service delivery. In this context, South Africa’s violent protests about service delivery raises question of the voices that the powerful conventional mass media is representing. The paper asserts that the editorial rooms of the conventional media appear to use the protests of the poor people for making headline, selling their products and running their businesses, rather than communicating the unfe ttered voices of the majority. A conclusion is made that the social media networks, notwithstanding their drawbacks, hold a strong realistic potential to promote the voices of the poor majority for good democratic governance of service delivery.

Keywords: Conventional mass media, social media networks, governance, service delivery, South Africa

Introduction

Recent experiences of the so-called Arab Spring have displayed the power of social media networks in mobilizing the energies of citizens around diverse themes, raising popular concerns and enforcing political change. A generally accepted assumption holds that conventional media has served as a watchdog for democratic principles and ensuring that ruling parties deliver on their electioneering promises (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Sebola, 2012). But evidence of journalistic extremes has been uncovered where on the one hand privately-funded media is bought to serve the interests of those who desire to destabilize the state, and on the other state-funded media is accused of being untrustworthy and sympathetic to incumbent government (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). The recent evidence of the now defunct UK-based News of the World, especially News International, intrusions into private lives, including those of children with fatal consequences, perpetrated by conventional media has increasingly raised vexed questions of its journalistic fairness, objectivity and accuracy, as well as service as watchdog on behalf of public interests for good governance and service delivery (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). In this context, this paper argues that social media networks hold the potential to serve as uncensored watchdog and mass-based communication of citizens’ authentic needs, aspirations, interests, fears and concerns about public service delivery. The apparent trend of the ANC-led government towards gaging conventional media freedom amidst widespread and evident public discontent with the delivery of services, as well as the continued suspicion that the large majority of media is either state-controlled or privately-funded detractors that seek to undermine government, suggest that social networking could offer the only reliable platform for originality, accuracy and objectivity in reporting and communication of citizens concerns about good governance and service delivery. However, the paper remains non-committal in regard to insinuations that social media too has been infiltrated by state agencies of the most powerful nations that use it against governing regimes of weaker states.

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Theorization of media includes, among others, the uses and gratification theory, two-step flow theory and the hypodermic needle theory (Fourie, 2001, 2009; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). According to the theory of uses and gratification, people use the media content to escape from their daily routine and work, and from a wide variety of problems that they encounter in their lives (Fourie, 2001: 297). Gratification is an emotional release, albeit of contemporary nature. However, media also provides content that gratifies the needs of companionship and sociability; and, people use its content to compare themselves and their situations and values with those of others. More importantly, they use the media for information, entertainment and education.

The two-step theory provides for co-determination of human behaviour and attitudinal change, because users are not necessarily at the mercy of the media but can selectively expose themselves on the basis of their own knowledge, experience, background, education, culture and expectations (Fourie, 2009). People tend to expose themselves selectively to media content with which they agree, prefer and understand. Also, the group (friends, family or community) of the media users can filter their interpretation and experiences of media messages as buffers against bias. However, media contributes to behavioural change and reinforces existing behaviour.

The hypodermic needle theory was popularized with the advent of mass media, radio and cinema. In its simple description, it holds that mass media can easily influence a large group of people without any challenge and opposition from them (Fourie, 2001, 2009; Wikipedia, 2011b). Mass media is assumed to be capable of injecting messages and information directly and uniformly into audiences’ minds with immediate impacts. According to this theory audiences do not use their experience, intelligence and opinion to analyse the messages, with the result that media is understood to be producers and creators that manipulate audiences for self-interest. That is, this theory equates the media with an intravenous injection of certain values, ideas and attitudes into societies, for particular behavioural patterns. To this extent, the recipient is seen as a passive and helpless victim of media (Fourie, 2009; Steward, 2010).

All these theories seem to contain aspects of truth, depending upon the form of media in question. The same perspective can be applied to the state-society relations and exercises of citizenship in public service delivery (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). It could be asked if media could successfully advocate for good governance and effective service delivery?

Jaglin (2008: 1897) notes that “sustainable provision of basic services on a fair and equitable basis has been the most critical municipality priority in post-apartheid South Africa”; and, Bontenbal (2009) observes that public participation is a key requirement for the delivery of services because passive citizenry would remain “users and choosers” rather than “makers and shapers” of services delivered. The challenge of allocating scarce public capital for universal delivery of basic services in starkly unequal; and, starkly poor societies such as South Africa renders the exercise of citizenship an imperative. When the African National Congress (ANC) assumed state power in 1994 the majority of South Africans “lacked access to basic services such as water, electricity, sanitation, good-quality health care, and decent primary education” (Spalding-Fecher, 2005: 53); and, the same segment of the population had no voice in the apartheid public service “delivery”. In the post-1994 era, it now appears that other than through public protests, sometimes violent, the majority of the poor continue to be excluded from the exercise of democratic citizenship, even with the legislation for community participation through the integrated development planning processes.
Noting that the state possessed limited investment capital for the provision of services (Smith, 2004; Spalding-Fecher, 2005), South Africa’s democratic governments have sought to decentralize and devolve authority to the local sphere in order to encourage political deliberations for “more efficient allocation of public resources and service delivery” as well as the enhancement of institutional responsiveness to “the needs of the ‘poor’ through new institutions and greater citizen participation” (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). Given the propensity for challenges to local state legitimacy, decentralization and devolution of power should have brought the state and society into close affinity, providing the opportunity for public participation and responsiveness of state institutions to community’s genuine needs (Bergh, 2004; Bontenbal, 2009; Tshandu, 2010).

South Africa’s democratic constitution provides for public participation through a variety of legislative instruments including, among others, the requirement for municipalities to facilitate the design of Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and to “create ‘new spaces and places’ … for participation of non-public actors in decision-making and policy implementation” (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). The Local Government Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 affirms the developmental nature of the municipalities by establishing the requirements for integrated development planning (RSA, 2000). Section 29 (Subsection 1) deals with the process that the municipality must follow in order to (b) “allow for – (i) the local community to be consulted on its development needs and priorities; (ii) the local community to participate in the drafting of the integrated development plan” (RSA, 2000: 40). Additionally, the Community Development Workers Programme (CDWP) was implemented in 2004 as a national mandate to fast track service delivery and development in various local municipalities (Tshishonga and Mafema, 2010) with the expressed hope of enhancing poor people’s exercise of citizenship in public service delivery.

The CDWP was viewed to be “a panacea to service delivery backlogs” and a national transformative agenda “pace setter for inclusive endogenous development geared towards sustainable service delivery” (Tshishonga and Mafema, 2010: 561, 562). The primary focus of the CDWs “is firmly on the needs of local communities” because the CDWP was conceived as “part of the process of deepening participatory democracy”, especially in social services, social grants and the development on municipal IDPs (Levin, 2008: 34). Together, these instruments seek to establish conditions, spaces and places for effective public participation and exercise of citizenship in decision-making and policy implementation, especially among the poorest sections of the South African population. However, public participation in service delivery in a democratic South Africa has remained a less than straightforward phenomenon because of the inequalities in decision-making power (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010). Media has also played a critical role in the nexus of exercise of citizenship, public participation and governance of service delivery. Inevitably, the domination of the state-society relations in South Africa takes place through a variety of mechanisms, including the use of access to different forms of media.

Whereas there could be deep discontent with the ANC-dominated parliament’s Protection of State Information Bill, conventional media industry in South Africa has raised many eyebrows in regard to the underlying intent to overstep the limits of media freedom and maintain unfettered reporting and independence, devoid of the virtues of responsibility and accountability. But it is evident that the use of social media networks in the Arab Spring has now precipitated further actions and consequences that even the state-sponsors, in case there were, would not have predicted. Whereas both conventional reporting through newspapers, radio stations and television channels as well as social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are a double-edged sort, the former group is open to
manipulation by those who hold power, to the exclusion of the voices of the poor who experience the worst effects of poor governance of public service delivery.

Modern media practices have evolved significantly from their traditional forms, and universal public access and participation is central to this “new interactivity media” (Phillips, 2008; Steward, 2010; Wikipedia, 2011b). The digital age has seen a spread out of interactive media whose news can be shaped by everyone. The interactive media involves the Internet and the “online world”; and, Brücks, Mehnert, Prommer and Räder (2008: 2) affirm that “the Internet is part of our everyday life” because “we do the same in the Internet as in real life, probably in a more efficient, faster and cheaper way.” Indeed, public communication through the Internet is becoming increasingly popular. Beyond allowing the virtual meeting of strangers, the new interactive media enables users to articulate their social networks, hence the conception of social media networks. Social networking sites (SNS), like Facebook, Twitter and Mxit are the latest trends in online communication which is virtually open access (Brücks, Mehnert, Prommer and Räder, 2008; Phillips, 2008). They have become extremely popular in recent years and they continue to attract large numbers of users. Since their introduction, millions of users have integrated these sites into their daily routine. They have become some of the most popular online destinations; not surprisingly, this level of user attraction has been accompanied by much coverage in the most popular press, including speculations about the potential gains and harms stemming from the use of social network services. However, the value or otherwise of the social networks in servicing the purposes of good governance for service delivery on behalf of the majority of the poor people, compared to the conventional mass media, remains scarcely tested.

**Power and Access to Media: Mediating the State-Society Interface**


In respect of community participation in integrated development planning, the 2001 Regulations stipulates in Chapter 4, Section 15(1)(a) that “in the absence of an appropriate municipal wide structure for community participation, a municipality must establish a forum that will enhance community participation in - (i) the drafting and implementation of the municipality’s integrated development plan” (RSA, 2001: 17). The forum established for community participation is required, by law, to be representative of the composition of the local community of the municipality. Additionally, Chapter 5 of the 2001 Regulations stipulates in section 2 that “a municipality must – (a) convene regular meetings of the forum … (1) to – (i) discuss the process to be followed in drafting the integrated development plan; (ii) consult on the content of the integrated development plan” (RSA, 2001: 17). Section 15(3) in Chapter 5 of the 2001 Regulations provides that “a municipality must afford the local community at least 21 days to comment on the final draft of its integrated development plan before the plan is submitted to the Council for adoption” (RSA, 2001: 18).
These provisions for public participation sound benign, but in practice poor communities have remained passive due to government reinventing itself and redefining citizens as end user and chooser clients/customers, rather than “makers and shapers” of services delivered (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Tshandu, 2010). The media has not been a blameless bystander in this muting of the voices of the poor through democratic provisions that allow for selective domination of communication.

In a democratic setup, access to media could bear contradictory outcomes in regard to giving pragmatic effect to participatory democracy and good governance, which are key ingredients for universal delivery of public services among the poor. Good governance is intricately interlinked with the success of decentralization, efficiency of the local state and effective public participation because active and engaged civil society can eloquently express genuine interests of the citizenry and enforce responsive state machinery in delivering public services (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Tshandu, 2010). Intensive state-society intersections strengthen governance, citizen participation, state responsiveness and public functionaries’ accountability. As Bontenbal (2009: 182) observes that “a strong state and a strong civic society are therefore simultaneously imperative for better conditions for service delivery and high responsiveness to poverty needs”. A strong local civic society involves citizenship, participation and voice (Mitlin, 2004; Johnson and Wilson, 2009; Tshandu, 2010).

The exercise of citizenship is not just a political right, but it is an act of agency and practice which strives to improve accountability and transparency wherein citizens act as “makers and shapers”, rather than “users and choosers” of the ideal governance structures for service delivery (Bontenbal, 2009: 182). For this reason, participation is intricately intertwined with power and local politics as important ingredients of civic actors’ exercise of citizenship for public service delivery and enforcement of the ideal civic virtues. Reality is that “local politics are embedded in historical, socio-cultural contexts” (Bontenbal, 2009: 188) to the extent that taking part in conventional meetings may not allow for genuine exercise of citizenship. Unsurprisingly, the IDP planning meetings are captivated by technocrats and the local notables to the virtual exclusion of the voice of the poor. Indeed, the mode of citizenship participation is of critical importance because it relates to variable power relations (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Bontenbal, 2009; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010; Tshandu, 2010; Steward, 2010).

Whereas some modes of participation are straight-jackets that are predetermined in the Editorial Boardrooms, some are flexible, leaving unfettered power in the hands of the user to exercise citizenship, with unpredictable outcomes. The social media networks having being at the core of legitimizing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military strikes in Libya, they cannot control the ultimate destiny as there is now genuine fear that Libya could be divided into at least four states. However, the differentness in modes of citizen participation is especially invaluable for the poor who are not a homogenous group because it creates the opportunity for distinct, yet closely related, interest groups and agendas to be exercised (Mitlin, 2004; Skog, 2005; Steward, 2010). A comparison of the conventional and social networks will demonstrate that the latter has the necessary qualities to guarantee a greater unfettered voice of the poor people in service delivery.

**Conventional Media and the State-Society Interface**

The role of media in the government administration has a long history of existence traceable to the early 20th century (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Theoretically, there are two propositions about the role of conventional media in modern democracy. The two most commonly acknowledged functions of
conventional media in a democracy are to ensure that citizens make responsible and informed choices rather than act out of ignorance or misinformation; and, that elected representatives uphold civic virtues (Centre for Democracy and Governance, 1999; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Whereas other conceptualize media as middlepersons mediating the state-society interface, with its role being limited to the recording and passing of information as is, others argue that it is more than mere reporting and passing information to the public, embracing therefore thorough analysis of policy consequences that need to be enacted. These two conceptualizations of the role of the media in the state-society interface are selectively entrenched in the modern society. However, the ease of state intervention in conventional media reportage makes it a less effective alternative for the poor because the state-society interface tends to be dominated by the state, creating a self-serving culture wherein public servants find no obligation to be accountable and responsive to the genuine service delivery needs. Under such conditions of biased control of conventional media by state agencies, good governance and service delivery become unattainable pipedreams.

In South Africa various institutions were put in place to secure and ensure good governance and service delivery; and, these instruments include the Office of the Public Protector, Special Investigations Unit, Auditor-General, the Hawks and other anti-corruption legislations such as Executive Members Ethics Act 82 of 1998, Corruption Act 94 of 1992, the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act 2004 and the Protected Disclosures Act 26 of 2000 (Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). In addition to these institutions and legislations, there is a good element of the freedom of speech and expression by the conventional media industry in South Africa. South Africa’s governance provisions hold promise and a realistic potential for successful implementation and application in service delivery. However, media is varied, with different power dynamics and mechanisms of its relations to the citizens and the state; as a result, the role of conventional media in enforcing civic virtues for good governance and service delivery is not a given. Whereas applicable to the private and public sectors, the concept of governance is often identified with the latter as a set of operational processes and system required by a public institution in service delivery (Smith, 2004; Fourie, 2009; Maldonado, 2010). Poor governance, as the antithesis of “good governance”, is characterized by corruption, lack of unaccountability and unresponsiveness to the genuine needs of the poor (Pillay, 2004; Sebola, 2012). Intricately intertwined with the concept of governance are issues of public participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-orientatedness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency and accountability (Godbole, 2001; Pillay, 2004; UNESCAP, 2010).

There is specific legislation adopted for the purposes of service delivery in South Africa; and, they include the White Paper on Transformation and Service Delivery of 1997 (Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010; Tshandu, 2010; Steward, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Legislative instruments such as Batho Pele Principles were designed to foster good governance and public service delivery (Sebola, 2012). A democratic South Africa, in its aspiration for good governance in service delivery, adopted the corporate concept of clientilism and redefined the public as clients/customers, who are per legislation expected to receive fair public administration. Notwithstanding the numerous legislative instruments to curb transgression against civic virtues, acts such as corruption, nepotism, fraud, bribery and self-enrichment, appear to have persisted. The recent violent protests point to continued disaffection among the majority of the poor. The fact that conventional media has been at the forefront of the challenges in service delivery, including expose of open-toilets, yet accountability and good governance at the local state continues to be non-existent, implies that the exercise of citizenship by wider publics remains wanting. Perhaps, it is the dominant mode through which the citizenship is being
exercised that does not serve the interests of the poor, who are in the majority in South Africa, in ensuring genuine service delivery and accountability.

Government monitoring institutions such as the Auditor-General and the Public Service Commission have appeared to be trapped in bureaucratic engagements and political squabbles, rather than enforcing accountability (Ruhinga, 2009). Pressure groups such as AfriMap and the Open Society Foundation for South Africa have lamented the unresponsiveness and ineffectiveness of service delivery and good governance oversight institutions such as the Public Service Commission and the Auditor-General (Sebola, 2012). More often than not, when all such formal institutions fail to entrench the exercise of citizenship, the poor in particular, become disillusioned and disengaged; and, it has appeared that the “haves” tend to look up to conventional media to critically oversee the conduct of the public sector for self-interests. There are historical incidences that suggest that the objectivity and integrity of conventional media have been compromised.

By legislation, the South African media industry has a role in nation-building and the provision of information to the public. Among others, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Broadcasting Amendment Act of 2002, the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993 and the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa are central to guiding the conduct of conventional media. In addition to the ethical requirements imposed on the media industry, these legislative instruments equally provide for freedom and independence of reportage. The Constitution encapsulates the right to freedom of expression, which includes freedom of press and other media, freedom to receive or impart information or ideas (RSA, 1996). This right does not allow for propaganda, incitement of violence or advocacy of hatred along racial, ethnic, religious or gender divides (Sebola, 2012). But access to conventional media is dependent upon position and class in society. That is, the poor are unable to access media or use it as a tool for exercising citizenship and enforcing good governance, accountability, civic virtues and universal public service delivery.

Conventional media in a democratic South Africa appears to have been discredited because the function of the new legislation on the Protection of State Information Bill is to regulate the freedoms guaranteed by the Supreme Law. Commenting about the Media Appeals Tribunal proposed in this Bill, the ANC Youth League argued that conventional media has lost its integrity because its reportage is shrouded in “spiteful agendas” and that media monitoring and evaluation institutions such as the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF) and the Press Council of South Africa have equally failed the test of objectivity (Szabo, 2010). Further, it is held that newspapers such as City Press, Mail & Guardian, the Citizen, Sunday Times, the Times, die Burgher, Rapport as well as all other Independent Group newspapers have compromised their journalistic objectivity and integrity (Szabo, 2010; Sebola, 2012). Other than being seen as ANC detractors, a significant section of conventional media in South Africa is accused of being funded and goaded by opposition parties and, therefore, unqualified to raise genuine service delivery concerns of the majority of the poor (Szabo, 2010).

In terms of the Broadcasting Amendments Act of 2002, there is a requirement that the Public Broadcaster reflects South African attitudes, opinions, ideas, values and artistic creativity, supports South African talent in education and entertainment programmes, embraces a plurality of views and variety of news, information and analysis from a South African point of view and advances the national and public interest (RSA, 2002b). The Broadcaster is further required to adhere to a Code of Practice that ensures that the services and the personnel comply with the constitutional principle of equality, equitable treatment of all segments of the South African population and official languages, the rights of all South Africans to receive and impart information and ideas, the mandate to provide for a wide
range of audience, interests, believes and perspectives and a high standard of accuracy, fairness and impartiality in news and programmes that deal with matters of public interest (RSA, 2002b). On paper, these provisions are benign, but the reality among the poorest segments of the South African population is that of poor and inadequate access to this medium for exercise of citizenship for service delivery, other than when violent protests make for “good headline news”. Unfortunately, it has emerged that some commentators were barred, albeit unofficially, from appearing on the Public Broadcasters because of the views they hold about state and society. True or otherwise, such incidences raise vexed questions of whose voice the Public Broadcaster has sought to promote; and, the reasons thereto could as well be ominous signs of democratic decay.

The objective of the Media Development and Diversity Agency Act of 2002 is to promote development and diversity in the South African media, consistent with the right to freedom of expression, especially freedom of the press and other media as well as freedom to receive and impart information or ideas (RSA, 2002a). This Act seeks to balance the rights of journalists with those of politicians, without necessarily enhancing the access to the media by ordinary citizens. Additionally, it avoids the necessary requirement that journalists’ reportage should embrace an analytical engagement. The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa Amendment Act of 2006 on its part, seeks to deal with the granting, renewal, amendment, transfer and revocation of licenses (RSA, 2006), rather than engendering the mechanisms for the exercise of citizenship by the poorest sector of the population. These legislative instruments are indeed necessary, but they do not extent access of conventional media to the poor as a platform for enforcing good governance for service delivery. That is, the reformist tendencies in South Africa is a reflexive reordering of the relationship between the state and media, rather than allowing for scope for the voiceless majority to transmit unfettered messages through conventional media houses.

A democratic South Africa is blessed with national public television stations such as SABC 1, 2 and 3 as well as its sister Radio Broadcasters that cover almost all the official languages, privately-owned television and radio stations such as M-NET, e.tv and eNews Channel and numerous other community television and radio stations (Wikipedia, 2011a; Sebola, 2012). Additionally, newspapers include well-established ones such as Business Day, Daily Sun, Mail & Guardian, Rapport, Sowetan, Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, Sunday Sun, Sunday World, the Citizen and City Press, all of which purport to be raising the voices of the marginalized. But none of their stories could have been possibly authored or co-authored by the poor people themselves. That is, a significant number of the stories about the plight of the poor, service delivery, corruption and so on, are written on behalf of the voices of the poor by journalists who are not so poor, with limited “lived experiences” of the conditions in informal settlements and rural South Africa. If conventional media promotes good governance and genuine service delivery, it may not be due to the direct citizenship and enforcement by poor people themselves. Development requires people themselves to be active, makers and shapers of their own service delivery. In the same spirit, citizenship exercised on behalf of the poor is incomplete and inadequate. Given that full democracy is impossible in reality, the most powerful instrument for the poor to raise their voices is equally situated in the prevailing power relations.

Social Media Networks and the State-Society Interactions
Social network sites were launched first in 1997; and, the first was named SixDegrees.com which allowed users to create profiles, list friends and, as of 1998, surf the friends lists (Wikipedia, 2011b). Despite having attracted millions of users, SixDegrees became financially unsustainable, apparently because it came ahead of time, when social networking was poorly understood. Ryze.com launched the next wave of social networking sites (SNSs) in 2001 helping to leverage networks business. This
re-launch of SNS was backed by entrepreneurs and investors. The venture was supported by, among others, Tribe.net, LinkedIn and Friendster, which were closely entwined hoping to avoid a repeat of the recent history of the collapse of SixDegrees (Chatkin, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007; Wikipedia, 2011b). But Ryze.com did not generate mass popularity, whilst Tribe.net grew to attract a passionate niche user-base; and, LinkedIn became a powerful business service whilst Friendster grew to be the most significant network (Chatkin, 2007: 1). Currently, social networking sites have increased and regularized into normal daily experiences, each site bringing something new that will make it stand out of the rest.

Facebook was founded in 2004 to, originally, facilitate social interactions exclusively among college students (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007). The site grew to include more than 49 million users; and, it is now available for use by anyone with a valid email address and/or cell phone. It allows users to select one or more “networks”, in accordance with specific interests and foci, to which they wish to belong. Facebook allows for group communication, which provides the potential for use in the exercise of citizenship. Twitter is now the fast growing popular social media (Philips, 2008). It offers a social networking and micro-blogging services, enabling users to send and read messages called tweets, which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user’s profile page and are publicly available by default, but senders can restrict message delivery to specific groups. According to Barnes (2006: 13), Mxit is one of the biggest mobile instant messengers worldwide; and, it is widely used in South Africa and is very popular amongst the younger generation. Basically, it is a small java application that runs on mobile phones, allowing multiple users to chat instantly over the internet through GPRS packet data. Messages are sent for the fraction of the cost of a sms where a couple of characters of text amount to only a few kilobytes. Mxit’s rise to popularity relied solely on word of mouth-marketing. Taken together, these SNS provide a powerful platform for potential popular and full democracy where diverse and multiple voices could be raised to shape governance for public service delivery.

According to Hodge (2006: 3), SNSs play a crucial role in bridging boundaries, enabling communities to communicate on a platform of virtual equality. They offer a popular means of staying in touch and communicating with friends and family whilst simultaneously growing the social circle of new acquaintances. Online social networking, which commonly uses websites, creates virtual social sites that are controlled by the users themselves, thereby functioning like an online community of Internet users. Depending on the website in question, many of these online community members share broadly common interests in hobbies, religion and/or politics. The socialization associated with this new interactive media tends to be deeper, including reading the profile pages of other members and, sometimes, making personal contacts with them. Making friends is just one of the many benefits of social networking online. It also exposes users to diversity of views, debates and consensus building, which are central to democratic systems. Besides creating the possibility for friendships, social networking sites make for on-going learning among the users, which is a critical requirement in public service delivery as it could enforce convergence of public sentiments. For instance, in the Arab Spring, people who participated in the removal of leaders did so for a diversity of reasons, sometimes even contradictory to each other. This character of social media networks demonstrates power to transcend divisive propensities of human beings; and, it should be a good quality for collective enforcement of civic virtues, good governance and service delivery at the local state scale. Its capacity to bring together individuals and/or organizations as interest groups as cheaply as it does, points to its usability to representing the voices of the poor in exercising citizenship for good governance of service delivery.
Conventional Mass Media Versus Social Media Networks: Public Versus Self-interested Voice

Public participation should generate mutual communication, information and education exchange process wherein the public and their functionaries learn on an on-going basis because public needs and aspirations as well as local government challenges and priorities are in a state of flux (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). In South Africa, though, comprehensive blue-print plans are devised by professionals and accepted by the dominant social, political, education and economic institutions” as reflective of “consensus of the majority on how to solve social problems (Reddy, Naidoo and Pillay, 2005; Erwin, 2008; Kollapen, 2008; Labuschagne, 2010; Mzimakwe, 2010). The poor and specifically the informal settlement communities in South Africa are “a living example of passive consumers of the services”. That is, despite all the public participation provisions, poor communities have not engaged their rightful democratic spaces in local government service delivery, other than through violent protests (Van der Waldt, 2007: 28; Mzimakwe, 2010: 514). That is, the democratic provisions made to secure good governance through the exercise of citizenship, which include among other things the 1996 Constitution of South Africa, the Municipal Finance Management Act 56 of 2006, Protected Disclosures Act, Municipal Systems Act, Corruption Act and Public Service Regulations (Pillay, 2004; Mafunisa, 2007; Sebola, 2012), have continued to circumvent the voices of the poor.

State’s propaganda has tended to legitimize and validate itself through conventional media. As a result, the genuine public service delivery grievances of the poor may be underreported and/or misrepresented. The South African Broadcasting Corporation’s role in democratization and good governance has become highly questionable because of strong suspicion of government censorship. Apparently, the Public Broadcaster selectively manages the state-society interface by the nature of news reported or excluded. E.tv, on its part, is feared for investigative journalism that has unsettled both politicians and public officials in regard to neglect of duty, corruption, nepotism and self-enrichment. Indeed, some of the station’s expose have earned it further journalistic credibility, amidst sentiments of the station’s reportage being criticized for being extremist and less objective. Even as e.tv regard itself as the free-to-air “watchdog of the people of South Africa”, it does not necessarily afford ordinary poor people the editorial freedom of choosing and authoring their own genuine stories. This point shows that the measure of journalistic integrity and objectivity applied in conventional media may perhaps exclude the circulation of genuine news among the poor. Demonstrating the conventional media’s association with power and class, Cunningham (2010) indicates that some disillusioned members of the ruling party started newspapers of their own in order to control the reportage and to serve their self-interests. Whereas it may be speculative to argue that conventional media represents the powerful voices, it is perfectly legitimate to enunciate that the poor people have no means to react to their exclusions from conventional media, whose transformation has failed to enhance their exercise of citizenship.

The focus of social networking websites is variable, and some emphasize particular interests, whereas others do not; hence, Skog (2005) characterizes social networking websites as “traditional” open-membership spaces and places. This means that anyone can become a member, irrespective of differentness in hobbies, beliefs, views or political persuasion. For this reason, the new interactive media lends itself for effective use and exercise of citizenship among the poor communities, even in starkly unequal societies such as South Africa. Despite claims of infiltration in some cases, it is not as yet evidently clear how the state would dominate the state-society interface through this potentially effective mode of participation. Indeed, there are dangers associated with social networking; and, these include data theft and viruses, which are on the rise. The most prevalent danger though often involves online predators or individuals who claim to be someone that they are not. However, these
dangers cannot preclude the use of networking online. Addiction may be the most worrying side effect of the new interactive media; and, Skog (2005) observes that social networking sites have brought tremendous changes in people’s life. It is now easier and cheaper to chat over the phone with a friend using Mxit, Facebook and Twitter. Some people have even got addicted to the networking sites and use them more often and as such their life is completely influenced by the frequent usage. In the final analysis, it should be accepted that by design, SNSs are designed to foster social interactions in a virtual environment wherein communication is facilitated through information posted in the profile by the users themselves. Communication can take place through a variety of applications similar to email or online message boards. Such interactions can potentially address a variety of social and political matters. With proliferation of social networking online, there may be no reasons to avoid using it to enhance exercises of citizenship for good governance and public service delivery among poor people.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that genuine exercise of citizenship by the majority of the poor continues to be elusive due largely to the power relations, exercised through conventional media among other things, embedded in the state-society interactions. Access to conventional media is highly variable and dependent upon economic and socio-political class. Whereas the “haves” access all forms of media, poor people may be limited to the social media networks, unless when conventional media seek to exploit their plight for suspicious, unspecified agendas. On the one hand, it cannot be concluded with uncertainty that conventional media act as a responsible watchdog over state accountability and good governance at both the individual and institutional scales. The critique of government policies and activities by conventional media has indeed kept politicians and public officials on their toes in dealing with public affairs; simultaneously, conventional media has been criticized for being goaded and abused by capital. On the other hand, social media networks too, despite being accessible to ordinary citizens, uncensored and offering full power to the end users, have been criticized for allowing the spread of uninformed, clumsy, opaque and irresponsible hearsay. However, social media networks seem to provide the best available option for poor people in exercising citizenship for service delivery. This paper proposes that the local state too should seek to rely on social media networks for education, information exchange and learning about the public’s genuine needs, as well as managing fair state-society relations.

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Unlocking the Door from Poverty through Rotating Savings and Credit Associations: A Study of Group Based Savings in Ward 14 of Gutu District, Zimbabwe

Alimos Mushuku¹ and Julliet Mayisa²

Abstract: Formal credit excludes the majority of poor people and often a majority of rural people. Yet the poor can make good use of credit to increase rural incomes which is the key to rural economic growth and food security. There is, therefore, a shift away from formal credit back to community controlled rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs). The focus of the study therefore was to assess the contribution of rotating savings and credit associations in improving the livelihoods of rural people in ward 14 of Gutu District. A sample of 30 ROSCA group members was selected using stratified random sampling. The research instruments that were used to gather data include questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that ROSCA members engage in simple or random ROSCAs, consumer durable ROSCAs and bidding or discounting ROSCAs. Participation in ROSCAs has enabled rural households in Gutu district to accumulate assets and starting up new business. However, ROSCA members encounter various problems which include defaulting members and mismanagement of funds. The study therefore recommends that the government should influence financial institutions to offer loans to ROSCA members since they can repay.

Keywords: Rural poor, Rotating Savings and Credit Associations, microfinance, increased incomes, sustainable livelihoods

Background of the Study
Making ends meet for rural dwellers across developing countries is a daily struggle. In Sub-Saharan Africa, rural households typically pursue diverse livelihood portfolios not because they have plenty of economic opportunities but as a response to shocks and seasonality. Most of these rural areas are often in marginal agro-ecological regions for most forms of agriculture. Frequent droughts, infertile soils, a decline in forest resource bases, lack of access to credit facilities, difficulties in accessing vibrant markets for most products and the deplorable state of infrastructure are some of the constraints to achieving a better life. The interaction of all these factors over time has resulted in high incidences of poverty among rural populations.

Rural poverty has been exacerbated by the fact that governments of developing countries have reduced their commitments to rural development activities. As Makumbe (1996) puts it, by the end of the 1980s natural economic hardships had forced governments of developing countries to reduce their commitments to rural development activities and projects. This led to the growth of income generating projects and other microfinance projects among people in rural areas. Sustainable access to microfinance helps alleviate poverty by generating incomes, creating jobs, allowing children to go to school, enabling rural families to obtain healthcare and empowering people to make choices that best suit their needs, as a result improving their livelihoods.

Rotating Saving and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) are one way in which people have tried to save their low income in households. ROSCAs have flourished both in urban and rural settings especially where formal institutions seem to fail to meet the needs of a growing population. ROSCAs are among the oldest and most prevalent savings institutions found in the world. According to Ardener (1964),

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ROSCAs started back in 200BC in China and other developing economies among subgroups who had been traditionally excluded from mainstream financial services as well as among individuals who had reasonable access to banking institutions. ROSCAs have been reported among employees of International Monetary Fund and among bank employees in Bolivia as is put by Adams and Canavesi (1992). In countries such as Taiwan with well functioning credit market as well as Bangladesh and Japan, as much as 50% of people are estimated to belong to ROSCAs (Besley and Coate, 1995).

ROSCAs have also spread to developing countries. Bouman (1995) asserts that estimates suggest that in the 1980s, 50% of the population in Congo belonged to a ROSCA while participation ranged from 50% to 95% in most rural areas in Liberia, Ivory Coast, Togo and Nigeria. In 1992, membership of ROSCAs in Cameroon was estimated at 80% of the population and in several villages of Nigeria membership was found to be 65% of the total population as Bouman (1995) puts it.

In Zimbabwe, several microfinance projects such as ROSCAs and accumulating savings and credit associations (ASCRAs) began in the 1980’s and gained popularity in the 1990s with a lot of people adopting and engaging in ROSCAs as a livelihood strategy and a form of livelihood diversification. ROSCAs are a local saving mechanism and they are flexible and adapt themselves easily to rural peculiarities as well as existing community patterns of group members. ROSCAs have come up as a result of the bottom-up approach to development in which there is total participation of the rural people and decision making lies with these people. The study sought to assess the contribution of ROSCAs in improving rural livelihoods.

Statement of the Problem
Many formal credit programmes have largely failed to reach the poor because of the shortcomings in the structure and functioning of formal credit systems. As such there has been a paradigm shift away from bureaucratically managed credit back to locally controlled internal savings and lending schemes. The study therefore assesses the contribution of ROSCAs to the livelihoods of rural people in Ward 14 Gutu district.

Aim of the Study
The study sought to assess the contribution of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) in improving rural livelihoods in Ward 14 of Gutu.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
1. To identify the nature of ROSCAs
2. To assess the contribution of ROSCAs in improving rural livelihoods.
3. To evaluate the challenges faced by members participating in ROSCAs as a livelihood enhancement strategy.
4. To recommend solutions aimed at improving rural livelihoods through engaging in ROSCAs.

Justification of the Study
The study generates information on why people save, how much they contribute, what they use their savings for and how these savings help them improve their livelihoods. Such information can help Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) to identify and strengthen the indigenous financial systems. Information such as how much they save can be used by formal banks in assessing the risks of lending money to the rural poor. The total amount of money they contribute is estimated to be a third of their total incomes and such statistical information is also important to banks. The total amount one gets from each cycle help banks and financial institutions to determine the amount of loans they can
facilitate to ROSCA members so as to help them start up businesses or income generating projects. Normally banks offer loans four times more one’s monthly income and this will help the bank to determine the exact amount that can be given to the rural people as loans.

**Methodology**
The research employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were the data collection techniques utilized in the study. Questionnaires were distributed to 30 ROSCA members selected through the stratified simple random sampling technique. Focus Group Discussions were held with ROSCA group members in Ward 14 Gutu district during ROSCA meetings. In-depth interviews were conducted with officials from the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises. Descriptive statistics and summaries of emerging issues concerning the contribution of ROSCAs to rural livelihoods were used to analyse data.

**Literature review**

*The Nature of ROSCAs*
ROSCAs are the poor man's bank where money is not idle for long but change hands rapidly, satisfying both consumptions and production needs. Ardener (1964) described ROSCAs as an association formed upon a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given in whole or in part to each contributor in rotation. Bouman (1979), goes on to define ROSCAs as a group of individuals who come together and make regular cyclical contributions to a common fund which is then given as a lumpsum to one member in each cycle. A member will lend money to other members through his/her monthly contributions. After having received the lumpsum, when it is his/her turn, he/she then pays back the amount in further monthly contributions and this explains the name for ROSCAs. Depending on the cycle in which a member receives his/her lumpsum, members alternate between lenders and borrowers. There is therefore a mutual give and take involved in ROSCAs.

*Membership*
Members participating in a ROSCA are selected based on ethnic lines or geographic limitations. According to Geertz (1963), ROSCAs consist of groups of people between 4-15 who already have a relationship of some sort such as employment in the same organization, same ethnic background, friendship, neighbourhood or business ties.

*Contributions*
The amount to be contributed in each cycle is decided based on the number of participating members, the total winning amount that each member can get and other socio-economic factors. Bouman (1979) asserted that contributions can also be in form of shares, thus allowing a member to have more than one share or contribution in a particular cycle, increasing their chances of winning the lumpsum but also increasing the regular contributions to be made.

*Cycle Period*
The frequency with which contributions have to be made in each cycle is the cycle period. This can be daily, bi-weekly, monthly and bi-monthly, depending on the amount to be contributed. Usually, the little the amount, the shorter the cycle period.
Mode of Selecting the Winner

Bouman (1979) postulated that the basis of selecting the winner of the lumpsum is decided by one of the following:

(a) By consensus, where by common agreement between members, the amount is given to the member who is in most need of finance.
(b) By lots, where a lottery determines who gets the lumpsum in a particular way. Members who have received the lumpsum do not participate in subsequent lotteries but continue to make contributions.
(c) By bidding, where the lumpsum amount is bid for by members during the cycle. Thus the member who wins the bid will receive the lumpsum minus the bid amount, while other members pay their contributions minus their share of the bid amount.

Types of ROSCAS

Simple or Random ROSCA

In a simple ROSCA, each individual contributes a predetermined fixed sum to a universal fund and it is given to one member who becomes the first on the cycle. The fund rotates to another participant or member at the next meeting until all members have had a turn at the lumpsum. In a random ROSCA, the contributions are fixed, and everyone contributes the same amount at each meeting and receives the same amount when their turn arrives. By the end of the ROSCA everyone will have received, in lumpsum, the total of their monthly contribution. In that sense, there is no net gain or loss for any participant.

The Consumer Durable ROSCA

This is mostly popular among women and has a slight variation on the random ROSCA. As in random ROSCA, the leader organizes the group who contribute a fixed amount to the fund. Instead of rotating a lumpsum of funds, however participants receive a physical good such as an asset, for example a car that the group has agreed upon at the beginning of the ROSCA (Shepherd, 1998). The organiser usually obtains a discounted price for the goods in exchange for the guaranteed purchase of a certain number of goods in the coming months. Thus participants in consume durable ROSCAs can attain the purchasing power necessary to negotiate goods at a lower price.

Discounting or Bidding ROSCAs

These use bidding as a means of determining the order by which participants receive the pot. As in the random ROSCA, the organiser in exchange for assembling the participants receives the pot first. To determine the order in which the participant would receive the pot, a system of bidding is introduced in the rounds. At the beginning of each rotation, the organiser contacts the participants who have not yet received the pot in order to forgo in exchange for early receipt of the pot. The person, who submits the highest bid for the rotation, therefore translates into a discount for some of the participants (Dzingira, 2000).

ROSCAs require very little record keeping. But it is always safe to keep the record of the amounts collected, attendance at each meeting and who receives the lumpsum on which date. In case there is a conflict between members regarding the procedure or if the group decides to continue its activities and begun another cycle, such records help everyone remember what was decided and agreed on the meetings.
Characteristics of ROSCAs

Social Capital

ROSCAs, like banks, make the decision to originate a loan to a borrower based on certain information. Banks arrive at a credit decision by assessing the borrower’s credit history, current income and available collateral. This process is highly efficient and allows financial institutions on a larger scale to assess the credit worthiness of individuals with whom they have not had previous relationships. In contrast, ROSCAs rely on a person’s social capital to assess a participants’ credit worthiness. Social capital, a concept carried by Loury (1977), represents the consequences of social position in facilitating individual acquisition of the standard human capital characteristics. In regard to ROSCAs, a person’s social capital is the basis of his/her creditworthiness and grants him/her access to capital. ROSCA members are personally acquainted with each other and are generally part of the same community. As a result, a participant’s current and previous economic status as well as commitment to meet financial obligations will be known. ROSCA participants depend on social capital to assess financial risk and viability, to promote forced savings, networking and information gathering and to create group pressure that will guarantee continued commitment.

Assessing financial risk

In most ROSCAs organisers employ social capital to recruit individuals from their own social network whom they can depend on to meet financial commitments. Participants on the other hand, will agree to join ROSCAs as long as they view the organiser as credible and trustworthy. This credibility must extend to the organiser’s ability to choose equally honest and reliable individuals to join the ROSCAs and to perform the administrative tasks associated with collecting funds and ensuring payment, even if it means assuming the payments of a defaulting member. Participants must also trust that the organiser will not disappear with the funds after the first rotation. In some case, ROSCAs will allow new members of the community to join. However, membership will be granted on references or at the recommendation of an existing member. In other ROSCAs, new members must first demonstrate their credit worthiness to the community for example new members might receive the pot towards the last round and move up in the pecking order once they have shown their credit worthiness (Bouman and Harteveld, 1976).

Forced Savings, networking and information gathering

Some participants regard ROSCAs’ emphasis on social capital as a means of self discipline where savings are concerned. Because maintaining one’s social capital is necessary to obtain future access to credits, participants join ROSCAs as a way to compel themselves to make monthly payments hence to save. Many participants point to the ease with which a person could discontinue making payments to financial institutions because of lack of social consequences. In contrast, not only would a defaulting ROSCA member endanger his future access to credit, participants also understand that their default would directly correlate with other members not being able to obtain the funds necessary for some transaction.

Participants also rate altruistic mutations for joining ROSCAs particularly random ROSCAs. Participants feel that their contributions assist members of their own community who may be in need of a lumpsum to pay college tuition, to make a large purchase such as furniture for a home, wedding or building a house. ROSCAs facilitate social networking and information exchange. Many ROSCA meetings involve ritualistic practices and social observances. According to Bouman and Harteveld (1976), ROSCA meetings provide opportunities for feasting, drinking and networking as is the case of West Cameroon where participants exchange greetings and share kola nuts while reserving drinking until after the day’s business affairs have been settled.
ROSCAs also provide opportunities for participants to network, to support each other in economic endeavours and to congratulate each other in attaining a financial goal. As a result, participation in a ROSCA has been compared with membership in a weight weathers program where group pressure and support make progress possible (Light 1996). Light (1996), goes onto describe ROSCAs as educational institutions because they support information sharing. It is not uncommon for participants to discuss what they intend to do with their lumpsum and other participants to offer on where best to purchase a particular good or service. In this way, ROSCAs offer most of the services those financial advisors in banking institutions provide.

**Group Pressure**
Organisers and group members rely on social capital to ensure continuous monthly payments throughout the life of a ROSCA, even after a member has had his/her turn at the pot. Normally participants meet their contribution for fear of the social consequence. Sometimes however, members need coercing. Often the organiser or any group member may visit the home of the defaulting member and make it clear that he or she must pay his/her obligation (Bonnet, 1981). When that fails, the organiser may proceed to announce to all members what the defaulting member had done.

**Savings Mechanisms**
ROSCAs serve as a vehicle for saving in households where there are conflicting preferences over immediate consumption versus saving among household members. Anderson and Baland (2002) are of the view that ROSCAs are regarded as a sourcing commitment device whereby people can save their money for future use by contributing in ROSCAs. Members save for buying durables in the long run (Besley, Coate and Loury, 1993).

**Security or Insurance Function**
ROSCAs provide insurance to its participants even in the presence of formal credit markets by providing an additional instrument for its participants to share shocks among them. ROSCAs insure members against the consequences of illness, accidents or death. According to Kaseke (1998) most people in Zimbabwean rural areas especially farmers engage in ROSCAs as they provide a social security function and protects them against contingencies such as sickness and death. In the event of such problems many often use the money from ROSCAs to cover the expenses incurred. According to Anderson and Baland (2002), in Kenyan rural areas formal markets for insurance are virtually non-existent. When funds are distributed via an auction mechanism ROSCAs can serve as insurance mechanisms because participants may access money when they need it.

**Lower Transaction Costs**
Since ROSCAs are performed by assembling participants of a closely knit community who are aware of each others’ credit worthiness, costs associated with bank lending such as running a credit history, requiring collateral and performing pre-loan and post-loan monitoring are not experienced. According to Chami and Fischer (1995), lower transaction costs are passed on along to ROSCA members which may result in lower cost loans or higher yielding service plan.

**Accessibility and Flexibility**
Fewer transaction costs also enable ROSCA members to receive loans quickly. While borrowers with as little or no credit history may experience some difficulty or delay in accessing funds from financial institutions, ROSCA members may have funds in as little as a day. Additionally, many meetings are routinely held at a member’s home making it convenient for members to meet without incurring costs
(Bouman and Haeteveld, 1976). Furthermore, ROSCA meetings are social gatherings where members share a common language and culture. For individuals unfamiliar with financial institutions and the banking concepts associated with them, being able to access funds generated by the community can prove to be less intimidating. According to Chami and Fischer, (1995), ROSCAs exhibit a certain degree of flexibility with characteristics such as loan amount, duration, regularity of meetings and rotational decisions depend upon the members’ discretion. ROSCAs have been cited as a good source of obtaining small loans which banks are normally reluctant to give to someone with little credit history.

**Source of Start-Up Capital**

ROSCAs are used for many different reasons such as start-up capital of small businesses. In Asia Small business capitalization has been attributed to the existence of ROSCAs which save as a source of start up capital. In essence, ROSCAs serve economic more than social reasons. According to Light, (1972) surveys suggest that the Japanese ROSCA (Tanomoshi). Korean ROSCA (KYE), West Indian ROSCA (susu) are used more for business enterprises. This therefore shows that ROSCAs help people start up businesses at the same time improving their livelihoods as the business owners will be able to divert funds to engage in other activities. They can also finance other activities such as sending children to school, acquiring assets, access to health care facilities and many others.

**Acquisition of Assets**

ROSCAs can also be used by other people to acquire assets such as livestock and heavy farming machinery which according to the Sustainable Livelihood Framework help them increase their physical asset base. This consequently helps improve their livelihoods.

**Problems Associated with ROSCAs**

ROSCAs pose a number of problems to both the leader and the members and such problems may result in the dissolution of the ROSCA. These problems shall be discussed in detail below.

Defaulting is one major problem associated with ROSCAs. Some members may default and this will result in uncertainty that can stem from the possibility of a low payout from the ROSCA arising from the depletion of members. Sometimes, the member who gets the pot first or second is most likely to default and this will inconvenience other members who are last on the cycle.

There is always a last person in the rotation to benefit from the fund and this person could have saved as an individual with the same result. Similarly, people who take their turn towards the end of the rotation and have been saving all along do not receive any interest. Early winners get interest free loans while late winners borrow an amount which is almost worthless than earlier loans. According to Shepherd (1998) this may not matter if the period over which the money saved is short, that is a matter of days or weeks but does matter if it is longer and if inflation rates are fluctuating.

The ROSCA fund may be used for other purposes other than the intended use. According to World Bank (1986), there are possibilities that the ROSCA disbursement, whenever it occurs may not be sufficient to realize the planned investment opportunity, apart from the possibility that the venture itself may be stressful or unstressful. This is normally popular with consumer durable ROSCAs whereby members plan on buying a durable. In the event that it has become more expensive than anticipated, members may end up opting for the cheapest commodity.
Timing of the receipt of funds by a member may not necessarily coincide with his/her need for finance. Sometimes a member gets the lumpsum on the first or second round then later he/she encounters a problem that requires finance when he/she already has had a chance.

ROSCAs are informal savings mechanisms and are therefore not directly linked to the banking system and hence they are unlikely to benefit from additional bank loans since they are not organized as a legal entity. If a member defaults, there cannot be any legal action against such member since ROSCAs are not registered.

Risk of mismanagement, fraud or bankruptcy by the leader or organiser of the ROSCAs where he can abscond with the accumulated contributions. Since there is no constitution or legal paperwork that governs ROSCAs, the leaders may misuse the funds for their personal use and no one can ask them. As a result, this may affect the sustainability of the life of a ROSCA.

ROSCAs have a limited impact since most people in the villages may not participate in ROSCAs. Only a few are economically active and are thus able to engage in ROSCAs. The rest, who include children and the elderly are not economically active but sometimes are the household heads. This therefore shows that not all people engage in ROSCAs.

The cyclical timing of contributions also affects savings. If a member by chance gets surplus funds he/she cannot increase his/her ROSCA contribution but has to wait for the agreed amount and the time. This therefore shows that someone cannot save extra cash in ROSCAs but has to adhere to set rules.

**Possible Solutions**

For members that default from contributions, Ardener (1964) asserts that the member who defaults in one ROSCA may not only be sanctioned socially but can also be prevented from further participation in any other ROSCA. The member may suffer to such an extent that he/she may not be accepted as a member of any other. In West Cameroon, the ROSCA credit institution has been so rooted in the economic and social system that would be a serious deprivation. The issue of social pressure, reflected in the selection of ROSCA members from among relatives, friends or work colleagues will also reduce risk of default as members do not wish to let their relatives down. As a result, members will not default contributions because of fear of exclusion and are afraid to disappoint their friends and relatives.

Modifications can be made to rectify the problem of a member not getting a loan at the time they urgently need it. Interest rates can be charged such that earlier receivers pay more for their loans and late receivers are compensated with higher bonus payments. According to Bauman (1995), auctions can also be held so that those who need cash urgently may bid for it, with the successful bid being distributed among those who did not win the bid. Another way of solving this problem could be that the last receivers of the pot become first receivers in the next round.

If the economic situation of the country is unstable, that is high and fluctuating inflationary rates it is better for ROSCA members to agree to contribute an amount which is equivalent to an agreed amount in foreign currency so that the money will not lose its value. This happened in Zimbabwe during the 2008-2009 period where people would contribute amounts in South African rands or United States dollars so that the last person in the cycle would get money that is just as valuable as was the first person.
Research Findings

Nature of ROSCAs in Ward 14 Gutu District

Types of ROSCAs conducted

ROSCA members choose a type of ROSCA that suits them and their needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types ROSCA</th>
<th>Member of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Random</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durable</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidding/Discounting</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data 2012

Most members in ward 14 of Gutu district engage in the simple/random ROSCA as shown in Table 1 above. From a focus group discussion, respondents highlighted that they prefer to use simple or random ROSCA because it gives members the choice to decide to use whatever they want with their money. In an interview, one respondent highlighted that members who engage in consumer durables ROSCAs, are women. In this ROSCA instead of the winner or recipient receiving money, they receive a physical good such as an asset or groceries. Members in bid or discounting ROSCAs commented that they prefer bid ROSCAs because they are in business and thus require money frequently. As such a bid ROSCA enables those who need money urgently to bid for it.

Membership in ROSCAs

ROSCA members decide on the number of participants they want and most respondents highlighted that they belong to a class of 4-6 as shown in Table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ROSCA</th>
<th>Membership in ROSCAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Random</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durable</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidding/Discounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data

Most ROSCAs maintain a small group. Respondents indicated during focus group discussions that they prefer a group of less people because they want the cycle period to end before the money is eroded by inflation. Group organizers also argued that small numbers of people are easier to manage than ROSCAs with a lot of people.

Mode of selecting winner

There are different ways of choosing the winner (the person who receives the lumpsum money). 50% of the respondents reported that they selected the winner by way of lots as shown in Table 3 below.
Table 3: Mode of Selecting the Winner of the Lumpsum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ROSCA</th>
<th>Mode of selecting the winner of the lumpsum</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By consensus</td>
<td>By lots</td>
<td>By bidding</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Random</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durable</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidding/Discounting</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data

In interviews ROSCA organisers explained how the various modes of selecting the winner of the lumpsum operate.

**Selecting by Lots**
When selecting by lots they write numbers and put them in a box then they pick the papers randomly and the number of the paper is their ranking in receiving the lumpsum. This method as they call it ‘pick a box’ is fair in that everyone has an equal chance of being the first.

**Selecting by consensus**
Some ROSCA members preferred selecting by consensus. Members with an urgent need of money present their cases at monthly or weekly meetings. Members who are in emergencies are normally prioritised.

**Selecting by bidding**
This mode of selection is particularly carried out in bidding/discounting ROSCAs. A group organiser from a ROSCA with four members using the adding method to select the winner highlighted that they meet once a month and their monthly contribution is $50 each. The grant total per month is $200 and members who are in urgent need of the lumpsum offer bids. The highest bidder will take the lumpsum minus the amount offered. In a bid record book a table showing how the bid ROSCA was being carried out was extracted (Table 4). Table 4 illustrate that the lumpsum was first taken by D who offered $10 for it. This means that he took a lumpsum amount of $190 ($200-$10=$190). The price $10 was kept as an income earned for the group and was shared at the end of the cycle when all members had received the lumpsum once. At the end of the second meeting, A paid $20 to get the lumpsum. He took $180 ($200-$20=$180). Since B was the last she received full $200. At the end of the cycle members equally share the money collected from the lumpsum sale. Since the group has accumulated a total of $50 from the lumpsum sales, each member then receives $12, 50 at the end of the cycle.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Paid</th>
<th>Accumulating group interest</th>
<th>Received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Mr A</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr B</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr C</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr D</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>$200</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Mr A</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr B</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr C</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr D</td>
<td>$50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Amount contributed in ROSCAs

ROSCA group members contribute different amounts of money depending on what they agree on as a group. Most respondents contribute between $21-$30 as shown in Table 5 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ROSCA</th>
<th>Amount contributed in ROSCA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$1-$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Random</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durable</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidding/Discounting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data

In a focus group discussion it was highlighted that ROSCA members opted to start with little amounts so that it can be afforded by most members even those that do not engage in business endeavours. Other respondents remarked that they engage in ROSCAs contributing more than $40 as they are traders and thus require a large capital base.

Cycle period of conducting ROSCAs

ROSCA members highlighted that they contribute either weekly or monthly as shown in Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of ROSCA</th>
<th>Cycle period of ROSCA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple/Random</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer durable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidding/Discounting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Survey Data 2012

More than half of the respondents indicated that they contribute once a month. From an interview with a chairperson of one ROSCA it was revealed that most members get income from trading and others from remittances and therefore prefer to contribute once a month. From focus group discussions, 4 business people who contribute weekly revealed that one of them owns a butchery, the other one a
bottle store and the other two rent a salon at Utsinda business centre and therefore require cash constantly and that is why they contribute weekly.

**Contributions of ROSCAs to the Livelihoods of Rural People**

ROSCAs play an important role to the livelihoods of people in rural areas. These include asset accumulation, security function, sending children to school, expanding business and starting up new business.

**Accumulation of Assets**

A large number (73%) of ROSCA members have accumulated assets. When they collect the lumpsum, the member who is the recipient buys assets such as cattle, electrical gadgets, solar panels or even machinery. From a focus group discussion, respondents commented that engaging in ROSCAs is important in their lives as they are investing in assets using ROSCA money. As a result ROSCA members live a better life and do not live in poverty.

**Security Function**

Most people join ROSCAs because they believe that they invest their money so that they use it when they encounter problems such as death or illness in the family.

> “ROSCAs helped me very much when my daughter was sick and was admitted at Gutu Mission Hospital. I used the ROSCA money and my husband was very surprised because I managed to pay the bills and buy medication”, said one women in a focus group discussion

A total 67% of all the respondents saw ROSCAs as a form of insurance whereby they can bank their money and collect it when they really need it in case of an emergency. Thus ROSCAs act as an instrument for ROSCA members to share shocks among themselves.

**Sending children to school**

More than half of the respondents use the ROSCAs money to send their children to school.

> “My children will never be sent back home as long as I conduct ROSCAs. I can manage to pay school fee. My children are now at university and I am paying for them using ROSCA money”, said one women during a focus group discussion

Thus ROSCA members do not face financial problems when it comes to payment of school fees because they take the money from the ROSCA pot and pay fees.

**Expanding Business**

Amongst the ROSCA members in ward 14, 17% of them stated expanding business as a contribution to their livelihoods.

> “I operate a salon at Utsinda Business Centre and ROSCA money has assisted me so much as I have managed to use the money to buy chemicals and equipment that I use and thus hope that my business will continue”, said one respondent in a focus group discussion.

Through capital injection form the ROSCA money, small businesses in rural areas will always continue and they are less likely to be bankrupt.
Starting up new businesses
Some (13%) ROSCA members indicated that they use the lumpsum to start new businesses. From a focus group discussion, one ROSCA member highlighted that she started a tuckshop using ROSCA money where she sells basic commodities such as sugar, soap, cooking oil, inter alia. Another respondent revealed that he has since been saving his ROSCA lumpsum for 2 years and has invested the money and soon wants to buy and install a grinding mill at Utsinda Business Centre so that people will not walk long distances to Mupandawana Growth Point. This therefore shows how ROSCAs have made an improvement in the economic development of Ward 14 Gutu district.

Challenges faced by ROSCAs
ROSCAs face a number of problems.

Defaulting members
About 73% of the respondents highlighted defaulting of members as a problem encountered by ROSCAs. It was revealed that those members who usually ask to receive the pot first tend to default payments and thus threatening the life of the ROSCA.

Mismanagement of funds
When members contribute their monthly contributions the money is given to the organiser who then gives it to the winner or the recipient or waits to buy assets after everyone has contributed. It is at this point that most organisers use the money with the hope of replacing it but then fail to replace it and this causes problems as they fail to account for the money. In a focus group discussion it was revealed that some organisers in the past have disappeared with the lumpsum and this result in the dissolution of the ROSCA.

Lack of finance to contribute regularly
Most ROSCA members start contributing with others on a good note but later on run short of money to continue contributing as highlighted by 60% of the respondents. From a focus group discussion, one respondent highlighted that the reason why some members lack finance is that some members only rely on remittances and they do not have small business of their own so when their children fail to send money or if they send less money then they fail to contribute. As a result the life of the ROSCA is threatened.

Late Payments
Late payment is another challenge faced by ROSCAs. One respondent revealed that they agreed to contribute on the last day of the month and the latest on the first of the next month. However, other members contribute as late as the 7th of the next month or even after 2 weeks. This therefore poses a number of problems in that the recipient or the winner of the lumpsum sometimes would have want to use the money all at once and this may inconvenience them especially if they engage in consumer durable ROSCA.

Diverting of funds
Diversion of funds is another problem faced by ROSCAs. One respondent in a focus group discussion highlighted that from the onset as they join ROSCAs, members plan to do something with the lumpsum money but once they get hold of the money something always comes up such as illness, the need to buy an asset, buying inputs and chemicals in times of rainy seasons. Consequently, the funds are diverted and their plans do not take place and they have to wait for their turn again when the round has been finished.
Conclusions
There are various types of ROSCAs in Ward 14 Gutu district. These include simple/random ROSCAs, bidding/discounting ROSCAs and consumer durable ROSCAs. These have an immense contribution to rural livelihoods. Such contributions include managing to send children to school, starting up businesses or expanding existing ones, accumulation of assets and using the lumpsum money as security or insurance against shocks. These contributions in a way have improved the livelihoods of rural people in that they manage to attain human capital through educating their children, physical capital through accumulation of assets and financial capital through starting up businesses or expanding existing ones. Through attaining these capitals their lives are better off in that they are no longer susceptible to poverty. Despite these contributions, ROSCAs face a myriad of challenges. Problems such as members defaulting, lack and inconsistent payment, mismanagement of funds and fraud and also lack of finance to contribute regularly were encountered by ROSCA members. These problems were threatening the life of the ROSCAs. The government should be able to influence other partners in microfinance such as NGOs and financial institution to intervene in areas where ROSCAs are conducted. Local NGOs and the government through the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and other financial institutions should work together to provide loans so that rural people can become financially independent and as a result improve their livelihoods.

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Lexington:
Protecting Children from Exposure to Pornography in South Africa

Lufuno Nevondwe¹ and Kola O. Odeku²

Abstract: The paper looks at the use of online media which is being used to create and distribute child pornography in South Africa. It is argued that the lack of parental supervision on the use of cellphones by their children perpetuates child pornography. The paper further looks at the mandate of the Films and Publication Board which is at the forefront campaigning against child pornography. The paper also looks at the rights of the children and freedom of expression and how these rights either complement or contradict each other and argues that the best interest of the child are of paramount importance in every matter. This does not insinuate that these rights supersede all rights in the Constitution. There is a need to strike a balance between freedom of expression and the rights of children. The paper concludes that child pornography has some form of negative effects on children and recommends that legislations prohibiting child pornography should be implemented effectively as child pornography offence is rife in South Africa.

Keywords: Pornography, best interest of the child, cyberspace, internet, mobile devices

Introduction
South Africa has become one of the world’s largest distributors of child pornography and has also become a popular sex tourism destination for pedophiles (Hughes, 1999). South Africa is listed as one of the top five countries that legislate meaningfully on child pornography. Other countries include Australia, Belgium, the United States of America and France (O’Donnell and Milner, 2007). However legally declaring the practice of child pornography as an offence that is punishable in South Africa seems to fall on deaf ears of the perpetrators as this practice remains rife in the country. At the center of all this is the modern technology which is the ultimate distributor of child pornography in South Africa (Boyd et al. 2009). The concern is that most children are well acquainted with the use of technology and social networks which are rapidly becoming a way of life in the modern world. As a result of this, children are exposed to different information on the internet some of which are very destructive and promote sex trade and trafficking (Holloway and Valentine, 2003).

In South Africa, the internet could be accessed principally through different devices including mobile phones which are very popular and the wireless infrastructure as they are available to a lot of people (Ally, 2005). The number of internet users in South Africa rose to 8.9 million in 2011, nearly twice the 4.6 million total in 2008 (Gillwald et al. 2013). Whilst this shows how technology is being used for communication purposes, it is also unfortunately being used to perpetuate child pornography (Weckert and Dalgarno 2006). Access to cyber-space and mobile phones by young people and children in particular, have led to an increased risk and exposure of children to potentially undesirable and explicit content that may be inappropriate for children of certain ages and place them at risk of abuse (Badenhorst, 2011).

The Films and Publication Board Act 65 of (1996) (FPB, 1996) is at the forefront of promoting the need for parents to protect and inform children of the dangers of child pornography and the responsible use of cyber-space as well as the new media platforms (Jenkins, 2003). This body is concerned with the classification of materials (films, publications and games), and protection of consumers, in particular children. This body engages in various campaigns involving the media, school visits, community outreach programmes and social media networks to advocate against child pornography.

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Whilst these campaigns have proven to be successful in some way, children however still remain exposed to child pornography and adult content directly or indirectly (Koen, 2007). The number of incidents where children themselves have been involved in the creation and distribution of child pornography within schools and in communities are alarming (FSB, 1996:12). Equally, there is the continuous threat of adults who, masquerading as children, use social networking sites to lure children into forwarding them images and videos of their private parts in sexually compromising positions for sexual arousal (FSB, 1996:12). This shows how the online media dominates these practices. The following question therefore becomes relevant: what measures can be put in place in order to regulate social networks in South Africa? What are the impacts of child pornography? And whether there is proper implementation of legislations criminalising child pornography or whether such legislations need to be amended?

**Online media (social networks)**

The advantage of modern technology is that children are able to access information about the world at large without difficulty (Morville and Rosenfeld, 2008). Social networks are designed for convenient communications between individuals but if not well-managed or monitored it can lead children astray (O’Kane, 2004). The Internet and advances in digital technology “have provided fertile ground for offenders to obtain child pornography, share child pornography, produce child pornography, advertise child pornography, and sell child pornography” (Wortley and Smallbone 2012). The Internet has also allowed offenders to form online communities with global membership not only with the intention to facilitate the trading and collection of these images, but also to facilitate contact (with each other and children) and to create support networks among offenders (Quayle and Taylor, 2002).

Rather than simply downloading or uploading images of child pornography from and onto the Internet respectively, offenders also use modern technologies such as Facebook, Skype, twitter and so on to talk about their sexual interest in children, to post or exchange comments about the abuse depicted in particular images even as images are shared real-time to validate each other’s behavior, share experiences, and images of themselves abusing children (Wolak et al. 2010).

According to Mawere (2013), social networks that are popular among the youth include twitter, facebook, mxit, whatsapp, mySpace, flicker and friendste. Mawere indicated that most times, these social networks are being utilized without parental supervision and this is where children become vulnerable as they connect with different people all over the world, believing they have good intentions without actually knowing who they really are (Mawere, 2013).

What effects does social network have on society? More often than not, the FPB reported that in all communities and schools visited during campaigns, members of the public and learners cited cases where they themselves or people they knew or have heard of, had been either victims of child pornography or had seen others carry or receive pornographic content mostly on their mobile phones (FPB, 2011:6). Mobile Internet access makes it easier for South African young people to become exposed to sexual contents online (Kreutzer, 2009).

By virtue of section 14 of the South African Constitution, privacy is one of the fundamental rights in the Constitution. The right to privacy includes the right not to have communications infringed (Olinger et al. 2007). However, with the development of smart phones, social networking sites and mobile networks have created applications that track the location of mobile users and are often able to view the
communications of others users without their consent (Fling, 2009). It is against the backdrop of this exposure that privacy has become difficult to maintain in the digital sphere (Solove, 2004). This is an alarming reality. The question that needs to be asked is whether there are no laws that govern social networks so as to ensure that these social networks are not used to expose children to undesirable contents (Mitchell et al. 2003). If such laws do exist, the cardinal question is whether these laws are implemented effectively to curb the usage of social networks as medium perpetuating child pornography. We opine that such laws do exist, as it would be discussed more in detail below, but the implementation of these laws is the challenge which the FPB and other law enforcement agencies are grappling with.

What is child pornography?
Defining child pornography has never been an easy task. The Films and Publication Act 65 of 1996 defines child pornography in section 1(a) as:

Any image, real or simulated, however created, depicting a person who is or who is shown as being under the age of 18 years, engaged in sexual conduct or a display of genitals which amounts to sexual exploitation, or participating in, or assisting another person to engage in sexual conduct which amounts to sexual exploitation or degradation of children.

The Constitutional Court in De Reuck v Director of Public Prosecutions (De Reuck) 2004(1) SA 406 (CC) looked at the general definition of pornography from the New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary where pornography was defined as:

The explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity in literature, painting, films, etc., in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feelings; literature etc in a manner intended to stimulate erotic rather than aesthetic feeling.

The Constitutional Court used the definition above as a useful guide and added that erotic and aesthetic feelings are not mutually exclusive from the definition. The Court however stated that where the aesthetic element is predominant, the image will not constitute pornography. Accordingly child pornography bears a corresponding meaning.

The Constitutional Court defined child pornography, by excluding material that is substantially aesthetic. The Court observed that:

The stimulation of erotic rather than aesthetic feelings is an essential element of the definition of child pornography. Any image that predominantly stimulates aesthetic feelings is not caught by the definition. It does require, however, that the image viewed objectively and as a whole has as its predominant purpose the stimulation of erotic feelings in certain human beings who may conveniently be referred to as the target audience.

According to Mills (2003:195), “the constitutionality of prohibiting the possession of child pornography has indeed been challenged in the case of De Reuk case in that Mr Tascoe De Reuck, a former TV presenter, arrested on charges of possession of child pornography, argued that with reference to section 16 of the Constitution (freedom of expression) it is not constitutionally justifiable to prosecute researchers who would require possession of child pornography for purposes of their research, or producers of film dramas and documentaries who would be recording scenes which could, judged without reference to context, amount to creation or production of child pornography.” In De Reuk case, the court ruled that:

the fact that the Constitution regards a child’s best interests of paramount importance must be emphasised. It is the single most important factor to be considered when balancing or weighing competing rights and interests concerning children. All competing rights must defer to the rights of children unless unjustifiable. Whilst children have a right to, inter alia, protection from
maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation, there is a reciprocal duty to afford them such protection. Such a duty falls not only on law enforcement agencies but also on right thinking people, and ultimately, the Court which is the upper guardian of all children.

As was the case in R v Sharpe (2001) 194 DLR (4th), the South African Court placed particular emphasis on executing the right of the child to be protected from abuse and degradation, in this way enforcing section 28(2) of the Constitution.

According to Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 32 of 2007, child pornography

means any image, however created, or any description or presentation of a person, real or stimulated, who is, or who is depicted or described or presented as being, under the age of 18 years, of an explicit or sexual nature, whether such image or description or presentation is intended to stimulate erotic or aesthetic feelings or not, including any such image or description of such person-

(a) engaged in an act that constitutes a sexual offence;
(b) engaged in an act of sexual penetration;
(c) engaged in an act of sexual violation;
(d) engaged in an act of self-masturbation;
(e) displaying the genital organs of such person in a state of arousal or stimulation;
(f) unduly displaying the genital organs or anus of such person;
(g) display any form of stimulation of a sexual nature of such person’s breasts;
(h) engaged in sexually suggestive or lewd acts;
(i) engaged in or as the subject of sadistic or masochistic acts of a sexual nature; and
(j) engaged in any conduct or activity characteristically associated with sexual intercourse.

The Definition of child pornography as defined in the Act only amounts to child pornography where the scene is interpreted in context and where the erotic element is dominant (Taylor and Quayle, 2003). It is axiomatic that where the scene is interpreted in context and where the aesthetic element is dominant the scene would not amount to child pornography (FPAB, 2013).

Child Pornography is evidence of the commission of a serious crime against a child (Leary, 2007). Apart from the child-victim, parents and relatives are victimized as they suffer the knowledge of the abuse of their child, which is captured forever in time (FPAB, 2013). The following can be deduced from child pornography,

• lack of parental supervision on the use of internet by a child,
• lack of awareness of the illegality of creating and distributing of child pornography amongst the youth and
• the lack of proper regulation of online media to prevent the spread of child pornography.

One may perhaps argue that they have a right to access to child pornography as encompassed by the Constitution by virtue of section 32 which provides that everyone has the right of access to information (Morehead and Haworth, 1995). It is submitted that there are certain materials that cannot be distributed, even though it may be possessed for personal and private use. This includes materials containing bestiality (sex with animals), incest, rape or explicit infliction of extreme violence, section 36 of the constitution restricts the rights especially if it is justifiable (Jacobs, 1984). Pursuant to this, the possession or distribution of materials containing child pornography remains prohibited (Ost, 2002).

In 2008, ‘Out in Africa’ (OIA) South African Gay and Lesbian Film Festival submitted to the Films and Publication Board (FPB) an application for a certificate of exemption in terms of section 22 and section 23 of the Films and Publication Act 65 of 1996 in respect of a film called XXY which contained certain
scenes where teenagers under 18 years of age engaged in simulated sexual intercourse. The film was
due to be screened at the festival in 2008, but was refused certificate of exemption on the grounds
that it constituted child pornography. It therefore could not be shown at the festival and OIA appealed
the decision of the Board (FXI, 2013).

The Appeal Board delivered a judgment in favour of OIA and reaffirmed the fact that the decision of
the De Reuck was still applicable to the definition of child pornography contained in the Act even
though it had been changed slightly since the De Reuck judgment and that “…on any objective
assessment XYY cannot be deemed to be a means of conveying images of child pornography”.

The lack of consistency by the Board in interpreting and making decisions on matters pertaining to
child pornography would appear to be a worrying factor. The question that begs to be answered is
whether this inconsistency is based on an element of intolerance and discrimination against the gay,
lesbian, intersex community in respect of their right to freely express themselves on matters
fundamental to their human nature (FXI, 2013).

The mandate of the Films Publication Board (FPB)
Any organ of State derives its powers from a particular legislation (Kelsen, 2007). The legislations
provide guidelines and the legal framework within which these organs of State should operate under
so as to avoid the latter from exceeding its powers (Hayek, 2012). The FPB is also an organ of State
and it derives its mandate from the Films and Publications Act (Act 65, 1996), amended in 2004 and
2009. This Act is the enabling legislative framework and thus outlines the key functions, powers and
duties conferred to the Board.

According to Section 2 of Films and publication Amendment Act 2008, The Films and Publication
Board has a mandate to regulate the creation, production, possession and distribution of films, games
and certain publications in order to:

• provide consumer advice to enable adults to make informed viewing, reading and gaming
  choices, both for themselves and for children in their care;

• protect children from exposure to disturbing, harmful materials and from premature exposure
to adult experiences; and

• make the use of children in and the exposure of children to pornography punishable.

In order to achieve its mandate the Board is empowered in terms of Section 10 of Films and
Publication Amendment Act 2008 to appoint Classification Committees as may be prescribed. In
terms of Section 16(4) of Films and Publication Amendment Act 2008 the classification committee has
a duty to examine any publication that has been referred to it by the Board; in this regard the latter
shall do the following:

(a) classify that publication as a refused classification if the publication contains-
   (i) child pornography, propaganda for war or incitement of imminent violence; or 16
   (ii) the advocacy of hatred based on any identifiable group characteristic and that constitutes
incitement to cause harm, unless, judged within context, the publication is, except with respect
to child pornography, a bona fide documentary or is a publication of scientific, literary or artistic
merit or is on a matter of public interest;

(b) classify the publication as —XX if it contains —
   (i) explicit sexual conduct which violates or shows disrespect for the right to human dignity of
any person; (ii) bestiality, incest, rape or conduct or an act which is degrading of human beings;
(iii) a conduct or an act which constitutes incitement of, encourages or promotes harmful
behaviour;
   (iv) an explicit infliction of sexual or domestic violence; or
   (v) explicit visual presentations of extreme violence, unless, judged within context, the
publication is, except with respect to child pornography, a bona fide documentary or is a
publication of scientific, literary or artistic merit or is on a matter of public interest, in which event the publication shall be classified X18 or classified with reference to the guidelines relating to the protection of children from exposure to disturbing, harmful or age-inappropriate materials; 

(c) classify the publication as —X18 if it contains explicit sexual conduct, unless, judged within context, the publication is, except with respect to child pornography, a bona fide documentary or is a publication of scientific, literary or artistic merit or is on a matter of public interest, in which event the publication shall be classified with reference to the guidelines relating to the protection of children from exposure to disturbing, harmful and age-inappropriate materials; or

(d) if the publication contains material which may be disturbing or harmful to or age-inappropriate for children, classify that publication, with reference to the relevant guidelines, by the imposition of appropriate age restrictions and such other conditions as may be necessary to protect children in the relevant age categories from exposure to such materials.

Section 10 of the Films and Publications Amendment Act, 2008 states that the decisions of the Classification Committee shall be taken by a majority of votes, provided that where there is an equality of vote, the Board shall appoint an additional member to such committee so as to enable the committee to come to a majority decision. A decision of the Classification Committee shall for the purposes of this Act be deemed to be the decision of the Board.

Classification Committee must ensure that the decision that is being taken promotes the enshrined rights in the Constitution and that it is in line with the objectives of the Films and publications Act. Should the classification decision deviate from the Constitution and the Films and publication Act, it is likely that the decision would be flawed and accordingly overturned. There is no single yardstick to determine whether a publication should be classified. In the premise, by virtue of section 16(1) of the Film and Publication Act, the classification committee must consider the following during their classification process:

- The right to freedom of expression within the law;
- The right of access to information within the law;
- The right of children to be protected from materials that are harmful to their well-being;
- The right of the public to be protected from unsolicited exposure to materials that some may find offensive and
- The principle that classification decision takes into account the human rights values enshrined in the Constitution, especially with the regard of the right of everyone to have their dignity respected and protected.

**Striking the balance between the children’s rights and freedom of expression**

There are various statutes that provide adequate protection of children’s rights. The most important legislation is the Constitution which is the supreme law of the country which defines a child as a person under the age of 18 years. The Constitution provides that every child has the right to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation. By virtue of section 28 of the Constitution, a child should also not be required or permitted to perform work or provide services that-

- are inappropriate for a person of that child’s age; or
- place at risk the child’s well-being, education, physical or mental health or spiritual, moral or social development.

The Constitution requires that the best interest of the child should be of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child (Goldstein et al. 1986). The protection of children’s rights includes the protection against sexual exploitation or degradation in publications, films and on the internet (Kierkegaard, 2008).

In De Reuck the Constitutional Court held that:
Children merit special protection by the state and must be protected by legislation which guards and enforces their rights and liberties. This is recognised in section 28 of our Constitution. Children’s dignity rights are of special importance. The degradation of children through child pornography is a serious offence which impairs their dignity and contributes to a culture which devalues their worth.

Society has recognised that childhood is a special stage in life which is to be treasured and guarded (Fass, 2003). The court said in the case of De Reuck v Director of Public Prosecutions and others 2004(1) SA 406 (CC), Para 63, that the state must ensure that the lives of children are not disrupted by adults who objectify and sexualise them through the production and possession of child pornography.

There is obvious physical harm suffered by the victims of sexual abuse and by those children forced to yield to the demands of the paedophile and pornographer, but there is also harm to the dignity and perception of all children when a society allows sexualised images of children to be available (Solowey, 2002). The Court observed that the chief purpose of the statutory prohibitions against child pornography is to protect the dignity, humanity and integrity of children.

According to Pretorius (2006), the concept of ‘freedom’ denotes a right to perform certain acts without fear of hindrance or reprisal. It is this concept that forms the basis of the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. The right to freedom of expression in section 16 of the Constitution includes

- freedom of the press and other media;
- freedom to receive or impart information or ideas;
- freedom of artistic creativity; and
- academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

Freedom of expression lies at the heart of democracy and this means that tolerance should be exercised not only on expression that are deemed appropriate but also those expressions that are deemed to be inappropriate (Malherbe, 2007).

In the words of Oppenheimer, “Freedom of expression is the cornerstone of a functioning democratic state, since it gives people the opportunity to be exposed to a number of different viewpoints so that they can make informed and legitimate decisions about both their political and private lives.”

It has been argued that persons who possess materials that create a reasonable risk of harm to children forfeit the protection of the freedom of expression and privacy rights altogether, (Ross, 2000) and that section 28(2) of the Constitution trumps other provisions of the Bill of Rights. The Constitutional Court in De Reuck put guidelines to this imbalance by reaffirming the approach adopted by the Court itself to the effect that constitutional rights are mutually interrelated and interdependent and form a single constitutional value system. The Constitutional Court held that section 28(2), like the other rights enshrined in the Bill of Rights, is subject to limitations that are reasonable and justifiable in compliance with section 36.

Legislative framework
South Africa has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1995. Article 1 of UNCRC also defines a child as a person under the age of eighteen. Article 19 of the UNCRC provides that States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse,
neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

South Africa has adopted a number of statutes that gives adequate protection to children against any form of sexual exposure. The most prominent is the Children's Act 38 of 2005. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 is one of the paramount and primary statutes for the protection of children and young people. It provides for the investigation of cases of alleged abuse, neglect and exploitation of children.

The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007 provides that “a person who:

a) manufactures, produces, possesses, distributes or facilitates the manufacture, production or distribution of an article, which is exclusively intended to facilitate the commission of a sexual act with or by a child;
b) manufactures, produces, possesses, distributes or facilitates the manufacture, production or distribution of a publication or film that promotes or is intended to be used in the commission of a sexual act with or by child

c) supplies, exposes or displays to a third person:
   • an article which is intended to be used in the performance of a sexual act;
   • child pornography or pornography; or
   • a publication or film,
   with the intention to encourage, enable, instruct, or persuade a third person to perform a sexual act with child ; or

d) arranges or facilitates a meeting or communication between a third person and child by any means from, to or in any part of the world, with the intention that a third person will perform a sexual act with child, is guilty of the offence of promoting the sexual grooming of a child.

Furthermore a person who unlawfully and intentionally exposes, displays or causes the exposure or display of

(a) any image, publication, depiction, description or sequence of child pornography or pornography;
(b) any image, publication, depiction, description or sequence containing a visual presentation, description or representation of a sexual nature of a child, which may be disturbing or harmful to, or age-inappropriate for children, as contemplated in the Films and Publications Act, 1996 or in terms of any other legislation; or
(c) any image, publication, depiction, description or sequence containing a visual presentation, description or representation of pornography or an act of an explicit sexual nature of a person 18 years or older, which may be disturbing or harmful to, or age-inappropriate, for children, as contemplated in the Films and Publications Act, 1996, or in terms of any other law, to a child with or without the consent of the child, is guilty of the offence of exposing or displaying or causing the exposure or display of child pornography or pornography to a child.

In addition to the above provision the Films and Publications Amendment Act 2009 posits in section 24B that, “any person who unlawfully possesses or creates, produces or in any way contributes to, or assists in the creation or production of any film, game or publication which contains depictions, descriptions or scenes of child pornography or which advocates, advertises, encourages or promotes child pornography or the sexual exploitation of children, shall be guilty of an offence.” The form of a publication includes “visual presentation, placed on any distributed network including, but not confined to the Internet.

The Act mandates the FPB to curb child pornography by imposing age restriction if the classification committee or the Review Board is of the opinion that, judged within context, it is necessary to protect children in the relevant age group against harmful or disturbing materials in the film. The interest of the child is paramount in the Act. The Act offers adequate protection of children from exposure to disturbing and harmful materials and it also punishes the use of children to produce pornography.
Conclusion and recommendations

It is evident that South Africa has profound legislations that are aimed at curbing child pornography. The practice of child pornography seems to persist despite the existing legislation and we opine that Internet Services Providers (ISPs) must do all in their powers and take reasonable steps to prevent their services from being used for illegal processes. The ISPs must further report the internet address that disseminates child pornography to relevant law enforcement agencies. It is further suggested that it would be prudent if the ISPs can prevent access to internet websites on the internet service that distribute, promote and engage in child pornography.

The use of the internet hotline initiative by FPB is welcomed. The internet hotline affords the members of the public with an opportunity to report online, any child pornography or sexual abuse images discovered accidentally on the internet. The internet hotline provides and guarantees a secure and a confidential environment to members of the public when reporting child pornography (FPB, 2013). The hotline staff adheres to the code of ethics (which puts emphasis on confidentiality) as prescribed by National and International Bodies such as the International Association of Internet Hotlines (FPB, 2013).

It is evident that the exposure of children to inappropriate material is as a result of access to internet, cellphones, social networks and chat rooms generally under no parental supervision. It is suggested that the FPB campaigns should also be aimed at educating not only children but also parents to exercise parental supervision of their children when they are on their cell phones.

The number of reported child pornography cases in South Africa is unknown because sexual offence data is not disaggregated (SAGIRCP, 2008). The extent of the problem in South Africa is also not known given the clandestine nature of the crime, however it is safe to conclude that child pornography has some form of negative effect on the children and more measures have to be put in place to identify offenders especially those offenders that also use technology to avoid being identified and caught.

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