

# Review of Community Development Initiatives for Poverty Reduction in Southern Africa

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**Abstract:** There is a growing global recognition that community development has the potential to enhance the socio-economic status of resource-constrained rural communities. Many countries have established community development initiatives in rural areas to reduce poverty and improve social investment. However, numerous challenges hinder the implementation of community development initiatives that contribute to poverty reduction in most of Southern Africa. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1, mandates all countries to end all forms of poverty by the year 2030. One approach to achieving this goal is to devise and implement sustainable community development initiatives. This review paper presents some best practices for how community development initiatives could reduce poverty in Southern Africa. The literature collected from government reports, accredited journal articles, and other credible scientific writings from 2000 to 2022 was reviewed to triangulate sources of information and understand the state of community development initiatives. Several challenges were found to impede progress in poverty reduction and negatively impact sustainable community development. The effectiveness and sustainability of poverty reduction strategies implemented by countries in Southern Africa vary widely from country to country and within the country itself. The study provides recommendations and best practice models implemented within rural communities in Southern Africa.

**Keywords:** Community development, food security, funded initiatives, poverty reduction, sustainable development goals.

## 1. Introduction

Globally, there is a growing recognition that community development initiatives are important in improving the socio-economic status of underprivileged rural communities. Southern Africa has multiple examples of community development projects such as rural electrification, water and sanitation, road construction, and agro-based projects in Eswatini; food security, sewing, and housing projects in Lesotho; cooperatives, township enterprises, and rural enterprises in South Africa; farming projects, indigenous food security, conservation projects, and smallholder livestock farming in Zimbabwe; boreholes, sewing, bakery, piggery, gardening, and irrigation projects in Namibia; food security project, vulnerable groups feeding project, Ipelegeng labour-intensive public works projects, and backyard garden projects in Botswana; irrigation clubs, livestock clubs, fertiliser revolving loans club, fish farming groups, youth groups, cooperatives in Malawi; family farming, youth entrepreneurship projects, community-informed oil and gas exploration projects in Mozambique, and small-scale farming projects, environmental support projects in Zambia. These

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projects were established with differentiated demographic beneficiaries that vary based on the needs and interests of the communities. Some projects are initiated for women, some for youth, and others for people living with disabilities to reduce poverty and improve the standard of living. Besides, in September 2000, member states affiliated with the United Nations signed the Declaration on Millennium Development Goals, of which Sustainable Development Goal 1 states that all countries should reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half in 2015 (United Nations, 2015), including countries in the Southern African region. Despite these global agreements, poverty is still widespread in most southern African countries. The study's objective was to conduct a literature search on whether the community development initiatives in Southern African communities have reduced poverty among marginalised people. The study would also investigate the effectiveness of state-sanctioned community development projects in the region.

Several studies have been conducted on the contribution of community development projects to poverty reduction and have reported mixed results (Fuseini et al., 2022). Some studies show that community development projects have contributed to reducing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, including the Southern African region (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020 & Dahie, 2019). Other studies, however, report limited contributions of community development projects in reducing poverty among disadvantaged people, especially those living in rural areas (Forknor & Agyemang, 2018; Farida, 2019). Other scholars, such as Banks and Hulme (2012), support the idea that community development projects are not positively contributing to reducing poverty among marginalised poor people. Where there is poverty reduction, the contribution is limited, with minimal impact on tackling the structural, deep-rooted causes and symptoms of poverty (Fuseini et al., 2022). For example, underprivileged people continue to be marginalised and further entrenched in poverty due to the failure of community development projects to facilitate effective transformation at the local level. The failure is mainly due to poor administration, limited understanding of community development processes, lack of leadership, economic instability, and lack of conflict resolution skills while implementing programs that focus on eradicating poverty in the communities (Nyathi et al., 2017). Table 1 below depicts the different categories of community projects in various countries in the region and the impact they had on reducing poverty among marginalised people.

## **1.1 The concept of community development**

Community development is a multidisciplinary field that has evolved from different perspectives (Wang et al., 2021; Shava & Thakhathi, 2016; Rwigema, 2022). The concept originated in the late nineteenth century and can be traced back to the social reform movement in Britain and North America towards the end of the eighteenth century (Wang et al., 2021). On the other hand, Hoffman (2012) indicates that the principle of community development was crafted and applied in third-world development interventions during the 1950s and 1960s. It played a vital role in internationalising poverty reduction by providing a safety net to underprivileged individuals in rural areas (Bonye et al., 2013). Although community development is regarded as the solution to the devastating poverty and environmental problems of Third World countries, including countries in the Southern African region (De Wet, 2016), it is also seen as a development pathway of Third World countries towards the modernity characteristic of First World ideals of economic growth through industrialisation and high consumption patterns (De Wet, 2016).

It is acknowledged that scholars have had different conflicting definitions of community development (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016). Hatcher (2015) asserts that community development is about changing poor people's livelihoods and improving the social, political, and economic institutions of communities (Hatcher, 2015). Adding to the above statement, the United Nations (UN) defines community development as a process where members of the community, settlers, or citizens converge to share a common goal of reducing poverty and finding solutions to challenges faced by the most disadvantaged people in rural communities (Rwigema, 2022). Through community

development initiatives, community members can become more empowered to challenge the conditions and structures that disempower them and disadvantage their livelihoods (Ife, 2016). Table 1 below offers a kaleidoscopic view of some community development projects in Southern Africa. The nature, type, and forms of projects are informed by the local contexts, local resource availability, and community inclusion.

All the projects cited in Table 1 sought to create local employment and generate local economic development by using locally available resources and skills. This approach confirms that community development is both a process and a product. Stajduhar (2008) reported that community development is a process of community mobilisation through collaboration with other stakeholders in the community to achieve effective community-based action and change in terms of poverty alleviation. The examples in Table 1 affirm the centrality of community inclusion and participation in locally driven social change initiatives. In addition, Wang et al. (2021) states that community development involves the participation of a larger and growing number of people in the local community, initially focusing on poverty alleviation.

**Table 1:** *Selected community development projects for the marginalised people*

Country	Type of project	Targeted beneficiaries	Organisation for the projects	Period (2000-2022)	Outcomes	Source
Eswatini	Rural electrification, water and sanitation, road construction and agro-based projects	Disadvantaged individuals in the local disadvantaged communities.	Government	2000-2019	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Bimha, 2019).
Lesotho	Self-help projects such as food security, sewing and housing projects	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	Government	2000-2022	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Raeber et al., 2024)
Mozambique	Exploration of oil and gas projects in the Rovuma basin, youth entrepreneurship projects and family farming projects	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	Government	2000-2022	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	Key message in the context of the national voluntary review in Mozambique, 2020 & World Bank, 2019.
South Africa	Cooperatives, township enterprises and rural enterprises	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	Government	2000-2022	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Zuma, 2015); (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016).
Zimbabwe	Farming projects, Indigenous food security, conservation projects and smallholder livestock farming	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	MCT, CIDT, SAFIRE, TWO, ADMT, and CRS	2000-2019	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Mhaka, 2014).

Namibia	Boreholes, sewing, bakery, piggery, gardening, and irrigation projects	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	World Vision, Red-cross, and Government	2000-2022	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Nakipala, 2015).
Botswana	Food security projects, vulnerable groups feeding projects, Ipelegeng labour-intensive public works projects and backyard garden projects	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	Government	2000-2018	Poverty reduction	(Jongman, 2018)
Malawi	irrigation clubs, livestock clubs, fertiliser revolving loans clubs, fish farming groups, youth groups, cooperatives	Disadvantaged men, women and youth	Catholic Development Commission of Malawi (CADECOM)	2000-2017	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Kanyinji, 2012).
Zambia	Small-scale farming projects and environmental support projects.	Disadvantaged people in all categories	Government	2000-2022	Poverty reduction and job opportunities created	(Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020)

## 2. Methodology

This study conducted a systematic literature review to identify and synthesise relevant sources of information. This approach was preferred because it allows for a comprehensive and unbiased search of existing research, reducing the risk of overlooking important studies (Whitlock et al., 2008). We searched literature from multidisciplinary databases, including SCOPUS and EBSCOhost. We carefully chose these databases because they provide access to various perspectives and disciplines relevant to community development and poverty reduction. Our study focused on accredited journal articles and book chapters published between 2000 and 2022 to ensure our review was based on credible and up-to-date research (Whitlock et al., 2008; Bronson & Davis, 2011). This timeframe allowed us to capture the latest advances and trends in community development initiatives. We excluded grey literature due to concerns about its reliability and rigour (Schmucker et al., 2013). We used keywords such as "community development," "poverty reduction," and "Southern Africa" to retrieve and screen relevant articles. Using the Zotero data management program, we electronically identified and removed duplicate articles from the two databases. The word cloud tool in ATLAS.ti, as shown in Figure 1, further validated our article selection (Bronson & Davis, 2011). We only considered full-text entries to ensure access to complete information (Schmucker et al., 2013). After uploading the selected articles to ATLAS.ti, we performed text processing, coding, and analysis to identify patterns, themes, networks, and visualisations. The synthesised information helped answer the research question, "Why do community development initiatives fail to reduce poverty in many Southern African countries?" The collected and synthesised information provided insights into the state of community development initiatives in rural communities in Southern Africa. Additionally, we consulted government reports and documents for some countries in Southern Africa.

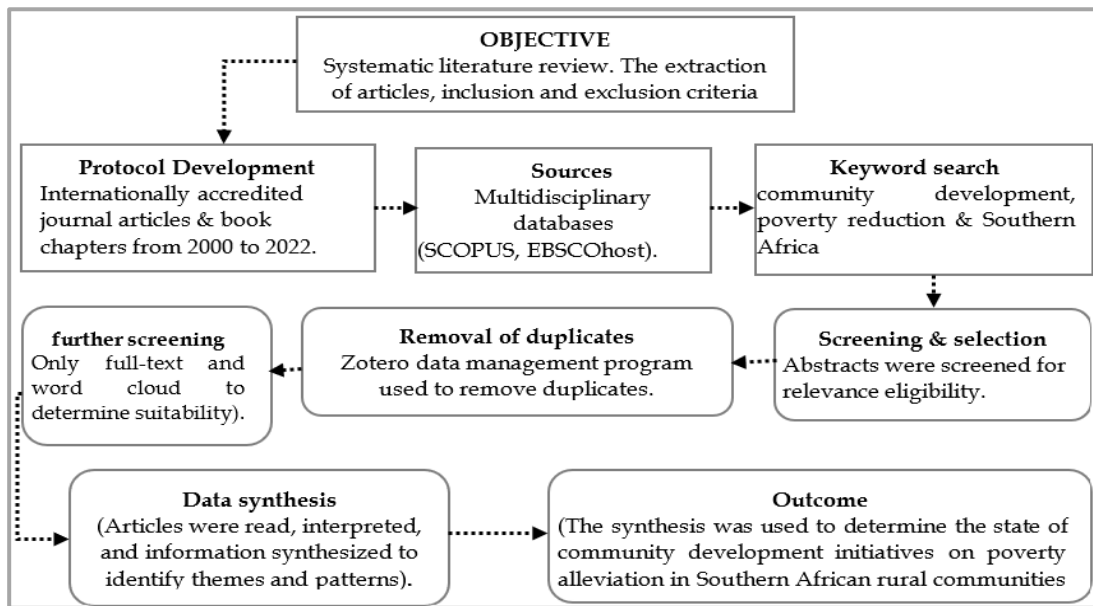


Figure 1: Methodology of how articles were selected and screened.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Several sources were consulted, and key highlights from these sources are presented in table format below.

Author and year of publication	Title	Key issues
Adjei et al., 2012	Non-governmental organisations and rural poverty reduction in northern Ghana: Perspectives of beneficiaries on strategies, impact, and challenges	Another success story in Nabdram District in Ghana, the Maximum Transmission Unit (MTU) Mondo NGO, which was regarded as an international organisation, contributed to reducing poverty through the establishment of social businesses that are basket weaving and shea butter extraction for women and tree planting.
Amofah & Agyare, 2022	Poverty alleviation approaches of development NGOs in Ghana: Application of the basic needs approach	The provision of educational materials to schools, including stationery, desks, and computers, to boost human capital development needs.
Bhattacharya & Roy et al., 2017.	The NGOs in Pakistan	Successes stories of community development initiatives reducing poverty drawn from other countries in different regions outside the Southern African region. For example, in Bangladesh, there are reports about the NGOs that contribute to reducing poverty and improving the quality of life of the beneficiaries.
Bimha, 2019	Community Project Implementation issues in the Kingdom of Eswatini: A Business Management Perspective	The failure of community development projects on poverty reduction in the Kingdom of Eswatini suggested the need for intervention in the form of self-help techniques to capacitate community members to address local challenges that will empower them to participate in resolving their problems in future.

Bothale, 2017	Enhancing public project implementation in Botswana during the NDP 11 Period.	The failure of the public project implementation strategy that was implemented in Botswana caused the government to suggest that professional project management should be provided to all members who take part in the community development projects, including other projects initiated by the government.
Chauya, 2015	The effectiveness of community development groups in poverty reduction with regards to individual community members: The case of Likasi area development programme in Mchinji District, Malawi.	Malawi introduced community development groups (CDGs) to reduce poverty by providing technical skills, material, and social and economic support to community-based projects.
Chitonga, 2013	The contribution of NGOs to rural development: The case of Catholic Relief Services Protecting Vulnerable Livelihoods Programme in Zimbabwe	The CDC also introduced a Small Livestock Project, which increased cattle ownership and improved livelihoods in Zimbabwe.
Dahie, 2019	Role of non-governmental organisations on poverty reduction: Empirical study from local NGOs in Mogadishu-Somalia	Another success story of community development projects through microfinance, NGOs in Mogadishu, contributed to improved food security, empowerment in terms of the livelihoods of people and poverty reduction for beneficiaries in the rural areas.
De Wet, 2016	Community development and community participation: A conceptual Revisit.	The use of the basic needs approach by community development projects is clear for all projects that highly concentrate on neglected or underdeveloped communities.
Fuseini et al., 2022	Role of non-governmental organisations in poverty reduction in the global South: Evidence from World Vision Ghana, Kintampo South District	NGOs invest significant amounts of donor money in poverty reduction activities, which is essential to determine the impact on poverty reduction.
GISD, 2022	Global Invasive Species Database (GISD) on community development in Lesotho	Involvement of all stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and the private sector, is recommended to complement one another to strengthen policy-guided development initiatives to improve the economy, reduce poverty and increase food security in Lesotho.
Gatari et al. 2016	). Evaluation of factors influencing sustainability of water projects in Gahondo: A Case of water projects in Muhanga District, Rwanda.	In addition to the challenges, there is a lack of community participation, non-availability of funds, poor project management practices, lack of community training, and lack of accountability and transparency.
Gorakhnath & Tayappa, 2015	Self-Help Groups in India: A conceptual framework	Community development projects show more significant socio-economic intervention at the community level.
Morris et al., 2020	Non-governmental organisations and poverty reduction in Uganda: A case of compassion `International in Kisoro District.	Some studies have shown that efforts of community development initiatives to reduce poverty have yet to be realised, especially the plight of disadvantaged people.
Kanyinji, 2012.	Development Facilitator: World Vision Malawi.	Challenges of community development projects that do not have the capacity to

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Forkuor & Agyemang, 2018	Women empowerment through self-help groups in Andhra Pradesh, India.	reduce poverty in Malawi. About 150 community development groups were established by organisations such as the Catholic Development Commission of Malawi.
Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020	Development perspectives	Community development is regarded as one of the most attractive and participatory approaches with minimal financial efforts.
	Sociology-Actor	Despite a corpus of seminal literature on bottom-up development, there are limited examples of successfully implemented bottom-up community development processes in poor communities.
Mhaka, 2014	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and poverty reduction strategies in Zimbabwe: The case of the Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) in the Binga District.	Some success stories of community development initiatives that reduced poverty in Southern African countries, such as in Zimbabwe, were reported about an NGO called Catholic Development Commission (CDC) in Binga District that contributed to reducing poverty among the beneficiaries. The CDC in Zimbabwe helps to reduce poverty and empower disadvantaged people to participate actively in matters affecting their lives, such as working in community development projects that aim to improve their standard of living.
Wang et al., 2021	Exploring the contribution of community development to rural livelihoods.	Argument that through community development, local rural people in communities are empowered to work on their own political, social, economic, and environmental issues to improve the quality and standards of their livelihoods.
Naicker, 2006	Factors contributing to women being successful in the SMME sector	Projects should have their savings as start-up capital, the community project to reflect both precise planning and implementation processes, their previous funding and audited financial statements, transparency and faithfulness of community development project members who are in management positions.
Nakipala, 2015	"Methods, techniques and skills of youth community work, casework, community development and surprising".	
Ika & Pinto, 2022	An investigation into the reasons for the failure of community-based projects at Folvohondwe, Limpopo,	The approval of the community development project is based on the project management plan for the entire project's implementation.
Abiddin et al., 2022	The role of NGOs in promoting empowerment for sustainable community development.	Engagement in community-based projects such as farming projects, indigenous food security, conservation projects and smallholder livestock farming to reduce poverty.
Nyathi et al., 2017	Rural poverty alleviation: Reflection on Zimbabwe's Experiences and needed strategy	The Zimbabwean government, like the Namibian government, has experienced increasing rural poverty despite

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		government commitments to rural development since independence in 1980
Government of Namibia, 2017	Namibia's fifth national development plan) NDP5) 2017/18 to 2021/22, National Planning Commission,	Namibia, for example, indicated the most effective way to address poverty through wealth creation, which is done by contributing towards economic growth and sustainability that can create decent employment opportunities.
Nkwede, 2014	Approaches for poverty alleviation and sustainable development in Nigeria: A study of Ebonyi State community-based poverty reduction Agency (EB-CPRA).	Poverty is a pandemic that has generated a lot of concerns for both the government and members of the communities who are within non-governmental organisations trying to reduce poverty.
Osore et al. 2022	Perceived benefits and barriers to community participation in development projects-The case of Hazina ya Maendeleo ya Pwani on the Kenya coast	The advantages of funding community development and how they benefit people in rural areas.
Libert-Amico & Larson, 2020	Elite capture risk and mitigation in decentralised forest governance regimes.	The wealthier or more powerful individuals within community-based projects usually gain a disproportionately larger share of benefits that will ultimately increase inequalities among community project members
Rwigema, 2022	Community development programs conceptions and practices with an emphasis on East Africa community.	Community development projects should be designed to bring positive change and be a value-based process that aims to address issues such as human rights, social justice, equity, inclusion, and the welfare of people in the communities.
Shava and Thakhathi, 2016	Challenges in the implementation of community development projects in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa	The debate on the real origin of community development continued to be unresolved for many years until its inception on the African continent.
Shepherd et al., 2021	Community Led Development: An analysis of Zambian Development NGOs' participatory practices	Recommendation on strengthening communication channels strategies when funding community-based projects in communities in Zambia.
Shifotoka & Kanyimba, 2021	Factors contributing to the unsustainability of community-based development projects in the Oshana region of Namibia	Partnerships between government and communities, NGOs and (CBOs), institutional capacity building, democracy, environmental protection, gender equality, and political stability in Namibia.
South African National Development Plan (NDP), 2030	Outcome 13 for social protection - South African NDP, 2030	The White Paper for Social Welfare is supported by Outcome 13 of the National Development Plan, 2030, in South Africa. Outcome 13 accords a central role to social protection in addressing the critical challenges of eradicating poverty and reducing inequality.
Tanga and Mundau 2014	The impact of Donor-funded community empowerment projects on poverty alleviation in Zimbabwe	Donor funding by local and international organisations is common and characterised by the positive impact of reducing poverty among the disadvantaged people participating in community development projects.



Udenis, Dassi, Emah & Zukbee, 2013; Kilewo & Frumence, 2015).	Experiences and challenges of community participation in urban renewal projects: The case of Johannesburg, South Africa	Challenges of community development project implementation include a lack of commitment by the project members, unclear project objectives that lead to poor project outcomes, poor project planning, lack of financial support, and poor communication between project members.
Tshitangoni et al 2010	Performance of poverty alleviation projects in South Africa: The case of Vhembe District in Limpopo Province	Lack of basic record keeping can contribute negatively to funding community development projects.
United Nations, 2015	Millennium Development Goals- Taking stock of the global partnership for Development-MDG Gap Task Force Report. United Nations.	Highlights poverty is a global issue, particularly in the global South. It continues to be a critical developmental challenge worldwide.
Hegazi & Seyuba, 2024	Reducing poverty, improving food security for farmers in Zambia.	The failure of community-based organisations to reduce poverty in Zambia, the government of Zambia launched a new UNDP-backed initiative in February 2019 at Lusaka to support the government in strengthening climate-resilient food security and poverty reduction measures.
World Bank, 2020	Southern African Institute for policy and research.	The poverty indices indicate that 60% of the world's poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa.
World Bank, 2022	Escaping poverty in Malawi requires improved agricultural productivity, climate resilience and structural transformation-Poverty Assessment Report.	Statistics showing population in Zambia that out of the 18 million population in Zambia, 60% of them live below the poverty line.
Zuma, 2015	State of Nation Address (SONA)	former President Jacob Zuma emphasised the need to rejuvenate the economy by unlocking the potential of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), cooperatives, township enterprises and rural enterprises to address the high poverty in most provinces of South Africa

Generally, poverty is a widespread issue that has raised concerns among both government officials and members of non-governmental organisations working to alleviate poverty (Nkwede, 2014). Nkwede (2014) further asserts that poverty has become a pressing concern in third-world countries worldwide. The United Nations (2015) acknowledges poverty as a global problem, particularly in the global South, and continues to be a significant developmental challenge worldwide (United Nations, 2015). Poverty indices indicate that 60% of the world's poor reside in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2019). While sub-Saharan Africa has high poverty rates, successful stories of sustainable community development practices have been limited due to unpredictable outcomes of development projects (De Wet, 2016). Additionally, the lack of community participation during the implementation phase has contributed to many failures in community development projects (De Wet, 2016).

Despite a wealth of literature on bottom-up development (Chambers, 1998), there are few examples of successfully implemented bottom-up community development processes in impoverished communities. In addition to creating favourable conditions for community well-being, it is crucial for governments to take responsibility for poverty reduction in rural communities by expanding funding channels to support community development projects. The debate on the true origins of community development remained unresolved for many years until it gained traction on the African

continent (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016). Similar to India, America, and other Asian countries, Africa has been plagued by the enigma or myth surrounding the origins of community development, with various authors providing conflicting views (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016). Consequently, many individuals in these communities have found themselves trapped in poverty, starvation, and high unemployment rates, largely due to the lack of sustainability in community development initiatives, as highlighted in the following overview.

#### **4.1 Overview of community development projects in Southern Africa**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly Goal 1, mandates all countries of the world to end all forms of poverty by 2030. One of the ways to achieve the SDGs is through establishing viable community development initiatives that can reduce poverty and improve food security systems for the people living in rural communities. Above all, the literature argues that through community development, local rural people in communities are empowered to work on their own political, social, economic, and environmental issues to improve the quality and standards of their livelihoods (Wang et al., 2021). According to Wang et al. (2021), community development is regarded as one of the most attractive and participatory approaches with minimal financial efforts. On the other hand, it shows more significant socio-economic intervention at the community level. The current article explores the effectiveness of community development initiatives on poverty reduction among disadvantaged people in rural communities across Southern African countries.

Some examples of community development projects that have been initiated in different countries are depicted in Table 1 above. Eswatini has rural electrification, water and sanitation, road construction, and agro-based projects (Bimha, 2019). The aim of these projects was to provide local disadvantaged communities with income-generating job opportunities, improve the quality of life, and enhance community well-being. The latter is envisaged to reduce poverty and improve the standard of living of local communities through access to quality services, wealth creation, and equality for the people in Eswatini. However, there were many challenges, such as delayed project implementation, laxity, and wasteful expenditure (Bimha, 2019).

In Zimbabwe, organisations such as the Malilangwe Conservation Trust (MCT), Community Technology Development Trust (CTDT), Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE), Tsungirirai Welfare Organizations (TWO), Africa Development Mission Trust (ADMT), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), engaged in community-based projects such as farming projects, indigenous food security, conservation projects, and smallholder livestock farming to reduce poverty (Abiddin et al., 2022). Despite all these development efforts, the negative role of the State and natural disasters has contributed to the increased poverty situation in Zimbabwe.

Abisuga-Oyekunle et al. (2020) mention that the government of Botswana created the Ipelegeng program to provide temporary job opportunities to disadvantaged people to reduce poverty in their households. The program developed essential community development projects that have been identified and prioritised through the normal development planning process to assist the disadvantaged people of Botswana in reducing poverty (Botswana Poverty Eradication Guidelines, 2013). Despite the country being an upper-middle-income country, Botswana continues to face many development challenges, including pervasive poverty and unemployment (Abiddin et al., 2022), yet there are community development initiatives in the country.

In Lesotho, the involvement of all stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, and the private sector, was recommended to complement one another to strengthen policy-guided development initiatives. This is in order to improve the economy, reduce poverty, and increase food security within the Basotho community (GISD, 2022). Furthermore, Lesotho used strategies that most directly impact the lives of poor people, including those involved in community development projects such as supporting local businesses and

providing access to credit. These initiatives aim to build the skills of Basotho entrepreneurs and increase the productivity of workers (International Monetary Fund (IMF), (2006). Despite these efforts, poverty still prevails in Lesotho, with approximately 49.7% of the population experiencing extreme poverty (GISD, 2022). In the Oshana region of Namibia, around 68 community-based development projects were initiated, including boreholes, health facilities, sewing, bakery, piggery, gardening, and irrigation projects. These initiatives aim to reduce poverty among disadvantaged people (Nakipala, 2015). However, many of these structures were not utilised due to a lack of maintenance and consultation (Shifotoka & Kanyimba, 2021).

Similarly, the South African government funded community development projects in an effort to reduce poverty. In the State of the Nation Address (SONA) for 2015, former President Jacob Zuma highlighted the importance of supporting Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), cooperatives, township enterprises, and rural enterprises. These initiatives aimed to address the high rates of poverty in most provinces of South Africa by utilising community economic development approaches (Zuma, 2015). However, the intention to reduce poverty through these means has not materialised due to poor implementation approaches and gross underfunding. Additionally, many rural disadvantaged communities are excluded from production value chains, as they lack local-based production, industries, and community projects that could create jobs for community members (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016).

Malawi, like other countries in the southern African region, has challenges similar to those of community development projects that do not have the capacity to reduce poverty. Approximately 150 community development groups were established by organisations such as the Catholic Development Commission of Malawi (CADECOM), National Smallholder Farmers Association of Malawi (NASFAM), irrigation clubs, livestock clubs, revolving loans clubs, fish farming groups, youth groups, cooperatives, and many more (Kanyinji, 2012). The focus of all the projects was to reduce poverty, enhance food security, and create job opportunities among disadvantaged people in Malawi (Kanyinji, 2012).

As one of the poorest countries in the world, Mozambique is facing rapid population growth, poverty, and large-scale extraction of natural resources such as oil, gas, timber, and wildlife poaching (World Bank, 2019). Through the Mozambique Integrated Landscape Management Portfolio (MILMP), the World Bank supports the government of Mozambique, local communities, the private sector, community development projects, and civil society partners to develop different community development projects focusing on reducing poverty and environmental threats (World Bank, 2019; Salvucci & Tarp, 2021). Other established projects include agricultural projects, natural resource landscape projects, conservation projects for biodiversity, development projects, Mozambique forest investment projects, and dedicated grant mechanisms for local community projects (World Bank, 2019). These community development initiatives were implemented as part of interventions in the communities to reduce poverty and generate income using natural resources managed through a multisectoral approach. Another aim of implementing the above community initiatives was to ensure food security for families, food for the market, and income for parents to pay school fees for their children. However, poverty still persists, especially in the rural areas of the country (Salvucci & Tarp, 2021).

In Zambia, community-based organisations were established to reduce poverty. Unfortunately, the study conducted on the impact of participatory practices of non-governmental organisations on community members and their ability to influence development projects seems to take a long time and create unnecessary discrepancies during the implementation of the projects (Shepherd et al., 2021). The World Bank (2020) supports the above authors, stating that out of the 18 million population in Zambia, 60% of them live below the poverty line. Above all, the major challenge in

many countries seems to be that most of the community projects initiated are poorly implemented and fail to reduce poverty in communities (Bimha, 2019).

## **4.2 Funding for community development initiatives and their effectiveness on poverty reduction**

Many governments and donors have initiated community development projects in Southern Africa to reduce poverty among the people in rural areas (Shifotoka & Kanyimba, 2021). This is to ensure that community development empowers disadvantaged people in the communities to improve their livelihoods (Rwigema, 2022). When community development projects are designed to reduce poverty, they should bring about positive change and a value-based process that aims to address issues such as human rights, social justice, equity, inclusion, and the welfare of people in the communities (Rwigema, 2022). As NGOs invest significant amounts of donor money in poverty reduction activities, it is essential to determine the impact of such efforts (Fuseini et al., 2022). As a result, non-governmental organisations in the global South (both local and international) have entered the poverty reduction efforts to complement state-led efforts to reduce poverty (Brass et al., 2018; Tomalin, 2018; Rozbicka & Szent-Ivanyi, 2020). Almost all countries in Southern Africa did not experience benefits from funding community development initiatives. Some examples of two or three countries that did not benefit from funding that cut across all countries in the region are Malawi, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Malawi, as one of the countries in the Southern African region, has introduced community development groups (CDGs) to reduce poverty by providing technical skills, materials, as well as social and economic support to community-based projects (Chauya, 2015 and Muchaku & Magaiza, 2024). However, the initiative did not benefit the poor people in the country; instead, it focused on community leaders and influential people who are well-off in Malawi (Chauya, 2015). In Namibia, the most effective way to address poverty is through wealth creation, which is done by contributing to economic growth and sustainability that can create decent employment opportunities (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020). However, many people in the rural communities of Namibia still experience poverty.

The Zimbabwean government, like the Namibian government, has experienced increasing rural poverty despite government commitments to rural development since independence in 1980 (Nyathi et al., 2017). According to Nyathi et al. (2017), poverty in Zimbabwe is predominantly a rural phenomenon, given the fact that 70% of Zimbabweans live in rural areas where poverty prevails. According to Tanga and Mundau (2014), donor funding by local and international organisations is common and characterised by the positive impact of reducing poverty among the disadvantaged people participating in community development projects. This has led the government to increase funds that are directed to community development projects to enable them to bring development where it is needed most.

## **4.3 Criteria used to fund community development initiatives in rural communities**

Funding for community-based projects in different countries is based on specific criteria. Some of these criteria are similar in terms of what, why, and how often community projects should be funded to reduce poverty in rural communities within the Southern African region. Other financial institutions, as noted by Naicker (2006), require projects to have their own savings as start-up capital, precise planning and implementation processes, previous funding and audited financial statements, and transparency and integrity from community development project members in management positions. It is crucial for community development projects to prioritise the needs of the poor people in the communities, who are seeking to bring about change, including poverty reduction and an improvement in their standard of living. On the other hand, Tshitangoni et al. (2010) highlight the negative impact that a lack of basic record-keeping can have on the funding of community development projects. It is recommended that all community development projects applying for funding must adhere to the basic requirements to access funding. Financial institutions also like to

see monitoring and evaluation plans in the business proposals, outlining how the community project management will assess the impact of the projects on poverty alleviation in rural communities in Southern Africa. This statement is supported by Ika & Pinto (2022), who states that once a community development project is approved, the project management plan becomes the foundation for project implementation.

#### **4.4 Benefits of funding community development initiatives**

In most cases, community development projects follow the basic needs approach, which is applicable to projects that focus on neglected or underdeveloped communities (De Wet, 2016). The funding of community development initiatives should primarily benefit the rural people who participate in these projects within their communities. Osore et al. (2022) discuss the advantages of funding community development and how it benefits people in rural areas. According to the authors, funded community projects promote representation, trust, and empowerment among the most marginalised individuals through social learning (Osore et al., 2022).

However, Libert-Amico & Larson (2020) argue that within community-based projects, wealthier or more powerful individuals often obtain a disproportionately larger share of benefits, thereby exacerbating inequalities among community project members and marginalising those who are more vulnerable (Libert-Amico & Larson, 2020). For instance, in Zimbabwe, the political and economic downturn led to a significant humanitarian crisis, prompting many local NGOs to initiate various projects aimed at eradicating poverty in the country (Tanga & Mundau, 2014). Nonetheless, the impact of donor funding on community-based projects is seen as detrimental to community development due to the way funding aid is delivered, as it weakens rather than strengthens local institutions that could contribute to poverty reduction (Tanga & Mundau, 2014). Consequently, in order to ensure that individuals benefit from community projects, it is crucial for the government and other donors to be aware of the perceived benefits and challenges of community participation in community development projects and to provide adequate funding (Osore et al., 2022). The authors further emphasise the importance of project members having a positive perception of the benefits of funding community development initiatives.

#### **4.6 Country-specific strategies to reduce poverty through community development initiatives**

Different countries in the Southern African region used various strategies to fund community development initiatives and reduce rural poverty. A select few countries in the region were examined to assess their strategies for community development programs and poverty reduction. For instance, Osore et al. (2022) found that community involvement is a strategy employed beyond the Southern African region. This involvement often takes the form of joint interest groups composed of members from the same Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) (Osore et al., 2022). Namibia, for example, implemented the National Development Plan 5 of 2016, which emphasised the goal of managing natural resources sustainably through community participation by 2022 (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020). In general, Namibia's national policy frameworks for development included partnerships between the government and communities, NGOs, and CBOs, as well as capacity building, democracy, environmental protection, gender equality, and political stability (Shifotoka & Kanyimba, 2021). After recognising the shortcomings of community development projects in poverty reduction in the Kingdom of Eswatini, it was suggested that self-help techniques be implemented to empower community members to address local challenges and participate in solving future problems (Bimha, 2019). Another recommended strategy that was widely implemented to overcome challenges, such as lack of awareness about poverty reduction programs, poor community participation in development projects, and ignorance of project benefits, was an aggressive communication strategy through multimedia platforms (Bimha, 2019). In South Africa, the White Paper for Social Welfare is currently supported by outcome 13 of the National Development Plan

2030, which highlights the importance of social protection in addressing the critical challenges of poverty eradication and inequality reduction (South African National Development Plan (NDP), 2030).

Botswana implemented the Ipelegeng programme as its primary strategy to reduce poverty (Jongman, 2018). This programme employed disadvantaged individuals on a short-term basis. Additionally, backyard gardens were implemented as a second strategy to ensure food security in households (Bimha, 2019). However, the third strategy, which involved an alternative package, was not well-received by the disadvantaged population (Jongman, 2018). Despite these efforts, poverty persists in Botswana. The Ipelegeng program employs individuals on a temporary basis, with workers only employed for twenty days per month. Furthermore, individuals must apply monthly on a rotational basis, with preference given to those who have not previously been in the program (Jongman, 2018).

In Mozambique, public policies aimed at eradicating poverty are closely tied to foreign assistance. It is practically impossible to separate these policies from the country's foreign policy (Daniel, 2020). Despite the approval of a new approach to poverty reduction strategy by the World Bank and IMF in 1999, Mozambique has failed to adopt a unified strategy or policy to eradicate poverty in the country from 2014 until 2022. Instead, all poverty reduction efforts are focused on the Operational Matrix of the Government's five-year program, which also addresses poverty (Daniel, 2020). The Mozambique Integrated Landscape Management Portfolio (MILMP) engages local communities directly in community development initiatives that utilise their natural resources to generate income and reduce poverty (World Bank, 2019). However, poverty persists in rural areas of Mozambique. As a result, the World Bank supports the government by building the capacity for sustainable institutional structures that connect communities to the private sector for the development of income-generating activities, including community development initiatives (World Bank, 2019).

Adding to the involvement of all stakeholders to support one another in development initiatives aiming to reduce poverty and improve the economy, Lesotho established the Lesotho Fund for Community Development (LFCFD) through Act No. 16 of 1999. The LFCFD seeks to reduce poverty in the country. It also addresses the challenge of politicising community development initiatives, where community leaders overtake local disadvantaged individuals in projects by influencing decisions involving the owners of the projects (Raeber et al., 2024). Another strategy used by Lesotho is integral self-help, whereby donor agencies and the government take control of decision-making for marginalised individuals in local community development projects (Raeber et al., 2024). Unfortunately, community members are invited to participate in decisions that have already been made by other leaders in the communities. They only contribute labour to the projects and do not have a say in their own development. However, empirical evidence shows that integral self-help interventions are inconsistent and heavily influenced by external factors such as politicians (Raeber et al., 2024).

Similarly, Zimbabwe, like other countries in the region, has implemented several rural poverty reduction strategies, such as cooperatives, the Growth Point Strategy (GPS), the Camp Fire Program (CAMPFIREP), and the Rural Non-Farm Economy. However, these strategies have had limited success due to poor implementation (Nyathi et al., 2017). While these strategies have the potential to reduce rural poverty, they neglect the importance of community involvement in development by relying on top-down approaches (Nyathi et al., 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate all programs already implemented in rural areas to address the underlying problems behind the failures of poverty reduction strategies and to ensure they benefit the majority of the poor in rural communities (Nyathi et al., 2017).

In Malawi, community or group mobilisation was used to establish community development projects to reduce poverty (Chauya, 2015). Unfortunately, this strategy has failed to effectively reduce poverty

in the country, especially in rural households (Chauya, 2015). Approximately 50.7% of the Malawian population still lives in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2022). In many cases, these groups consisted of community leaders, influential individuals, and the well-off, which does not benefit the most vulnerable people in rural areas of Malawi (Chauya, 2015). Consequently, many people continue to experience poverty despite their participation in these projects.

#### **4.7 Prospect of achieving SDG 1 by 2030 in Southern Africa through Community Development Initiatives**

Community development initiatives were established long ago to address poverty in rural areas, where many marginalised people reside. According to Fuseini et al. (2022), NGOs gained momentum in the 1970s and early 1980s, focusing on poverty reduction efforts in the global South, including Africa and the Southern African region. Furthermore, community development organisations should play a pivotal role in achieving SDG Goal 1 of eradicating poverty in all countries, including those in the Southern African region, by 2030. However, studies have shown that these initiatives have not yet been successful in reducing poverty, particularly among disadvantaged populations (Morris et al., 2020; Forkuor & Agyemang, 2018). This raises concerns about the effectiveness of community development initiatives in developing countries (Fuseini et al., 2022).

In response to the failure of community-based organisations to reduce poverty in Zambia, the Zambian government launched a new initiative backed by the UNDP in February 2019 in Lusaka. The goal of this initiative is to support the government in strengthening climate-resilient food security and poverty reduction measures. It has the potential to empower approximately three million smallholder farmers, particularly women, youth, and marginalised groups, including those working in community development organisations (UNDP, 2019; Hegazi & Seyuba, 2024). If community development initiatives are not strengthened to promote food security and create jobs in impoverished rural communities, achieving SDG Goal 1 will prove to be extremely challenging for most countries.

#### **4.8 Hindrances faced by Southern African countries in reducing poverty by 2030**

Poverty and food insecurity are interconnected issues that require attention from community development projects in all Southern African countries by 2030. However, there are numerous challenges faced by countries such as South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, and other developing nations that may hinder the achievement of SDG 1 by 2030. Examples of these challenges include poor implementation of community development projects, lack of commitment from project members, unclear project objectives resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes, inadequate project planning, insufficient financial support, ineffective communication between project members, the government, or donors, internal conflicts, and corruption within the community development projects (Udenis et al., 2013; Kilewo & Frumence, 2015). Furthermore, Gatari et al. (2016) also highlight a lack of community participation, limited availability of funds, subpar project management practices, inadequate community training, and lack of accountability and transparency as additional challenges. These aforementioned challenges can consequently lead to unsustainable community development projects in rural communities across the Southern African region.

#### **4.9 Mitigation strategies to achieve SDG 1 in rural communities of Southern Africa by 2030**

Strategic interventions have been implemented in different countries in the region to bring solutions to the struggling community development projects that are failing to reduce poverty among marginalised people. For example, Bothale (2017) states that after the failure of the public project implementation strategy in Botswana, the government suggested that professional project management should be provided to all members who participate in community development

projects, as well as other projects initiated by the government. This suggestion came after the realisation of two problems originating from the public sector: a lack of approach to professional project management and some task project managers who lacked management training (Botlhale, 2017).

In the Kingdom of Eswatini, Self-Help Techniques were suggested to empower community members to address local challenges in community-based projects that are also failing to reduce poverty (Bimha, 2019). Similarly, the poor performance of community-based development projects in Namibia was attributed to a lack of sustainability (Shifotoka & Kanyimba, 2021). In Lesotho, stakeholders such as the private sector, community development projects, and non-governmental organisations were among the few recommended to assist each other in strengthening policies that provide guidance on development initiatives to improve the economy, reduce poverty, and increase food security within marginalised communities in the country (GISD, 2022).

In Zambia, like in other countries in the Southern region, poverty reduction through community-based organisations has been unsuccessful. The country recommended strengthening communication channel strategies when funding community-based projects in communities (Shepherd et al., 2021). In South Africa, as well as in Zimbabwe and Namibia, community-based organisations should be continuously monitored and adequately funded to enable projects to assist poor people in the most vulnerable and marginalised communities in achieving self-determination and economic empowerment (Shava & Thakhathi, 2016).

#### **4.10 Best practises for community development initiatives on poverty reduction and food security in selected countries of Southern Africa**

Some success stories of community development initiatives that have reduced poverty in Southern African countries are mentioned below. In Zimbabwe, Mhaka (2014) reported on an NGO called the Catholic Development Commission (CDC) in Binga District that contributed to the reduction of poverty among its beneficiaries. The CDC in Zimbabwe helps to reduce poverty and empower disadvantaged people to actively participate in matters that affect their lives, such as working on community development projects aimed at improving their standard of living (Mhaka, 2014). Additionally, the CDC introduced a Small Livestock Project, which increased cattle ownership and improved livelihoods (Chitonga, 2013). Supporting this perspective, Kabonga (2023) states that community development projects in Zimbabwe have contributed to poverty reduction by improving the income of disadvantaged people in rural areas through income-generating projects, facilitation of access to markets, provision of project inputs, and crop diversification.

When it comes to investigating deeper into the success stories of community development initiatives that have reduced poverty in Southern African countries, information seems to be unavailable or limited. However, there are success stories from other countries in different regions outside Southern Africa that have demonstrated the positive impact of community development initiatives on reducing poverty among disadvantaged populations. For example, in Bangladesh, there are reports about NGOs that have contributed to poverty reduction and improvements in the quality of life for beneficiaries (Bhattacharya and Roy et al., 2017). The Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) NGO have successfully reduced poverty among the poor through enterprise training, enrolling over 3 million children in schools, providing scholarships to children of beneficiaries, creating employment opportunities, and increasing household incomes (Roy et al., 2017).

In Ghana, studies also show that NGOs have contributed to poverty reduction through increased incomes, high productivity levels, and improved consumption by project beneficiaries (Adjei et al., 2012; Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020). Another success story comes from the Nabdum District in Ghana, where the Maximum Transmission Unit (MTU) Mondo NGO, an international organisation,



has contributed to poverty reduction through the establishment of a social business that involves basket weaving and shea butter extraction for women, tree planting, and the provision of educational materials to schools, including stationery, desks, and computers, to meet the needs of human capital development (Amofah & Agyare, 2022).

Another success story of community development initiatives reducing poverty was reported in Pakistan (Fuseini et al., 2022 & Muchaku et al., 2023). The projects in Pakistan have improved access to health services, education, and income-generating activities for the disadvantaged people who are beneficiaries of the projects. The projects also provide security services for women, increase disaster awareness among the local people, and help mitigate the impact of disasters. Unfortunately, the NGOs have focused on urban areas and neglected people in rural areas where poverty is widespread (Fuseini et al., 2022). In support of the above authors, Dahie (2019) mentions that through microfinance, NGOs in Mogadishu have contributed to improving food security, empowering people in terms of their livelihoods, and reducing poverty for beneficiaries in rural areas. These success stories can serve as examples for Southern African countries to learn from and emulate to reduce poverty through community-based projects.

## **5. Policy Implication of the Study**

The current study recommendations should be used to review community development project funding to align with the National Development Plan, 2030. This plan guides all countries in the world, including Southern African countries, to end all forms of poverty by 2030. Aligning with Vision 2030 will also help countries in the region that are still lagging in poverty reduction to expedite their efforts in meeting SDG 1.

## **6. Conclusions**

There is growing recognition worldwide of the critical role that community development programs have played in improving the livelihoods of disadvantaged people living in rural communities in Southern African countries. Although the study confirms the positive contribution of community development initiatives to poverty reduction among disadvantaged people in these communities, it has been observed that the impact on poverty reduction has been limited. Therefore, the members participating in these projects do not benefit as expected. The study also found that many countries in the region, such as Zimbabwe, Eswatini, Lesotho, Botswana, Namibia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and South Africa, have established community development initiatives to reduce poverty, but with limited positive results in improving the lives of the poor. Challenges such as poor implementation of community development initiatives, lack of clarity in project objectives, poor project planning, lack of financial support, and conflicts in community development projects across the region have hindered progress in addressing the root causes of poverty among beneficiaries and thus undermine the primary objective and effectiveness of community development initiatives in local communities. However, the establishment of viable community development initiatives that are adequately funded, with good project management and commitment from project members, will help to eradicate all forms of poverty, end hunger, achieve food security, and promote sustainable agriculture by 2030 in the Southern African region and beyond.

### **6.1 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study presented above, it is proven that community development initiatives have the potential to reduce poverty among disadvantaged people in the rural countries of Southern Africa. Unfortunately, there is still a wide gap that needs to be filled in terms of making community development initiatives in Southern African countries function effectively to reduce poverty in rural communities. As a result, the study identifies different ways to reduce poverty in these countries. One way to achieve SDG 1 is through establishing and implementing viable

community development initiatives that are adequately funded with good project management to lead community development initiatives towards achieving the goal.

Another way is to strengthen the implementation of both newly established and existing community development initiatives to reduce poverty and achieve food security in rural communities by the year 2030. The study further recommends rural infrastructure development include establishing community development projects and constructing access roads to and from the community development projects to enhance the marketing of their goods and services in rural communities. Finally, the study recommends that poverty reduction and food security policies be revisited, strengthened, and implemented to ensure that Southern African countries avoid the disappointment of not achieving SDG 1 by 2030. More importantly, countries that are doing better than others in reducing poverty and improving food security measures should work with countries that are not doing well so that they can learn how to achieve the two goals. Ultimately, the countries would be able to share information, good practices, financial resources, and technologies and encourage one another to address poverty and improve food security within the region.

## 7. Declarations

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