

State ‘sponsored’ elitism and rural peripheralisation in Zimbabwe

Langtone Maunganidze

Abstract

This paper examines the interface between state-‘sponsored’ elites and the peripheralisation of rural communities in Zimbabwe. State-sponsored elites have both direct and indirect backing of the state and often operate within the structures and institutions of the state. The study which informed the paper followed an exploratory research approach. Data was collected through a combination of documentary evidence from related literature, institutional and media reports and lived experiences drawn from purposively selected rural villages in a district in southern Zimbabwe. The analysis was done through the lens of the constructivist actor-oriented interface approach to rural development. The central argument of this paper supports the position that rural development programmes in most African countries fail because they are driven more by elite interests than community ones. The study found out that in the Zimbabwean situation, while these elites have tended to project themselves as assets or catalysts for rural development, overall, they have accentuated the peripheralisation of ruralites. However, the ‘peripheries’ are not necessarily passive actants. There have been notable attempts to resist the tendencies of such state-centric elitism but their leaders or representatives have been culpable in influencing the practices and outcomes of this peripheralisation. The paper concludes that although the rural poor are often the stated or ‘intended’ beneficiaries of most development interventions, the ‘state-sponsored’ elites have effectively reduced them to permanent ‘hinterland’ or ‘dependent’ stakeholders.

Key words: elites, peripheralisation, power, rural development, State