

Women Empowerment Through a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme in Muyexe Village, Limpopo Province

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Abstract: The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) was implemented by the national government through the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform in various areas of the country including Muyexe village. The CRDP implemented broad based-agrarian transformation focusing on community organization and mobilization as well as strategic investment in economic and social infrastructure. The programme proposed an approach that empowers and addresses the needs of the people, household, community and space. It is built on the premise that rural areas in the country have the potential to be developed in a way that generates jobs and economic opportunities, thus providing an alternative to the urban centers, and contributing to the reduction of rural-urban migration. Muyexe village has been one of the pilot areas in the country where the CRDP was implemented in 2009. The purpose of this study is to investigate the contribution of CRDP on women empowerment. The study adopted a mixed research method and quantitative data was collected from 92 households using a structured questionnaire. Qualitative data was also collected using an interview schedule from 13 key informants. The finding reveals that women have been provided with job opportunities and skills training as well as access to basic services through infrastructures established by the CRDP. The CRDP has contributed for enhancement of services and infrastructure in the village. It was found that women are still facing several challenges and there is much to be done to empower women in the village. This study suggests various strategic interventions to further empower women in Muyexe village.

Keywords: Comprehensive Rural Development Programme, Muyexe village, Participation, Women empowerment

1. Introduction

There is an increasing awareness that woman empowerment plays an important and strategic role in the implementation of rural development programmes in South Africa. One of these programmes is the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme. Moreover, women empowerment is increasingly being integrated in rural development programmes worldwide, and this is largely due to the important triple role that women have demonstrated to play in societies through time (Mahmud & Beckers, 2012). Women have been vulnerable and experiencing disempowerment for a very long period of time in Muyexe village (Sebiloane, 2015). Mathebula (2014) pointed out that the major challenges facing women in Muyexe village includes: lack of participation in terms of decision making, poor education, lack of access to resources and inequality. The post-apartheid government of South Africa has been implementing strategies and programmes such as the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme to deal with the matters of rural-women empowerment, poverty and inequality. Muyexe has been one of the pilot areas in the country where

the CRDP was implemented in 2009. The purpose of the study is to investigate the contribution of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) on women empowerment. This paper is organized as follows: first it provides objectives and discussion on literature, secondly, methodology of the study is described, thirdly, it presents key findings as well as proposed framework, and finally, the paper provides conclusive remarks.

2. Literature Review

Planning and implementation could be considered as major determining factors in relation to the outcomes of development process. Therefore, development organisations should critically assess their process of formulating and implementing programmes and policies towards improving people's quality of life. If the goal of development is to reduce poverty and deprivation, then development planning and implementation should be process oriented, people-focused, institution-centered, and based on strategic decisions (Asha, 2014). Therefore, the CRDP as one of the rural development programmes should be implemented in

a manner that it is women-focused and women oriented, thus aiming to empower women in rural areas. But what is women empowerment?

2.1 The Concept of Women Empowerment

The term women empowerment is a concept which is very broad and complex as well as not easy to define because there are no widely acceptable definitions and meaning of women empowerment. Women empowerment should be understood as a process of making information and opportunities available to women, and giving them exposure through involvement in decision making and the implementation of decisions made. Furthermore, it encompasses giving women the power to influence change through access to resources (Hodgson, 2002; Batliwala, 2007; Mahmud & Becker, 2012). Women empowerment should be approached from an angle of ensuring that women participate in the planning and implementation of developmental programmes.

Developmental programmes should ensure equality between men and women and also amongst women themselves. Moreover, developmental programmes should ensure capacity building on the lives of women and lastly women's access to resources should be enhanced. Women empowerment can be achieved through the adoption and implementation of participatory, empowerment, integrated and sustainable approaches in developmental programmes. It can also be achieved by focusing on grass root level which would be formulated and implemented by the people and for the purpose of meeting the needs and priorities of the people. Moyo, Francis, and Ndlovhu (2012) argued that for women to be fully in charge of their development, they must be able to access resources, be aware of the structures and institutions that hinder their progress, be actively involved in decision making processes and finally take control of the resources at their disposal.

Participation is considered as one of the key tenets of democratic governance in South Africa. Mashamaite & Madzhivhandila (2014) remarked that municipal councils are obliged to develop a culture of municipal governance that shifts from strict representative government to participatory governance, and must for this purpose, encourage, and create conditions for residents, communities and other stakeholders in the municipality to participate

in local affairs. In view of this quote participation is crucial for achieving the empowerment of women, by shifting centralized representation and allowing women to represent themselves in matters which affect them the most. Such will promote decision making and involvement in the implementation of such decisions.

In a nutshell, women empowerment should demonstrate the following qualities. It should be participatory, enables access to resources, equality focus and build capacity. Firstly, participatory refers to the eligibility of women to partake in decision making processes. Secondly, access to resources refers to access to services, land, capital, freedom, physical infrastructure, water, electricity and employment. Thirdly, equality refers to eliminating gender based discrimination. Finally, capacity building which refers to enhancing the knowledge and skills of women in rural areas. Thus, programmes such as the CRDP have been implemented in rural areas of Muyexe village to foster women empowerment.

2.2 The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme

The CRDP is a strategic priority number three within the National Government's Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and implemented under outcome number seven (DRDLR, 2012). The programme strives for vibrant, equitable, sustainable rural communities and food security for all (Obadire & Mudau, 2013). Moreover, it strives for the above through three-pronged strategies which are coordination and integrated broad-based agrarian transformation, strategically increasing rural development, and an improved land reform programme (DRDLR, 2012).

The aim of CRDP is to achieve social cohesion and development in rural areas by ensuring improved access to basic services (access to resources), enterprise development (participation) and village industrialization (equality and education). The objectives of the programme in the rural communities involves more inclusive economic growth, decent work and sustainable livelihoods, economic and social infrastructure, and food security (DRDLR, 2012). The programme further consist of objectives which are: sustainable land reform; access to quality education; improved health care; the fight against crime and corruption; cohesion and sustainable communities; sustainable resource

management and use; and a developmental state including improvement of public services (DRDLR, 2012). The CRDP was designed in a way that it will bring about economic development in rural areas. The programme did not narrow its focus to women but women were a priority. The programme was designed to benefit rural communities inclusive of women. The benefits were through: access to land and agrarian transformation, social cohesion in rural communities, and sustainable development. More of the benefits were economic and social transformation inclusive of job creation access to credit and finance, food security, access to quality education, and improved health care. Lastly, the benefits involved fight against crime and corruption which includes fight against women and child abuse, sustainable resource management, and improved public services. The important benefit which the programme was designed for was to improve the standard of living for rural poor communities with women as a priority (DRDLR, 2012).

According to the reports from DRDLR (2015) the village of Muyexe reaped benefits through CRDP in which 330 houses have been built, boreholes have been equipped, a water purification plant has been set up underwritten by the Development Bank of South Africa. Internal water reticulation has been established, 275 sanitation units have been provided, a community center with a post office, clinic, satellite police station, drop in center and sports stadium have been built. Moreover, the local school was renovated and more class rooms and ablution facilities were added, a new early childhood development center with solar lighting was also constructed, two village viewing areas enabled the community to view major sporting events. In the year 2010 women in Muyexe village were trained to knit beads that decorated *vuvuzelas* during the world cup.

A review of the previous study in Muyexe village done by Mathebula (2014) presented findings that majority of the respondents 73% indicated that the CRDP has not brought any significant change in terms of service delivery. Findings further indicated that 21% of the respondents were of the view that CRDP has made some strides in addressing the socio-economic wellbeing and the level of service delivery. However, the authors further indicated, 6% of the respondents were not sure of whether changes visible in the village were part of the CRDP or not. Thus, from the literature reviewed the paper

discusses how the CRDP has contributed towards women empowerment.

3. Research Method

The study was carried out in Muyexe Village, a Village located in Giyani Town, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The paper has adopted mixed research design. Mixed research design is defined as a method for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing and integrating qualitative and quantitative research in a single study. The study used simple random sampling and purposive sampling to select participants of the study. The respondents of the study include 92 female headed households who were selected randomly out of the total 900 households in Muyexe village. Additionally, 13 respondents were purposively selected for one-on-one interview, including the CRDP facility managers, local government officials and traditional leaders. Data was collected using questionnaire and interview techniques. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS while the qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis.

4. Findings and Discussions

The findings of the study conducted are presented as follow.

4.1 The Status of Women in Muyexe Village

Regarding women rights, 88% of the respondents agreed that women have the right to freely express their views in the village meetings or *imbizos* which the residents in the village call *Xivijo*. Likewise, 92.4% of the participants perceived that women make decisions with their husband about finances in their household suggests that in their households, husbands do not suppress them nor side-line them when it comes to financial decision making.

Concerning women workload situation, 58.7% of the participants agreed that women have more workload due to their daily activities of cooking and taking care of the children. It suggests that women in the village are over loaded with home chores to a point where they are unable to focus on other developmental activities which would empower them whereas the man go out to work and bring money home. The finding on economic status shows that 63.1% of participants perceived that

women have access to income generating opportunities. Similarly, 64.2% agreed that employment opportunities are not gender biased.

4.1.1 Perception on Women's Participation in the CRDP

All participants of the study agree with the view that, women in Muyexe the village are involved in projects that are initiated to benefit the community. This entails that in the projects which are initiated to bring development in the village, women are also involved to participate in decision making processes. The participants indicated that the tradition of Matsonga and their culture which they practice in the village together with the village rules set by the traditional authority do not restrict them from taking advantage of opportunities presented in the village.

4.1.2 Perception on Gender Equality

Regarding employment, 62% of participants disagreed that women are satisfied with the type of employment they possess. Likewise, 69% of participants disagreed with the view that women are satisfied with the income they earn from their employers. This suggests that women are not satisfied with the income which they earn from their employers.

Concerning women engagement in leadership, 91% of participants agreed with the view that women in Muyexe village are allowed to hold leadership position, which entails that rural women have access to leadership positions like being a ward counsellor, school principal and managers.

4.1.3 Perception Towards Access to Resources

The finding indicates that:

- Most of the respondents 89% agreed that women are allowed to own land. Women have access to land which they can use for agricultural activities, business and for dwelling with their children.
- The majority of respondents 85% agreed that women have access to health care services. Women are able to access health services with ease, especially now that CRPD has built a health clinic in the village of Muyexe.
- A total of 89% of participants agreed that women have access to safety and security. Women feel

safe and there are no threats of crime and abuse in the village.

- The majority of respondents 90% agreed that women have access to water which reduce their burden of fetching water. Women no longer have to travel long distances to fetch water, but they can now fetch water from taps next to their households.
- The majority of respondents 90% agreed that women have access to electricity which reduces their burden of fetching fire wood. Women are able to cook and light their houses without having to fetch fire wood or use candles.

4.1.4 Perception on Women's Capacity Building

The finding reveals that:

- Most of the respondents 55% disagreed that women have opportunities to further their studies. Women in the village have never received opportunities which allow them to further their education like going to university, college or FET.
- The majority of respondents 60% women disagreed that women receive different skills and development training. Women do not have adequate opportunity for training and skills development.
- A total of 59% of participants disagreed that women are able to start their businesses through the skills they have acquired. Women lack capacity to enable them to start their own businesses.

4.2 The Implementation of CRDP

4.2.1 Establishment of Facilities and Service Centres

The finding revealed that there are various facilities or service centers established in the village. These include the clinic, post office, computer center, *Thusong* Centre, community hall, community market, library, Ben Muyexe Early Childhood Centre, women self-help and police station. These service facilities were established by sectorial departments and the municipality based in Giyani through CRDP implementation under the coordination of the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. This is confirmed by the following extracts:

- "I witnessed the opening of the women self-help centre which was done in 2010 in the presence of the president Jacob Zuma, where he also bought our hand crafted products and some traditional materials produced by women in the village. The president handed the centre to us and the women elected me to be the coordinator of the centre" (Women self-help coordinator, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).
- "Officials from the Department of Health come with officials from the municipality to open the clinic in 2012 but by that time the clinic had been operating for a month, it was an official opening and to certify access to the clinic by the Muyexe community" (Sister in Charge, Myexe Clinic, 21 June 2017).
- "It was 2012 when officials from the municipality and department of education came to the library to tell people that the library is open and free for people in Muyexe village to use it for reading and writing purposes. The village was aware of this visit so many people were here, they were allowed to enter in groups to see the set-up inside. My colleague and I were doing the orientation, people were further briefed on how to utilise library and its materials, it was a good day" (Librarian, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).

The comprehensive rural development programme did not only establish new facilities and centres in the village, it also contributed towards the existing businesses and projects in the village of Muyexe which are the Mancena garden, Muyexe early childhood centre and Pfunanani Brick making project. The comments below give an indication of the general responses:

- "The garden was established in 1980 by women in the village, in 2010 CRDP built us a store house which has an office, toilets, kitchen and a hall for storage, they promised our project that they will give us a mini tractor also so we can deliver our produce to retail shops and markets since we were unable to do so due to lack of transport" (Mancena garden coordinator, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).
- "The Muyexe early childhood centre was established in 1996 by women in the village, CRDP also gave us two Jojo tanks which are water reservation tanks, we understood that the programme could not give us more since we had already received funding from the Department of Social Development which started in 1999, but we are grateful for the water reservation tanks which we received in 2010" (Muyexe Early Childhood Centre Principal, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).
- "Yes CRDP contributed towards the Pfunanani Brick making project, they built us a change room which has showers, toilets, lunch area and a kitchen; they also promised us a big tractor which we will use to deliver our bricks to customers. Even though they refused to use our brick when they build these RDP houses because we were not producing the right size, we are still grateful because since the establishment of the project in 1998 this is the first time we receive something from the government" (Pfunanani Brick Making Project, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017)

The infrastructure and service facilities which are mentioned above were provided by CRDP in line with the CRDP plan. Evidence is found from the CRDP implementation and evaluation report for June 2009-June 2012 by the coordinating department of Rural Development and Land reform.

4.2.2 The Primary Activities of the Service Centre/Facilities in Muyexe Village

The finding shows that the primary activities of various service centers aimed at amongst others providing librarian services, postal services, child caring services in the absence of mothers, computer services, and health care services. The extracts below give an indication of the general responses:

- "The primary activities in the library are to enable pupils to come to the library and study, use books within the library to enhance their studying and help them to do their assignments; allow pupils to use the computers in the library to surf the net and get information on university application and find job opportunities." (Librarian, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).
- "What we do in the post office includes posting mails, receiving mails and parcels, banking, cash withdrawals and air-time purchases, its only just that villagers in Muyexe use free electricity we would sell it here, these are the activities which people in Muyexe come to do here". (Post officer, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).

- "In the Ben Muyexe Early Childhood Centre we take care of children from the age of 0-3 while their parents are away, we feed them, and we bath them before they go home, we also teach from grade RRR until grade R, we teach children how to speak English and to write. In summary, we take care of children in the absence of their parents" (Ben Muyexe Early Childhood Centre principal, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).
- "What we basically do in the computer centre is we assist young people who come in the centre to access computers, we assist them on how to use computers, how to surf the internet when they are looking for information on university application, employment and we also help them with online applications and many internet related assistance. The computer centre has faced challenges of vandalism and theft, many computers have been stolen and the thieves have gone to the point of stealing the floor tiles, chairs and cables inside the centre, thus it is now empty and young people only come to access wireless connections from outside the centre for social media purposes (Former Computer centre assistant, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).

4.2.3. The Activities Focused on Improving the Lives of Women

The finding highlights that a number of activities have been carried out to benefit women or improve their living standard. These activities among others include business opportunities for women, employment creation, banking services, and health services. This is confirmed by the extracts below:

- "The women self-help centre have many activities which focus on improving the lives of women which are sawing, beading, hand crafting, pottery many other creative traditional work which women invent on their own. We meet on daily basis to do these activities then on the week where we know that customers are getting paid, we go out to sell and we return again to do more products so that on those pay days we can go and sell". (Women self-help coordinator, Muyexe village, 21 June).
- "In the Ben Muyexe Early Childhood Centre temporary employment are often created for women because the more children we get every year and in day to day basis we request women in the village to come and assist and in that way they get jobs even though they are on temporary basis but that small salary helps them, on top of that women find it easy to go out in search for opportunities as we take care of their children here". (Ben Muyexe Early Childhood Centre principal, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).
- "I see the activities in the post office improving the lives of women because they come here to make savings on the stockvel groups which they have created and also for their personal savings, the women who work in the women self-help have created business accounts which help them save their profit and the post office has caused women to see the need to create various groups which help them save money, and lastly they get their salaries here". (Post officer, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).

It was found that there are service facilities which did not serve women. The comments below give an indication of the general response:

- "Women do not use the library and we don't know the reason why but the general assumption is they are not engaged in educational activities hence they do not see the library useful to them, but the good part about it is they encourage their children to visit the library to study and do other things." (Librarian, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).
- "I feel that if the community markets were operating, women were going to make use of them and sell their cooked and uncooked food, it is one centre which was going to create self-employment for women who are not working but have passion for business because it is only a matter of time we start to see people from other countries doing business in those markets." (Community Secretary, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).
- "The Thusong Centre must just start to operate because that centre was going to create employment; even though it wouldn't be women alone but at least 50% would be employed as cleaners, security guards, assistants, supervisors, administrators, clerks and data captures" (Community Secretary, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).

It was the aim of CRDP to ensure that the service facilities which were implemented improve the lives of not women alone but also the entire community. Evidence was also found in the Implementation and

evaluation plan which was developed by the coordinating Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR).

4.3 The Contribution of CRDP to Women Empowerment

4.3.1 Benefits Gained by Women

The finding from the study highlighted a number of major benefits that women have derived from various service facilities in Muyexe village. The comments below give an indication of the general response:

- "Women are now able access health services like medication, treatment, family planning methods, proper maternity services and easy access to health services without having to travel long distances, the same goes for their families, meaning taking care of their children and loved once is now easy for them" (Sister in Charge, Myexe Clinic, 21 June 2017).
- "The major benefits which women deprived from the post office are access to financial banking services, financial savings, access to credit, easy mailing access (sending and receiving), quick access to purchases of pre-paid vouchers" (Post officer, Muyexe village, 22 June 2017).
- "Women self-help has benefited women the most especially during the 2010 FIFA world cup year and after 2010, women were able to start their businesses of selling beaded and hand crafted work, it has allowed women to access to capital, it enabled women to be independent and it lead women to other business opportunities" (Women self-help coordinator, Muyexe village, 21 June 2017).

It was found indicated that women are concerned with the manner in which they were supposed to benefit from service centres because many of the service facilities are not operated by residents from Muyexe village, many of the service facilities are not operating after a minimum of 4 years of completion. The comments below give an indication of the general response:

- "Some of the service centres in the village are operated by people outside the village and we do not know how did this matter come about,

because the post office is operated by a woman outside the village, the two employees in the library are not members of the village whereas there are many people in the village." (Community member, Muyexe village, 19 June 2017).

- "I am very worried about the service facilities which are not operating because we would be benefiting from them, for example the community hall would give us jobs of cleaning, cooking during community events and supervision; the markets would help us to be self-employed, the *Thusong Centre* would create jobs for us and also the police station would create many jobs which women would also benefit." (Community member, Muyexe village, 20 June 2017).

4.3.2 The Importance of CRDP

The finding from the study revealed that CRDP was important in Muyexe village. The reason for its importance was that it has brought economic development and growth in the village and other surrounding villages. The comments below give an indication of the general response:

- "CRDP was very important in Muyexe village because now there is economic developed, people now have electricity, water, RDP houses, convenient sanitation and employment and their lives have been easy since the implementation of CRDP. Economically there is growth in the village because there is an in-flow and out-flow of money since there are markets, people have jobs, and others started their business; people have access to security through the police station, they have access to health services through the clinic, they have access to postal and banking services through the post office; a lot can be said but CRDP was very important in the village" (Integrated Development Plan Manager, Greater Giyani Municipality, 23 June 2017).
- "Muyexe village was a very remote village without any sign of development in it, therefore it was very important for the programme to be implemented so that the lives of people in the village could be improved, but the main purpose of CRDP was economic development and growth" (Integrated Development Plan Coordinator, Greater Giyani Municipality, 23 June 2017).
- "The village was very poor, everything was far from us, we had to travel for us to access clinics,

libraries, post office, police station, the standard of living for people in Muyexe was difficult, computer centres, community hall and early childhood centres were a dream for people in Muyexe, therefore for this reason I can say yes, CRDP was important in Muyexe village because it managed to give us all that I have mentioned". (Traditional Authority, Muyexe village, 23 June 2017).

The above response indicated that it was very important for CRDP to be implemented in Muyexe village, evidence of the statement was found in the CRPD implementation plan designed by the coordinating department of Rural Development and Land Reform. The CRDP is premised on a three-pronged strategy which focuses on agrarian transformation, rural development and land reform. The programme is said to be different from past government strategies in rural areas in that it embraces a proactive, participatory, community-based planning approach rather than an interventionist approach to rural development (DRDLR, 2009:3).

4.4 Challenges in the Implementation of CRDP

The findings from the study have revealed that there were challenges and weaknesses which were faced by the implementing office for CRDP. These are the challenges which they say have led to the failure of CRDP in some parts of Muyexe village. The comments below give an indication of the general response:

- "There was poor integration of sectoral departments who were responsible for delivering services and service facilities in the village. This was in a way that responsible offices in sectoral departments were rebellious and did not cooperate hence there are service facilities which are not functioning till today, but we hope that responsible departments will act and those centres will be operational". (Integrated development Plan Manager, Greater Giyani Municipality, 23 June 2017).
- "We experienced a great challenge during the implementation of CDRP in Muyexe village because building material we being stolen, service facilities were being vandalised, this was a bad experience because that meant there would never be enough benefits to distribute among village members. Benefits like computers, jojo tanks, building materials were stolen while other

employees within the projects decided to take more than the required number for distribution in each household. That is how the police station took many years to be completed, the Thusong Centre is not operating together with the computer centre because all the furniture inside have been stolen." (Integrated Development Plan Coordinator, Greater Giyani Municipality, 23, June 2017).

- "Yes we were taught that CRDP will bring service facilities, RDP houses, water, electricity and jobs for people, we are happy and grateful. I was only upset by the way sectoral department did their things, they implemented service facilities and left them like this, they don't tell us what will happen to the computer centre, thusong centre, police station, and the market, they did not tell us what will happen to the people who work in Community Workers Programme because their employments are temporary". (Traditional Authority, Muyexe Village, 23 June 2017).

5. Conclusion

The condition of women living in the village has improved as the result of the implementation of CRDP. According to the finding, women engage in decisions that directly affect them and treated with respect and dignity. For ex women have access to resources such as land, health care, water and electricity. They were taking part in the projects that were designed to benefit the community. Women are allowed to hold leadership positions despite the cultural and traditional practices. However, the participants of the study indicated that women are not satisfied with their working conditions and the income they earn.

The CRDP has facilitated to establish various facility services in order to benefit the local community of Muyexe by establishing a library, recreation center, computer center, early childhood learning center, post office, clinic, road construction and many more. Other projects implemented include water reservation tanks, electricity, toilets and backyard gardens. The infrastructure and service facilities that were developed through the CRDP have major impact in the lives of women in the village. Women have more access to houses, water reservation tanks, and electricity and sanitation facilities. Moreover, the projects initiated by CRDP have benefited women and their family as well as

created employment opportunities and skills training. The CRDP has not fully achieved its purpose of empowering community, women in particular due to several implementation challenges including inadequate coordination, theft and vandalism and nepotism. Hence it is crucial for the policy makers and implementers to look into the different challenges that women are facing and come up with appropriate strategies that will further empower rural women at large in South Africa.

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