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# **Rarity or Reality of Some Theories of Poverty in Explaining the Poverty in Africa**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the causes of poverty in Africa and the use of theories as a roadmap to dealing with poverty in African settings. The African continent is characterised by widespread poverty that includes lack of access to basic needs (such as shelter, clothes, food, clean water and clean environment) in addition to lack of income, opportunities, freedoms and choices. The main aim of the study was to explain the relevance—rarity or reality—of the theories of poverty in dealing with poverty in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular. This desktop research analysed the theory of individualism of poverty, Karl Marx’s capitalist theory and opportunity theory of poverty. Through document analysis involving 47 publications, the study found that the theory of individual poverty lacks relevance—is a rarity—in analysing poverty in Africa, whilst the Marxian theory and opportunity theory are highly relevant—are a reality—because of Africa’s colonial history and current invasion of Africa by multi-national corporations. The study concluded that some theories of poverty are a panacea to understanding development in Africa. The theories are important in understanding the nature, causes and interventions of poverty in general. As such, theories of poverty are both a rarity and a reality when it comes to understanding poverty in African settings, particularly in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Africa; rarity; reality; poverty; theories of poverty

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## **1.0 Introduction**

The issue of poverty within African communities is a hugely contested one. Different scholars have expressed different views on what constitutes poverty, or for one to be said to be poor. This scenario has led to a consensus amongst scholars to regard poverty as a multi-dimensional concept, with many scholars having to agree that poverty consists of many ‘poverties. The multidimensional nature of poverty “embraces a diverse range of characteristics such as limited financial resources, material deprivation, social isolation, exclusion and powerlessness, and physical and psychological ill-being” (Walker, 2015, p.2). To add to the dimensions of poverty there is the capability approach by Amartya Sen, which conceives poverty as ‘capability deprivation’ (Sen, 1992, as cited by Alkire et al., 2015). However, despite its multidimensionality, poverty has also been viewed as a problem that should not be allowed to exist in human societies, the African continent included. Research has shown that in sub-Saharan Africa the number of the extreme poor has increased, from 276 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015 (World Bank, 2018). To emphasise poverty in Africa, the combined gross domestic product (GDP) of African countries has been estimated to be 15 times less than the GDP of the United States of America, and

7 times less than the GDP of China (Abebe & Quaicoe, 2014). Further, it has been established that 60% of countries in Africa are characterised by very low human development due to high levels of poverty (Abebe & Quaicoe, 2014).

Based on the magnitude of poverty in Africa, practitioners and academics in the development arena have made many attempts to come up with suitable interventions aimed at alleviating or eradicating the problem of poverty from within our midst. In contemporary Africa, including Zimbabwe, poverty such as lack of shelter, lack of access to clean water, deprivation of freedoms, lack of access to education amongst others, is widespread resulting in much effort being devoted to its alleviation (Onwuka, 2006). However, despite numerous measures by international and local players to address poverty issues, it is strongly believed that about 736 million people still live in extreme poverty globally, and that 413 million of these are in Africa (World Bank, 2018). Further, about 80% of the world's extremely poor reside in rural areas (Castaneda *et al.*, 2018). As part of poverty interventions, different theories have been followed as a way of improving our understanding of the nature and causes of poverty. The belief is that such a diagnosis of poverty through development theories would help in coming up with suitable national development policies. For example, dependency theory holds the view that the condition of underdevelopment, and resultantly high levels of poverty in nations, is precisely the result of the incorporation of the Third World economies into the capitalist world system of poor nations (Ikechukwu & Jeffry, 2013). It is important to note that many of the theories used as prescriptions, for instance the theory of individualism in poverty, originate from outside the African continent. As such, some theories of poverty may not address poverty from the African perspective. This has raised some doubts from academics and practitioners, as to whether the theories can be a rarity or a reality as a development trajectory of dealing with poverty in Africa.

Despite all the efforts made through governments assistance, humanitarian aid from agencies, and non-governmental organisations to deal with poverty in Africa, “poverty remains the biggest challenge to human welfare in southern Africa and the world at large as it is preventing millions of people from realising their full potential” (Kaseke, 2007, p. 1). While it cannot be argued that most of the theories of poverty have been studied with a view to understanding poverty, some arguments have been raised on the relevance of the theories in analysing poverty in Africa. The basis of the arguments is the obvious one—that Africa is historically a unique continent in terms of its development. When other continents were developing, for instance, during industrial revolution, Africa's development trajectory had a different dimension and focus. This study, therefore, argues that when theories of poverty were propounded by different scholars, some theorists had little or no consideration about dealing with poverty in Africa. Hence, one would be tempted to believe that many of the theories on poverty seem to have been misunderstood as a measure to deal with poverty in Africa. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to provide an argument on the relevance (rarity or reality) of the theories of poverty in dealing with poverty in Africa.

### ***1.1 The Context of the Research Problem***

This study is concerned about relevance of the theories of poverty as a tool for dealing with poverty in Africa, especially Zimbabwe which is characterised by widespread poverty in the form of lack of shelter, lack of clean and safe water, lack of clean environment, and lack of food amongst other dimensions of poverty. Many theories have been offered by scholars as a way of analysing and understanding poverty in general. However, even though many of the theories originate outside of Africa, the theories have been adopted by scholars and

practitioners when dealing with poverty in Africa. I argue that it is time relevant and Africa-specific theories are employed in studying and understanding poverty in Africa. The reason being that some theories cannot help to solve poverty in Africa—are a rarity—whilst others can be relevant in the context—are a reality. This study focuses on the individualism of poverty theory, Marx's capitalist perspective theory, and opportunity theory as units of analysis. These theories were selected on the basis that they seem applicable, flexible and relevant to use when analysing poverty in wider contexts. In addition, these theories are the most commonly used and are regarded as accurate in making proper descriptions and explanations of poverty in general. However, the study argues that if the contexts of theories of poverty are not properly understood, wrong interpretations and prescriptions towards solving poverty in Africa would continue to be made.

## **2.0 Research Methodology**

This study was based on a qualitative literature analysis to form an argument on the rarity or reality of theories in analysing poverty in the context of Africa. The assumption was that each theory can make a significant contribution to the understanding of poverty. This desktop research entailed studying 47 published works on poverty issues, as well as on the theories of poverty mentioned in this study. Of these published sources, five sources were on individualism theory, 12 sources focused on Karl Marx's capitalist theory and three sources discussed opportunity theory. In addition to these published works on theories, 11 sources focused on all the three theories of poverty, whilst 16 sources discussed poverty in general. Of the 47 published works on poverty and theories of poverty, 40 were published by non-African scholars, whilst seven were written by African scholars. Journal articles, conference papers, books, and book chapters were some of the published works that the author consulted. The study of the three theories broadened the understanding of nature and causes of poverty. Further, the literature analysis revealed the rarity and reality of the theories in dealing with poverty in Africa.

## **3.0 Conceptual Framework on Poverty and Theories of Poverty**

The field of poverty studies is awash with literature that can best describe the poverty phenomenon affecting human societies. In addition, various theories of poverty have been advanced as a way of trying to explain the existence of poverty. This study views poverty from an Afro-pessimistic approach, as the study also regards poverty as deprivation of natural assets such as land, water, minerals, forests and wildlife. The study argues that poverty in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, can be reduced through reliance on natural assets or resources. Therefore, this section on the conceptual framework gives a basic understanding of poverty, as well as conceptualising theories of poverty.

Although poverty has been conceptualised in many ways, the consensus among scholars has been that poverty entails the deprivation of important human needs. The basic needs approach to poverty regards poverty as deprivation of basic needs such as food, shelter, clean water and clean environment. Traditional definitions of poverty have tended to focus on poverty as lack of income and wealth, or lack of money or material possessions (Angelsen & Wunder, 2006). However, contemporary thinking recognises poverty as a multidimensional concept that includes lack of access to education, lack of access to health care and infrastructure, the denial of opportunities and choices to take independent decisions, denial of the respect of others, and even remoteness to political power

(Onwuka, 2006). Because of its multidimensionality, it has become increasingly popular, to extend the definition of poverty to other non-material aspects of human well-being (Angelsen & Wunder, 2006).

Therefore, I strongly argue and support the view that poverty is not limited to the deprivation of basic needs, as it may include deprivation of non-material aspects of well-being. As the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs states:

While poverty has many dimensions, its two fundamental aspects are the lack of economic power owing to low incomes and assets, and the lack of socio-political power, as reflected in the limited access to social services, opportunities and information and often in the denial of human rights and the practice of discrimination” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005, p.14).

No matter how the phenomenon of poverty has been conceptualised, it has been widely acknowledged that poverty is a problem that should not be tolerated in societies. This is supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with SDG 1’s aim being that of ending poverty in all its forms, everywhere, by the 2030 Agenda (De La O Campos, Villani, Davis, & Takagi, 2018). Therefore, as part of the many poverty alleviation strategies, the SDGs have also been focused towards addressing poverty and its causes, as a way of trying to mitigate the problem. It has also been argued that poverty is a result of uneven development and exploitation of people within countries or societies. In some countries, any kind of structural change, for instance, industrialisation or expanded commercialisation, can worsen the poverty status of the poor.

To fully comprehend poverty issues, theories have been proposed by scholars and practitioners. Different theoretical opinions have been put forward about what constitute poverty, and its causes in Africa. Issues such as lack of access to social services, unequal distribution of wealth, corruption, bad governance, civil strife, growing indebtedness, marginalisation in world trade and finance, and the accompanying socio-economic malaise being experienced by African countries, have been theorised as some of the causes of poverty in Africa (Onwuka, 2006). This reveals the important contribution that theories can make in our conceptualisation of poverty. The definition of theory has been subject of debate by many researchers (Gelso, 2006; Henderikus, 2008). Theory is a determining law for ordering and understanding a phenomenon. In simple terms, theory points to the preferred conditions that academics try to promote to enhance our understanding of events or phenomenon (Udo-Akang, 2012). This study argues that policy makers and the ordinary African person share the same theoretical view and understanding about poverty. Theory is also viewed as a framework or lens that researchers use to plan and carry out their studies (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). As far as poverty is concerned, theories make it possible for us to focus on poverty and to frame our discussion so that poverty is at the centre, rather than at the margins, or off the radar entirely (Ansley 2001). As such, theories are seen to provide some coherent formal explanations about processes in the world, including explanations about poverty. They are grounded in hypotheses regarding the root causes of poverty or the conditions that perpetuate poverty in societies (Stark, 2009).

## **4.0 Understanding Factors That Can Cause Poverty in Human Societies**

Before analysing the rarity and reality of the theories of poverty in understanding poverty in African settings, it is important to briefly look at the major factors that can fuel poverty in human societies. Due to its multidimensional nature, different interpretations of the causes of poverty have been put forth by scholars (Vu, 2010). Poverty is caused by individual factors (such as individual attitude, human capital, and welfare participation), cultural and neighbourhood factors (such as pattern of values, beliefs, and behavioural norms) and structural factors (such as political influences, social exclusion, and exploitation of workers) (McFerson, 2010; Sameti, Esfahani & Haghighi, 2012). This study understands that these factors are existent in Zimbabwe, and that they may be contributing to the country's widespread poverty. However, as far as causes of poverty are concerned, no unifying theory has emerged from scholars and practitioners who have developed several poverty theories (Lehning, 2007). Each theory has a different perspective of poverty and poverty related issues. In addition, no theory can be claimed to be good enough to invalidate other theories. Some authors have even suggested the blending of the theories to make them more effective. The theoretical views on the factors that can fuel poverty can best be explained and understood through analysing some of the common theories of poverty, which are explained below.

### ***4.1 The Theory of Individualism of Poverty***

One theory of poverty that is influenced by individual factors that can cause poverty is the theory of individualism of poverty. Individual factors are part of human capital and are associated with making maximum use of one's knowledge, education, and hard work; ability to achieve goals and prosper; and to avoid poverty. This theory is taken from the American values and belief in a free market system (Rank, 2004; Sameti, Esfahani & Haghighi, 2012). A free market system is thought to provide equal opportunities for every person in the market to excel and prosper without restrictions. This market system is characterised by free entry and free exit into the market, and consumers have freedom of multiple choices. Producers also have a freedom to produce, offer and sell what they want in a free market system. Therefore, the belief in individualism places much emphasis on individual hard work and responsibility in a free market to acquire important basic needs such as food, shelter, water and health care services (Asen, 2002; Rank, 2004). The idea behind the individualism of poverty theory is that the free market can provide more basic needs to those who are hardworking and less to those who are lazy. This theory also focuses on one's lack of intelligence, little or no sense of achievement or motivation, moral deficiencies, and undeveloped ego and psychosexual characteristics amongst other things (Turner & Lehning, 2007). The theory of individualism of poverty is more appropriate in describing conditions in the United States of America (USA), a country seen as the land of opportunity (Sameti, Esfahani & Haghighi, 2012). Individuals in the USA are provided with vast opportunities including employment opportunities, opportunities to improve talents, and opportunities provided by free markets amongst others, to achieve the American dream of material prospect and success (Sameti, Esfahani & Haghighi, 2012). The idea behind the American dream thinking is that taking advantage of one's talent, virtue and hard work can lead to poverty reduction and prosperity in a free market system.

The view as to whether this theory is a rarity or reality in analysing poverty in Africa can be contested in poverty discourses. The theory seems to be a rarity

and out of place in Africa as it uses the United States of America, amongst other developed nations, as a benchmark towards addressing the problem of poverty. The theory attempts to explain the causes of poverty through emphasizing the shortcomings within individuals that lead to poverty, thereby blaming the victim (Vu, 2010). I argue that the level of opportunities, including opportunities for employment, opportunities to improve individual talents, opportunities for freedoms and choices, and opportunities provided by the free market system presented to individuals in the United States of America, are different from those that people living in African countries are subjected to. Whilst the United States is viewed as a 'land of plenty' with low levels of poverty, many African countries, Zimbabwe included, are affected by high poverty levels and less opportunities. Many individuals in Zimbabwe lack opportunities to advance their cause to obtain basic needs because they are socially excluded. Therefore, proponents of the theory of individualism seem to ignore that the poor have an undeveloped inherent trait, which prevent them from breaking away from poverty (Carr, 2003). Therefore, it is rare for this theory to be an effective tool for dealing with poverty in in Zimbabwe and other poverty-stricken African countries, since it blames individuals as being responsible for their poverty status. The theory ignores that an individual's poverty can be caused by other factors such as social exclusion, oppression and illness amongst other environmental factors. There is also the structural perspective that looks at poverty as a product of dynamic social forces within the broader economic, social and political realm (Alcock, 2006; Cunningham & Cunningham, 2008), which the theory of individualism seems not to acknowledge. As such, many scholars and practitioners have now shifted their view of the aetiology of poverty, to acknowledge that environmental factors can also influence one's poverty status (American Psychological Association, 2000).

Otherwise, if the theory of individualism is acknowledged to be a reality in the African setting, that would amount to acknowledging that Africans in general and Zimbabweans in particular, are a lazy lot. This may be unjustifiable because few opportunities are available to many people in African societies who are regarded as poor. As such, individuals should not be blamed for their poverty because they are subjected to some hostile environments and deviant cultures that are socially, economically and politically generated (Bradshaw, 2006) to work against their endeavours. In addition, the poor are not lazy, but tend to emphasize hard work as strategy to break away from poverty (Schwartz, 2000). My claim that the poor individuals are not responsible for their poverty is supported by previous findings. Poverty is not a consequence of the failings of the poor, but rather as being the result of the inadequacies of the policies that are designed to combat poverty (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2008). Political action that can influence the necessary changes within social structures is needed, so that poverty resulting from structural failings is reduced (Alcock, 2006). I therefore argue that the theory of individual poverty is a rarity in explaining poverty in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular. Many African countries, Zimbabwe included, are characterised by structural failings of the economy, including lack of opportunities for employment. As a result, Africans who possess good skills, expertise and knowledge for work may be victims of poverty because of the structural failings of the economy to provide employment opportunities. For example, poor people from Africa with requisite skills who migrate to developed countries to work can use remittances to eradicate poverty at household level or community levels. Therefore, the goal of sustained poverty reduction in Africa cannot be achieved through blaming victims, unless social justice that deals with their exploitation and exclusion is emphasised (Van der Westhuizen & Swart, 2015).

## ***4.2 Marx's Capitalist Perspective Theory of Poverty***

Apart from the theory of individualism, the Marxian theory can also help to enlighten our perspectives on the causes of poverty (Rank, 2001). Karl Marx's understanding of poverty was based on the view that poverty is caused by social exploitation and exclusion of certain classes. Marx argued that the emergence and growth of industrialisation contributed to a significant economic vulnerability of workers—commonly referred to as labourers in the capitalist system (Rank, 2001). Because of exploitation through working for low wages—or for nothing—and exclusion from certain entitlements like work benefits, the workers' conditions can deteriorate leading to poverty. Exploitation and exclusion put workers in a situation where they are neither able to afford basic needs, nor enjoy their freedoms. This theory is about 'master and servant', with the former exploiting the latter. Thus, social exploitation, when combined with social exclusion can promote or worsen poverty in human societies. This suggests that the problems of exploitation and exclusion are interlinked and can reinforce each other in causing poverty amongst workers.

The concept of exploitation and exclusion also explains the fundamental causes of poverty among workers during the period of the Industrial Revolution (Hurst, 2004). The Industrial Revolution was characterised by a great demand for labour power, which could easily come from the poor members of societies (Hurst, 2004). Marx viewed capitalists as owning the means of production, while workers hired their labour to capitalists (Calhoun et al., 2002). As a result, the theory emphasises that the poverty status of the workers is due to their exploitation by those who own the means of production. The argument here is that whilst workers are the centre of production, they receive very little or no rewards, yet the profits generated are derived from the accumulated surplus of their efforts (Calhoun et al., 2002). Therefore, Marxian theory argues that the capitalist accumulates more wealth and surplus through exploitation or dehumanisation of workers.

The Marxian theory of poverty has four main dimensions of worker exploitation or alienation: (a) alienation from his product, (b) alienation from himself, (c) alienation from fellow human beings, and (d) alienation from the process of production (Calhoun et al., 2002). Because of the exploitation and exclusion of the worker by the capitalist system, this theory argues that people are discouraged from participating in any form of work—leading to high unemployment. As such, poverty affects different aspects of people's lives, existing when people are denied opportunities to work (Pantazis, Gordon & Levitas, 2006). Structuring of economic systems leads to increased economic and social marginalisation of people, with the poor becoming poorer due to lack of access to employment opportunities. Thus, this explains the existence of a constant and unending struggle between capitalists—bourgeoisie—and workers—proletarians—in a capitalist society (Calhoun et al., 2002)). This struggle can only cease to exist if capitalists acknowledge and properly reward the good contribution that workers make in production.

## ***4.3 The Rarity and Reality of the Marxian Theory in Understanding Poverty in Africa***

The capitalist theory clearly explains the existence of poverty amongst workers because of poor remuneration or no reward at all. This makes the theory a reality in dealing with poverty in Africa, although this claim can be challenged. It can be challenged because being a German philosopher and revolutionary socialist, Marx's geopolitical thinking was from the north, and about the north. The fact that Marx was thinking from Europe, might suggest that his mind was

preoccupied with social problems existing in Europe at that time. This, therefore, may be one strong reason to challenge the capitalist theory as being a rarity in dealing with poverty in the Africa—the south. Some scholars have also argued that Europe does not care about poverty in Africa, hence the theory was not meant to analyse poverty in Africa. Europe underdeveloped Africa resulting in increased levels of poverty (Rodney, 1972). If the claim by Rodney is held to be true, why then would someone (Marx) thinking from Europe be concerned about solving poverty in Africa? The exclusionary part of the capitalist theory also explains the experience of marginalisation of some groups in the United Kingdom and United States at the time of technological revolution (Moulaert, Rodriguez, & Swyngedouw, 2003). Therefore, it might be appropriate to argue that this theory is partly a rarity in dealing with poverty in Africa as it is more focused on explaining poverty in Europe, and perhaps in America.

However, despite Karl Marx coming from Europe, it can also be argued that the capitalist theory is a reality, that is, an ideal tool for analysing and explaining poverty in Africa. The historicity of poverty in African is strongly believed to have been shaped by the era of colonialism amongst other factors. For example, in South Africa, the legacy of the apartheid era shapes the social injustice in modern-day South Africa (Handmaker & Berkhout, 2010). During apartheid Black South African citizens were denied the opportunity to mingle with Whites in social settings, a situation that still exists in racial townships in South Africa even today. This situation is well explained by the capitalist theory through its social exclusion or alienation dimension. The colonialism era also saw the exploitation of African labour, in which the Africans were made to work in foreign-owned firms for low income. Since exploitation is another dimension of the Marxian theory, this scenario further enhances the reality of the theory as a tool for dealing with or analysing poverty in Africa. During the colonial era, Africans in general and Zimbabweans in particular, were regarded as a free and idle commodity, the one that warranted the capitalists from the North to exploit for labour.

Proponents of the Marxian theory also argue that Europe is responsible for poverty in Africa because of industrialisation. Industrialisation saw Africans provide cheap labour that was not properly rewarded by the capitalists. For example, in Zimbabwe during the colonial era local citizens working for capitalists were paid very low wages. This trend of poorly rewarding labour has been perpetuated by fellow Africans, who are now exploiting each other as Africans are now the owners of the means of production. Therefore, Marx's capitalist perspective theory fits in well with this period as the situation of the Black Africans got worse due to exploitation. To make matters worse, African citizens were excluded from other workplace entitlements such as overtime payment and non-monetary incentives, further plunging them into poverty. For a country to progress well in terms of development, I argue that it should tap into the potential of every citizen at its disposal (Graaff, 2003). To conclude on the capitalist theory, I argue that the theory is both a reality and a rarity in explaining poverty in Africa. It is a reality through its exploitation and exclusionary nature in explaining poverty in Africa. Marx wrote about exploitation of workers by those who own the means of production, a situation that has been happening in Africa since the colonial period up to now. Presently, China has invaded African countries including Zimbabwe for development, a situation that has perpetuated capitalism, making the capitalist theory even more a reality to study and understand poverty in Africa.

#### **4.4 Understanding Poverty in Africa Through Opportunity Theory**

Lack of access to opportunity is regarded as one of the major causes of poverty in African societies, and Zimbabwe in particular. According to the opportunity theory of poverty, the poor have limited human capital, and suffer a lack of opportunities compared to those who are rich. Opportunity theory of poverty views the social system as structured in a way that favours certain groups—for example, the rich, men, and politicians—within a society to succeed. The favoured groups usually prosper while the excluded ones fail to break away from poverty. This theory views the United States of America’s social system as a model for a society that has plenty of opportunities. However, the United States of America’s social system is structured in a way that limits certain vulnerable groups’ access to resources (Calhoun et al., 2002). It is therefore also important to note that exclusion from opportunities that can address poverty and unemployment is also a violation of one’s dignity in society (Chambers, 2006; Kakwani, 2006). It is important to mention that even though the United States of America’s social structure provides opportunities for people to achieve the American dream, disadvantaged and marginalised groups have limited access to economic resources to achieve their goals.

I argue that opportunity theory holds water in analysing poverty in Africa, therefore, the theory is a reality. True to this theory, many people in African states, including Zimbabwe, lack opportunities to advance their standards of living. Many Zimbabweans lack opportunities to critical assets, opportunity to make informed choices and decisions, opportunities for representation, and opportunities to means of production, amongst others. The theory is a reality because many African countries including Zimbabwe, are characterised by internal conflicts that deprive citizens of any opportunities to contribute to development. For instance, 80% of the countries that perform badly on the human development index (HDI) have been at war or in political crises (Stewart, 2004). The effects of conflict in Africa have been witnessed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, Ivory Coast and Zimbabwe, countries marked by high poverty and underdevelopment due to structural and socio-economic factors (Matunhu, 2011). Politicians in these countries seem to have failed to enforce measures that can help to address poverty issues, especially the structural failings that they have created. Structural failings of the socio-economic system seem to be the causes of poverty and underdevelopment in many African countries (Decker, 2004). Therefore, opportunity theory is relevant when analysing poverty in Africa.

In addition, the invasion of Africa by multi-national companies from Europe, America and Asia has worsened the lack of opportunities and lack of access to resources to Africans. Some multi-national companies such as Anglo America, Mobile, and Unilever, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) and China Minmetals Corp are operating in Africa (Matunhu, 2011). Most of these companies are exporting labour to Africa, thereby denying employment opportunities to the locals. Where locals have been engaged, they are made to work under stressful working conditions, without taking a rest. It is now common knowledge that the Chinese are the biggest exploiter in Africa. The Chinese are alleged to be abusing desperate job seekers and looting African resources, a situation that has deprived African countries of opportunities to develop using their resources. China’s state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has established itself in Sudan and Chad, while China National Offshore Oil Corporation has invested in Morocco, Nigeria and Gabon (Matunhu, 2011). This suggests that more citizens in African countries are likely to continue to languish in poverty as they are denied opportunities to benefit from their

resources. Multinational companies are known for shipping resources out of Africa. Further, opportunity theory is a reality in Zimbabwe and Africa, as it recognises the lack of opportunity of populations that live in rural areas. Therefore, employing the theory to analyse the dimensions of poverty, their causes, and possible interventions in Zimbabwean and African settings is well acknowledged. Poverty in Africa is more pronounced in the rural areas (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006).

## **5.0 Way Forward for the Theoretical Poverty Epistemology**

The theoretical approach to understanding poverty in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, requires critical thinking that does not shift the blame onto the victims of poverty. Those in positions of power in African social settings are the duty-bearers, who should be held accountable to their constituents. Duty-bearers, including politicians, have an obligation to the citizens and should face the blame for creating conditions that perpetuate poverty in African societies. As a way forward in understanding poverty in Africa and Zimbabwe in terms of theoretical thinking, this study acknowledges that poverty can best be addressed with the following seven aspects in mind (Narayan, Pritchett & Kapoor, 2009):

- Poverty is not the product of a culture: people dream of success and of moving out of poverty.
- Poverty is a condition and not a characteristic: when opportunities are created potential can develop.
- Internal power bases are needed to develop potential: this requires empowerment
- Equal opportunities are the dream: social justice contributes to poverty alleviation and reduction.
- Responsive local democracy can address poverty: fair and compassionate leadership is needed.
- Collective actions assist people to deal with poverty, but not to move out of poverty.
- Programmes should include beneficiaries as active role-players to ensure sustainable change.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

Having studied the literature on the theories of poverty, I drew some important conclusions from the study. This study concluded that some theories of poverty are a reality to studying and understanding the nature of poverty, its causes and in coming up with possible interventions. However, not all theories describing poverty may be applicable to explaining poverty in African settings, and in Zimbabwe in particular. The reason being that people have different talents and that some employers have a taste for discrimination. In addition, poverty in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, exists mainly due to structural conditions created by those in positions of power and authority. Further, the study concluded that the theory of individualism is a rarity in dealing with poverty in Africa, whilst the Marxian theory and opportunity theory are mainly a reality. As such, there is need to blend the theories when analysing poverty issues in Africa. As such, the study concluded that some theories of poverty are both a rarity and a reality in Africa for understanding poverty in African settings.

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