



# WHY GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION MATTERS?: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION ON DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN BINGA, ZIMBABWE

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**Abstract:** *The geographical location of Binga poses significant challenges to the area's development. While education, agriculture, and small businesses play an important role in the local economy, Binga's distance from major cities makes it difficult to access the markets, infrastructure, and resources needed for these sectors to thrive. These challenges create obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the country's Vision 2030. This study sought to understand the true impact of Binga's geographical location on the community by conducting in-depth interviews with twelve individuals who had lived in the area. The interviews provided a firsthand account of the challenges posed by the community's remote location, including high living costs, limited access to technology and education, and low property values. The data from the interviews was analyzed and compared, revealing clear patterns in the ways that the geographic location has affected the community. To address these challenges, the study recommends implementing policies such as devolution, sustainable livelihoods approach, and rural appraisal to spur and stimulate development in this community. The study further appeals to businesses to set up shops in the district, in order to reduce the high costs of goods and services, as well as to cut down on the long and expensive journey to access goods and services. This would make a significant difference to the local economy, and improve the standard of living for the people of Binga. By bringing businesses closer to the community, the study suggests that it would be possible to alleviate some of the challenges that have been created by the geographical location of the district.*

**Keywords:** geographical location, development, rural communities.

## INTRODUCTION

The dichotomy that binaries developed urban areas and less-developed rural communities is a global phenomenon, one that highlights the importance of geographic location in determining the potential for development. This study set out to examine the intricate nexus between the geographical location of Binga and its level of development. Generally, Mackinder (1919), postulates that, the geographical location of a community is a fundamental factor in determining the potential for development, as well as the level of poverty experienced by a community. The geographical location of any community influences its access to resources, its susceptibility to natural disasters, its ability to connect with markets and other factors that play a major role in its development potential. For Donaldson and Faber (2017), the distance from major markets, as well as the size and shape of the region, play a significant role in determining the level of Development that a region will achieve. The World Bank (2018) substantiate the claim and provide that, the distance from major cities was a key factor in explaining the difference in development levels between districts in India. In Malawi the Food and agricultural organization of the United Nations (FAO) (2018), found that small holder ranchers who live in more remote areas have lower yields, are less likely to adopt new technologies, and have lower levels of income. The

central statistical office of Zimbabwe (2002), asserts that, Mudzi's remote location, limited infrastructure, and low levels of investment have all contributed to its lower levels of development compared to other districts in Zimbabwe. Thus the geography of a community is a sine qua non and a fundamental aspect when a positive and speedy developmental trajectory of any community is to be realized.

Cities are often the driving force of economic growth in any country, serving as a hub for employment, trade and innovation. Cities tend to have higher levels of productivity, wages and innovation than rural communities, due to their concentration of businesses, workers, and knowledge (Glaeser and Saiz 2004). The World Bank (2012) cements by asserting that, cities are responsible for a majority of global economic activities, and that urbanization is strongly linked to economic growth. Thus the claim that, communities that are located close to urban centers can benefit from these opportunities, as they can more easily access the infrastructure and resources necessary for development than their rural counterparts is typical. In this area, Growe and Plumper (2017), postulate that Skane's proximity to Malmo has been a key driver of the regions economic growth in recent years, this has been attributed to factors such as increased trade, investment and knowledge sharing with the capital city of Malmo in Southern

Sweden. In the same vein, Mankani and Pradhan (2016), found that the Greater Accra Metropolitan area (GAMA)' rapid growth in Ghana is due in part to its proximity to the capital city of Accra, which provides access to markets, infrastructure, and services that are important for economic development. For Chikowore (2012), the proximity to Harare has allowed Goromonzi to benefit from the spillover effects to the city's economic growth and has contributed to the district's increasing per capita income and employment opportunities.

Rural communities are predominantly agrarian by nature, thus those close to cities allows them to easily transport their produce to the market, with less time and cost spent on transportation. In contrast, communities like Binga, which are further away from urban centers face greater challenges in accessing markets and obtaining fair prices for their products. Thus the status of the district as one of the poorest is undoubtedly linked to its location. The district is located in a remote and underdeveloped region of the country, far from major urban centers. Following this fact, Munsaka (2012), gives Binga a title of the most poorest district in Zimbabwe. Additionally, Huck and Walter (2017), provided a case study of the Bihor region in Romania. Synonymous to the Binga situation, the authors argue that the remoteness of this region has led to a lack of economic opportunities and high levels of poverty. Similarly, the Overseas development institute (2017), found that the lack of access to markets in the Karamoja region of Uganda has led to widespread poverty as well as food insecurity. While according to the FAO (2019), the lack of access to markets in Hwange has resulted in high levels of poverty and food insecurity.

Several studies have explored the relationship between the geographical location of rural communities and their vulnerability to disasters. For example, a study by Ramirez and Peacock (2016) found that communities located in remote areas of the Peruvian Andes were more likely to experience landslides and flooding, as well as food insecurity and poverty, due to their limited access to resources and infrastructure. Similarly, a study by Li and Miller (2017) found that communities in rural areas of South Africa were more vulnerable to climate-related disasters, as they often lacked the resources and capacity to adapt to changing environmental Conditions. This study sought to analyze the impact of geographic location of Binga and its level of development.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### The Concept of Geographical Location

While the term "geographical location" may seem straightforward at first glance, it actually carries different meanings depending on one's perspective and field of expertise. To a geologist for example, geographical location means the physical coordinates of a location on the Earth's surface (Agnew 1987). This definition is much narrower and more literal than the one used by a spatial specialist, who may consider not only the physical coordinates of a location, but also its relationship to other places and the experiences and culture of the people who live there. Therefore, the same term can mean different things to different people, depending on their background and perspective. Thus in this study, geographical location is defined in terms of how far rural communities are located from major markets. In other words geographical location is conceptualized as the distance that separates rural communities from urban centers and major cities (Christaller 1933). This physical distance from urban centers is conducive to the

persistence of poverty in rural communities. This idea was returned by Bjorvatn (2016) who asserts that, the remoteness of rural communities can limit their access to education, information, health, and other resources necessary for development. In the same vein, the World Bank (2014), provides that the physical distance between rural areas and urban centers has a significant impact on poverty levels, agricultural productivity, access to healthcare, and other factors that are crucial to development. This limited access can perpetuate poverty in a self-reinforcing cycle, creating a rural poverty trap (Bjorvatn 2016). By analyzing the impact of geographic location of rural communities on development, this study aimed to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of geographic location in shaping the lives of the people of Binga community.

### The Concept of Development

The term "development" can be interpreted in a variety of ways depending on the individual's perspective. Some people may view it primarily through an economic lens, while others may emphasize the social, cultural, or environmental dimensions of development. This ambiguity can sometimes lead to confusion and disagreements over what constitutes "development" and how it should be pursued. In order to move forward with any development efforts, it is important to have a shared understanding of what the term means and what goals are being pursued. Thus according to Todaro (2000), development is the process of improving the quality of all human lives. This definition is too general, shallow and thus fail to demystify and capture the full complexity of the concept of development. Clark (1992), therefore defines development as a dynamic and fluid process that involves complex changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality, and the eradication of absolute poverty. For Chambers (1995), development is about increasing people's ability to shape their own future and influence the direction of change in their communities. Thus the collation of the above insights reflects the belief that development should be driven by the people themselves, and people should be considered as equal partners rather than imposing development projects and considering them as beneficiaries of development initiatives.

The ultimate goal of development should be to improve the quality of life for all people, especially those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. Any development efforts should focus on increasing access to basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, as well as improving education, employment opportunities, and infrastructure. By addressing these fundamental needs, development can make a real difference in people's lives and contribute to overall human progress. Todaro (1995), cements the above opinioned sentiments. He dichotomize development into three but mutual related concepts. Firstly, he sees development as involving the raising of people's living levels. Here development should increase income and consumption levels of food, medical services, and education, and ensuring that economic growth is relevant and sustainable. Secondly, development should promote self-esteem: this involves creating social, political and economic systems and institutions that respect human dignity and encourages personal empowerment. Finally, development should increase freedom of choice: that is, development should increase the range of choices available to individuals, such as by expanding access to consumer goods and services. These aspects of development are

interconnected and mutually reinforcing, therefore, it is a breakneck to try and extricate the three.

In the context of development, the geography and distance from markets can play a major role in perpetuating inequalities between the urban and rural communities. Urban areas often have a greater concentration of resources, such as hospitals, schools, and shopping centers, and are closer to the economic center of a country, thus can easily take charge of their destiny and realize their full potentials. Rural areas, on the other hand, may be remote and far from major cities, making it difficult to access these same resources. This unequal access to resources and services can create a vicious cycle of poverty and throttle the Development pursuits of rural communities. This study sought to analyze why geography matters in the development of rural communities taking Binga as a case study.

### **The Concept of Rural Communities**

A rural community is generally defined as a small, isolated, and sparsely populated area, typically located outside of an urban center. Rural areas are often characterized by their close relationship with agriculture and the natural environment, and often have lower population densities and less infrastructure than urban areas. According to Pahl (1984), rural communities are distinct from urban areas, and are characterized by their physical isolation, strong bonds of community and kinship, and strong ties to agriculture and the natural environment. This study was designed to address the lack of knowledge regarding the relationship between rural communities' geographic location and their level of development. It sought to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with the specific characteristics of rural areas, such as their remoteness, lack of infrastructure, and economic challenges. By exploring these factors, the study aimed to fill in gaps in the existing literature and inform policies and interventions that can support the development of rural communities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore the experiences of people living in rural communities, a purposive sample of twelve participants was selected from two villages in the district, namely Nagangala and Kalungwizi. These villages were selected based on their geographical proximity to each other and their similarities in terms of population size, infrastructure, and access to resources. The aim was to select participants who could provide rich and meaningful insights into the experiences of living in a remote rural area, and how these experiences are impacted by their environment and resources. Purposive sampling is a non-random approach to selecting research participants based on the researcher's judgment and knowledge of the topic. This sampling method prioritizes selecting participants who are likely to provide the most relevant and informative data for the study. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is an effective method for selecting "information-rich" cases that will yield rich and meaningful data for in-depth study. Merriam (1998) also stresses that this method can maximize learning by focusing on the most relevant and valuable cases for the study.

In this study, key informants were identified as employees of the Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises, who were selected as key informant participants based on their experience and expertise (UCL Centre for health policy research 2014), in the field of small-

scale business development in rural communities. These key informants were able to provide valuable insights into the specific challenges and opportunities that rural communities face when it comes to accessing resources, infrastructure, and markets. The combination of their experience and knowledge provided unique and rich data for the study.

The study employed open-ended interviews as a primary data collection method, allowing interviewees to express their views freely and in-depth on the relationship between geographic location and the development of rural communities. This approach provided valuable insight into the experiences and perspectives of interviewees, allowing the researcher to gain a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with rural development. By giving interviewees the opportunity to share their views and perspectives, the open-ended interview method was able to capture a rich and diverse range of data. This research focused specifically on the Wards of Nabusenga and Kalungwizi in Binga District Zimbabwe.

Drawing on the work of Bogdan and Biklen (2003), this study used a narrative approach to gather data from the community being studied. The research focused on understanding the community's lived experiences and perspectives, and sought to gain insights through direct interaction with community members. This approach allowed the researcher to understand the issues that the community faces and how they are impacted by their geographical location. The data gathered was then analyzed in order to gain a better understanding of the complex relationships between these factors.

The researcher took care to ensure that informed consent was obtained from all participants in the study. Participants were made aware of the nature and purpose of the research, and were free to decide whether or not to participate. All secondary data sources were properly acknowledged to avoid any issues of plagiarism. The researcher was mindful of the ethical standards that should be followed in qualitative research, and made every effort to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical and more acceptable manner.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

A diverse range of factors suggests that the underdevelopment of Binga as among rural communities located far from major cities and markets is, to a significant extent, due to its location. Geographical remoteness can pose a range of challenges, such as poor infrastructure, limited access to resources, and a lack of economic opportunities. Additionally, remoteness can result in a lack of access to essential services such as healthcare and education. All of these factors can contribute to a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment, making it difficult for this remotely located community to break free from its circumstances.

### **The Cost of Living**

This study confirmed that indeed the geographical location of a community has a significant impact on the cost of living and the community's general level of development. It was revealed through this study that the cost of living in Binga, is significantly higher and soring than in urban areas. The study found that shop owners in this locality pass on the cost of transport to their customers, leading to higher prices for goods and services. This is particularly problematic for low-income households, who may

already be struggling to make ends meet. An elderly woman from the rural community of Nagangala shared that the cost of basic goods such as food and medicine has become unaffordable for many people in the area. She explained that the prices of essential items have increased significantly, and that many families are struggling to make ends meet. This is especially concerning for the elderly, who may have limited income and may be unable to travel to larger towns and cities to access cheaper goods. This literature is materially related to that provided by Jumbe and Jayne (2011) who found that the price of maize flour was higher in rural areas of Tanzania than in urban areas, even after accounting for transportation costs. This price difference is to the fact that farmers in rural areas pay a higher price for transporting their maize to market, and this cost is passed on to consumers (Jumbe and Jane 2011). Thus, the literature above supports the idea that a community's geographical location is an important factor in its cost of living and level of development.

It was revealed also that the high cost of living in this community may be due, in part, to the lack of competition among businesses. One employee from the ministry of small and medium enterprises provided that, in Kalungwizi as in many rural areas, there are only a few shops available to residents, which means that the prices of goods and services are not subject to the forces of competition that help to keep prices low in urban areas. This lack of choice can lead to monopolies, where a single business controls the supply of a particular product and can charge higher prices. The informant further furnished that, this situation is further exacerbated by the lack of access to alternative sources of goods and services, leaving rural residents with little choice but to pay the higher prices. Stevens and Zhang (2020) concur with the insight provided above, they found that shop owners in rural areas of China shifted the cost of transportation to their customers. The study found that the price of goods was significantly higher in rural areas than in urban areas, even after accounting for the cost of transportation.

A lack of wholesale, industries and providers in rural Binga contributes to the high cost of living for residents of this areas, who must often travel long distances to purchase goods and services at wholesale prices. Wholesale providers, such as industrial companies and large retailers, typically offer goods and services at lower prices than those found in smaller, rural communities. The cost of traveling to these providers, combined with the cost of the goods and services themselves, can place a significant financial burden on residents of rural areas. This creates a disparity in the cost of living between those who live in cities and those who live in rural areas. This literature concurs with the one provided by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2015), which opinions that in many cases, rural communities in Africa are located far from major urban centers, making it difficult for residents to access wholesale goods and services. This results in the need to travel long distances to purchase goods, which increases the overall cost of living for rural residents. One elderly man from Malube Village maintained that, because there are no industrial companies located in the village, the local shop owners must travel to Gokwe to purchase goods to resell in the village. This process results in the shop owners increasing the price of the goods to cover the cost of travel and transportation. As a result, the cost of goods in the village is higher than it would be if there were industrial companies located nearby. The man further explained that this problem not only increases the cost of living for the

villagers, but also limits their access to a variety of goods and services.

### Access to Technology

It is unequivocally, unambiguously and undeniably clear that technology plays a crucial role in the process of development. Technological advancements have made significant contributions to the improvement of living standards and the efficiency of production. These sentiments resonate well with the insight from Castells (2000) who postulates that technological innovation has played a central role in shaping the economic, social, and political landscape of modern societies. Thus technology has become an essential part of the process of development, and it will continue to play a central role in shaping the future of societies around the world. Building on the literature above, the concentration of technology in urban areas is creating a digital divide between those with access to technology and those without. This divide was unearthed in Khumbu village as one youth in his own words had this to say, “*Swebo michina yamazubaano ngayazosika kabali bamuchikuwa baba achindi kababesya, zichita kuti tuchalile kunkani azya lusumpuko*”. (“We are often left behind when it comes to new technologies, and that means we are also lagging in terms of our development. We don't have the same access to information or resources as those in cities, and that makes it difficult for us to keep up. It's like we're stuck in the past, while everyone else is moving forward.”). Thus because of its geographical location, this community's development efforts is throttled, as it is not able to take advantage of the opportunities provided by technology. Thus indeed geographical location matters.

One of the main findings of this study was that Binga's location limits access to technological advancements across a range of fields, including agriculture. The study was informed by one participant in particular that limited availability of modern agricultural technology, such as high-quality seeds, chemicals, and fertilizers is due to the long and winding distance to major markets. This lack of access can have a significant impact on the agricultural sector, as farmers are not able to take advantage of the latest technological advancements that could increase productivity and efficiency. The study's findings on the impact of Binga's location on access to technology align with other studies that have examined the impact of location on technology access. For example, a study by Osterwald-Lenum (2002) found that the adoption of new technologies is constrained by location-specific factors such as proximity to markets, infrastructure, and availability of skilled labor. In the case of Binga, the lack of access to agricultural technologies has serious consequences for the local agricultural sector, including reduced productivity and decreased economic opportunities. Armed with this information, one can be forced to conclude that indeed the geographical location matters.

### Access to Education

The adage “knowledge is power” rings true when it comes to the potential of education to spur development in any society. By investing in the education of its people, a society gains access to a wealth of knowledge and skills that can be used to improve living standards, increase productivity, and drive economic growth (Hanushek and Woessmann 2008). Education provides the foundation for innovation, technological advancement, and social progress. In short, education is a powerful tool that can transform a society and help it achieve its development goals.



In this regard, the study therefore reports that, while there has been progress in improving access to basic education in this community, with several new primary and secondary schools having been built, there is still a significant challenge when it comes to access to tertiary education. This is a concern because without the opportunity to pursue higher education, many young people in the community may lack the skills and qualifications required to gain meaningful employment and contribute to the local economy. During personal interviews about the geographical location of Binga and the access to tertiary education of its people, the interviewed student's comments highlight a real barrier to accessing tertiary education in the area, which is the lack of nearby institutions that offer higher education. The need to travel far away to attend university presents a significant financial burden, as well as a logistical challenge. This discourages many young people in the community from pursuing higher education, which have a detrimental impact on the community's future prospects.

### Value of Property

Property values in rural areas are generally lower than those in urban areas. In Binga, for example, a property owner mentioned that they were receiving a very small amount of rent from a non-governmental organization that was using their property. This is a common occurrence in rural areas, where the demand for properties is lower than in urban areas. This can have an impact on the economic stability of property owners in rural areas, as they may not be able to generate enough income from their properties to support themselves and their families. Thus the low property values in Binga are a direct result of the town's geographical location. People with similar properties in larger towns are able to earn a much higher income, due to the higher demand for properties in urban areas. This highlights the importance of location when it comes to property values, and how Binga's remote location can have a significant impact on the economic prospects of its residents. This notion maintains the ideas from Fekete et al (2017), who postulate that there is a large price gap between properties located in urban and non-urban areas. Glaeser (1998) also rallies behind the idea and provide that, Spatial dependency on distance from urban centers can be attributed to several factors. First, the availability of employment is significantly higher in urban areas, which implies more people competing for homes within a reasonable commuting distance. Second, the variety of services and facilities offered in urban areas compared to rural areas can attract individuals to move to cities (Glaeser, 1998). Finally, the more people there are in a given area, the higher the demand for properties. Thus due to its low population density and limited economic activities, property values in Binga are lower than in more densely populated areas. The low population leads to a reduced demand for housing, and the lack of economic activity means fewer people will seek homes. As a result, property values remain low.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges faced by the Binga community are in part due to its location far from major cities and markets. This study therefore recommends that the government and relative stakeholders develop and implement policies that bring resources and infrastructure closer to rural communities. Devolution, rural appraisal, and the sustainable livelihoods approach are among the policies that should be strengthened and implemented to address

the needs of the community. This will help to improve access to education, health care, and other essential services, and contribute to the overall development of the community.

The business community is also encouraged to expand their presence in the district, which could have several benefits for the local population. This would reduce the need to travel to other areas for goods and services, potentially saving time and money. Furthermore, increased competition could drive down prices and promote a more diverse range of offerings, resulting in improved quality and lower costs for the community. This could help stimulate the local economy and encourage the development of a more vibrant marketplace.

## CONCLUSION

This research has analyzed the implications of the geographical location of Binga on its overall development, including access to resources, infrastructure, and services. Binga's remote location has resulted in entrenched and abject poverty for its inhabitants. The gap between urban and rural communities has had significant effects on various areas, including the cost of living, access to technology and education, and the value of property. This highlights the need for increased investment in infrastructure and services in rural areas to reduce inequality and improve the quality of life for all citizens.

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