

# Chapter 1

## Concept and Approach to Land Management Interventions for Rural Development in Africa

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### ABSTRACT

*Unlike urban development, rural development is not getting adequate attention in Africa. This is true in the aspects of development policies and as research interests. It is still not a priority in the development agenda of many African countries. The consequence is that the governance of rural development in many African countries is still treated as a linear affair. A further consequence is the negation of the complexities that impede the improvement of living conditions in rural communities in Africa. This chapter is based upon an explorative study that challenges existing notions of rural development. It uses the structured literature review and focused group discussion conducted with African doctoral researchers in Germany to identify how land management can be used as an intervention for rural development. As a way forward, it presents a land management-based approach to rural development that can be adaptable or applicable in African countries.*

### INTRODUCTION

In Africa, the search for better living conditions within and across countries is increasing. Within countries, the majority of the population that live below poverty lines (and who move to cities in search of economic opportunities) come from rural areas. Also, the majority of the over 240 million international migrants that move across countries in search of physical security come from rural areas. The most practical way to improve these situations is to ensure food security, reduce poverty, and make the rural environment secure and livable for those that dwell in rural areas. That is why sustainable rural development remains the most direct and effective way to improve the lives of the rural people and living conditions in the rural place.

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The debate on how to deliver rural development in Africa has been going on for more than five decades. It is a debate that has taken theoretical, ideological, conceptual and methodological angles. Despite the varied discourses on rural development in Africa, embracing responsible land management as an intervention to rural development remains unexplored. Scholars who have written about rural development have mostly viewed it from different aspects, depending on their school of thought and development philosophies (or ideologies). Some have written about it from the perspectives of modernization (Klinghoffer, 1973), basic needs (Palmer, 1977), local government administration (Rondinelli, 1979), participation (Cohen and Uphoff, 1980) and agricultural development (Bryceson, 1999). Others have viewed it from multifaceted approaches (Phuhlisani, 2009), development policy (Alemu, 2012), and cultural development (Chigbu, 2013a). Some have viewed it from the lens of place attachment (Chigbu, 2013c), women's empowerment (Chigbu, 2015a), ruralization (Chigbu, 2015b) and community development (Chigbu et al., 2018).

Considering that many rural areas in Africa are dependent on land-based livelihood options, land management is crucial to rural development. There are scholars who have conceptualized rural development approaches from land management perspectives (see Chigbu, 2013b; Magel, 2014). However, it was only of recent that de Vries and Chigbu (2017) introduced the concept and practice of responsible land management and applied it in the context of rural development in Ghana and Rwanda. In furtherance to the application of responsible land management to rural development, this study argues for a rural development approach that is based on responsible land management as an intervention. The study is based upon a conceptual research that challenges existing notions of rural development and embraces the role of land management in achieving rural development objectives (in African countries) in a responsible way. The essential elements of the study are that it emphasized the theoretical and practical issues that make responsible land management a practicable intervention for rural development in Africa.

## **QUALITATIVE EXPLORATIVE METHODOLOGY**

This study is best described as an exploratory methodology because it investigates questions that have not been clearly studied in the context of Africa. It serves as an exploratory effort to show the application of land management as an intervention in rural development. The use of quantitative methods based on exploratory techniques is known to allow for freedom of defining research boundaries and terms of operations (Chia and Lee, 2017). However, it has the limitations of not being “sufficient in practical aspects” because “there is no comprehensive analytical system dedicated to this issue, as well as research regarding this subject” (Czechowski et al., 2018: 1010). The qualitative explorative methodology has been adopted for this study because its objective is on presenting a pathway for action (land management intervention) rather than put emphasis on the specifics of carrying that action. The study emanated from a rural conceptualization forum on Africa with African doctoral researchers in land management at the Technical University of Munich, Germany. The methodological approach to the study involved the use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data on the scope, nature, and role of Land Management at the local level in Africa. The FGD specifically dealt with two major questions. (1) What are the developmental definitions of Africa, land management and rural development in African context applications? (2) How can land management serve as an intervention for rural development in Africa? The first question was answered on the verge of exploring a methodology for answering the second question. In answering these questions, the discussants based the FGD on two critical definitions (and

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