

The role of public universities in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi

By

Martino Kamwano MAZINGA

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Supervisor

Dr M. Höppener

Co-supervisor

Dr N. Mtawa

Co-supervisor

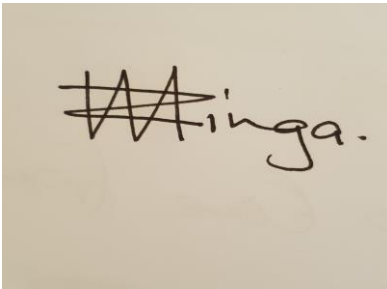
Prof. M. Walker

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

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Declaration

I, **Martino Kamwano MAZINGA**, declare that the thesis, **The role of public universities in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi**, submitted for the qualification of **Doctor of Philosophy with specialisation in Development Studies**, at the University of the Free State is my independent work. All the references that I have used have been indicated and acknowledged using complete references. I further declare that this work has not previously been submitted by me at another university or faculty to obtain a qualification.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored, textured surface. The signature appears to be 'Mazinga.' with a stylized, scribbled initial.

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SIGNED

DATE

Abstract

Literature indicates that higher education supports income growth, enlightens graduates with a breadth of knowledge and technical skills, expands people's choices, and increases individuals' skills necessary for economic and social development. Thus, higher education institutions such as universities have an important role in preparing graduates, who would in turn contribute to the development of others. However, few studies have focused on analysing graduates' preparation for rural development despite rural poverty remaining a global challenge. This study proposes a framework that would enable universities to prepare graduates with capabilities for rural human development. Rural human development is conceptualised from the capability approach as enhancing rural people's opportunities and choices for living a life that they have reason to value. Data for this qualitatively designed case study was collected in Malawi through semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted with deans, lecturers, and students from the four public universities, and employers and graduates from the rural development sector. The study's guiding question focuses on how universities can foster graduates' capabilities for rural development in the context of pervasive rural poverty and rurality.

Emerging perceptions of universities' roles in rural development re-affirm the ongoing calls for universities' contextual relevance. The findings show that universities can foster graduates' capabilities for rural social change through rural sensitive curricula and pedagogies that would stimulate or expand graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development. The study re-imagines a different kind of university that is oriented towards promoting rural human development in its preparation of graduates. The proposed multilayered framework of graduate preparation is contextually-oriented, capability-based, and recognises conversion factors in graduate preparation. The study findings push graduate preparation beyond the dominant views of enhancing employability attributes, to re-imagine a university education that fosters graduate capabilities which enhance and harness their agency and aspirations for rural social change.

Keywords: Higher education, university, rural development, capabilities, agency, and aspirations.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the Almighty God, who against odds, made it possible that I reach this far. To my mum and dad (Levita & Adamson Mazinga), to my aunt and uncle (Judith & Noble Yabwalo). To my beloved wife Martha Nyama, and my charming three boys, Lingalanga, Wanga, and Tamanga.

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The thesis is what it is because of data. I cannot list all interviewees, but I appreciate them all. I am grateful to my cohort mates, Bertha Kibona, Monique Kwachou, Ndakaitei Manase, and Fenella Somerville for all the support. I am thankful to the HEHD research group for the constructive inputs during various seminars and presentations.

Studying in a foreign land had its emotional challenges. I had to come to terms with leaving my family behind. In my absence Chimwemwe and Gloria Phiri, and Boniface and Olive Chibwana untiringly supported my family financially and emotionally! Mawu amene ndinganene ndi ZIKOMO! Lyton Lungu, my close friend, was called to God's glory at the time of writing this Ph.D. thesis. I lost a friend indeed and in need!

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List of Acronyms

BA - Bachelor of Arts

B.Soc.Sc. - Bachelor of Social Sciences

CA - Capability Approach

EMS - Economic and Management Sciences

FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization

FGD - Focus Group Discussion

GoM - Government of Malawi

HoD - Head of Department

IFAD - International Fund for Agriculture Development

INGO - International Non-Governmental Organization

LUANAR - Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources

MDG - Millennium Development Goals

MGDS - Malawi Growth and Development Strategy

MoEST - Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

MPRS - Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper

MUST - Malawi University of Science and Technology

MZUNI - Mzuzu University

NAP - National Agriculture Policy

NCDP - National Community Development Policy

NCHE - National Council for Higher Education

NEP - National Education Policy

NESP - National Education Sector Plan

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

UFS - University of the Free State

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Chapter 1

Introduction, background, and context

1.1 Setting the scene

It is argued that higher education has the potential to contribute to building stronger societies, ending extreme poverty, boosting shared prosperity, and enhancing human well-being (World Bank, 2017). “Higher education institutions are seen by many as playing a key role in delivering the knowledge requirements for development” (Cloete & Maassen, 2015:3) and contributing to transforming societies through the graduates they produce (Walker & McLean, 2013; Boni & Walker, 2016; Lozano, 2013). Higher education institutions serve as incubators for the knowledge base and human capital needed to promote and sustain development across many sectors (World Bank, 2017), which include among others, rural development sectors. Boni and Walker (2016) further posit that higher education supports income growth, enlightens graduates with a breadth of knowledge and technical skills, expands people’s choices, and increases individuals’ relevant skills for human development. Thus, higher education institutions, such as universities, have an important role in preparing graduates, who in turn are expected to contribute to the development of others (McLean & Walker, 2013). For instance, Walker (2012) argues that universities have a role to play in forming graduates with public reasoning capabilities, critical knowledge, and self-reflection that can enhance their democratic citizenship to act justly in a world that is characterised by different forms of inequalities, such as rural poverty.

Historically, universities have mainly had three distinct but interrelated functions: teaching and learning, research, and service to society (Yesufu, 1973). What distinguishes universities from other research institutions is knowledge production and transmission (Clark, 1983). According to Altbach

(2008), public universities in most developing countries continue to serve as central institutions of nation-building, research, and training, with a historical connotation of being ‘seedbeds of nationalism’¹. However, the research function is often weak, as Fussy (2018) argued that Africa has a discouraging performance in research, as compared with other world regions.

Post-independence universities in Africa were established with a fanfare of optimism (Lulat, 2003). A speech by the former president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, as cited by Ajayi, Lameck and Ampah (1996:1), captures a sense of pride, identity, expectations, hopes, and enthusiasm that came with the founding of the ‘local university’ in Africa. Kaunda said:

We in Zambia are immensely proud of our University. This pride is not simply that this is our first and only University. It is also because the University of Zambia is our own University in a very real sense...our people see in the University the hope of a better and fuller life for their children and grandchildren.

The initial idea of the African university was to be the university for the people, an Africanised university; not a transplant of the Western model of training; but growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil (Yesufu, 1973). However, there are fears that African universities continue to follow the Western model, for instance in curriculum and pedagogical practices. The question of what constitutes the African university, and what makes people feel it to be their ‘own’ is central to the African experience with higher education (Ajayi et al., 1996). Questions on the relevance of universities to local needs and issues have persisted over the decades, since the 1970s, and continue to dominate debates in higher education (Yesufu, 1973; Sawyer, 2004). Post-independence African universities were viewed as key instruments for national development (Sawyer, 2004), but their roles in national development have always been a subject of debate.

¹ Seedbed of nationalism relates to the graduates being more consciously aware of their national roles.

Altbach (2008) and Bloom, Canning and Chan (2006) observe that there have been scholarly contestations on the relevance of higher education, with a critical debate centred on whether university education is a ‘public good’ or a ‘private good’. Drawing from Walker and McLean (2013) and Nixon (2011), their understanding of university education is that it ought to add value to society by educating its people who in turn become productive citizens.

University education should not only benefit the individual graduate but also their society. For instance, Sub-Saharan African universities at their establishment following independence were expected to produce professionals who would manage their newly independent nations (Yesufu, 1973). Universities were called upon to engage in relevant research, that would focus on local issues, of which rural poverty was one, and to provide community services (Ajayi et al., 1996). Africans hoped their universities would help in nation-building, national heritage preservation, modernisation, and engagement with the local people (Lulat, 2005), most of whom were and are still living under multidimensional poverty in rural areas. However, over the years, little development changes were observed that could be attributed to the role of the universities (Ouma-Wangenge & Fongwa, 2012; Assié-Lumumba, 2006; Wandira, 1977). Concerns began to emerge that African universities were becoming “white elephants and flashy symbols of modernisation: ivory towers occupied by a minority elite” (Yesufu, 1973:39). University education did not serve the interests of African societies; instead, it was used as a means of extending colonial ideology (Woldegiorgis & Doeverspeck, 2013). These concerns were against the initial idea of what would be a contextually relevant African university. An African university that was expected to be:

A university, which would signify its commitment, not just to knowledge for its own sake, but to the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of, and for the amelioration of the conditions of the common man and woman in Africa. The African University must ... not only wear a different cloak but must also be differently motivated. It must be made of a different and distinctive substance from the traditions of Western Universities and must evolve a different

attitude and a different approach to its task. The truly African University must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment (Yesufu, 1973:40).

Therefore, in understanding the roles of universities, contextual relevance, and responsiveness to their environmental challenges were key, and they remain so. Universities were not only expected to pursue knowledge for its own sake, but to be pragmatic in addressing the development challenges facing their societies.

Questions on the roles of universities to development have been recurrent in higher education debates. From the review of literature, most of the studies that have looked at the roles of universities to development have paid less attention to contextual factors such as rurality. For instance, Mbah and Fonchingong Che (2019), Castells (2017a), Grobbelaar and De Wet (2016), as well as Cloete et al. (2011), among others, have written on the roles of higher education and development to national development in general terms, defining the context, with little attention to rurality. Further, scholarly works on graduate preparation have not paid much attention to how universities through their training role can prepare graduates for rural development.

1.2 Definition of the research problem

The role of higher education institutions and in particular universities in contributing to development has gained momentum across the globe over the past decades (Mtawa, 2019; Oketch, McCowan & Schendel, 2014; Cloete et al., 2011; Bloom et al., 2006). However, Sawyerr (2004) argues that African universities have failed to reposition themselves in the changing conditions of their societies. Governments, development stakeholders, and other academics are skeptical if not suspicious about the role of universities in national development (Mambo et al., 2016). While others argue that university education is a luxury; “nice to have but not necessary” (Cloete et al., 2011:5). Nevertheless, hope in the roles of universities to development remains (McCowan, 2019). Universities could help

in developing African experts who can analyse African problems (Bloom et al., 2006). These ideas resonate with Sawyerr's (2004), who argues that the African university must be one whose work and mission are directed towards the attainment of concrete and demonstrable development goals. He argues that a university must proceed in its programmes and pedagogies from an informed criterion, which is continuously engaging itself in search of real problems that are confronting African countries. However, it is observed from the literature reviewed in the coming chapter, that universities are unable to produce graduates who are prepared to contribute to addressing rural development challenges.

Yesufu (1973) argued that African universities ought to focus on where the greatest need lies. In the context of Malawi, rural development is considered one of the greatest needs given the country's rurality. However, the World Bank report on higher education in Malawi exposes higher education's inability to produce graduates who could meet the country's development needs and satisfy employers' expectations (Mambo et al., 2016). Despite national development policies and strategies (Government of Malawi (GoM), 2018, 2013, 2011, 2005) recognising higher education's roles in the generation of new knowledge and strengthening skills development, there are concerns with its contextual relevance (Mambo et al., 2016). It has been observed that most university programmes in Malawi are not aligned to the critical national development growth sectors (Mambo et al., 2016; World Bank, 2010). For instance, Hall and Thomas (2005:76) observe that higher education programmes in Malawi inadequately address the skills gaps of the context, as most programmes reflect "needs, concerns, and issues primarily relevant to the 1970s, 1980s and earlier." According to Chimombo (2003), at the establishment of the first university in Malawi, the focus was to prepare administrators who would take up leadership

from colonial masters. Despite the majority of Malawians living in rural areas, reports indicate that there less attention has been given to graduate preparation for rural development (Chinsinga & Kayuni, 2008).

Wide-ranging shortfalls in graduates' contextual preparedness in Malawi have been identified (Mkandawire, Luo & Maulidi, 2018; Mambo et al., 2016; GoM, 2016a; Hall & Thomas, 2005; Castel, Phiri & Stamini, 2010). Generally, graduate preparedness remains "at the heart of the value proposition of university education; it is its most compelling promise and unforgiving performance indicator" (Tiyambe-Zeleza in Sharra, 2018:1). However, the question remains why universities in Malawi are perceived to pay less attention to graduate preparation for rural development. Besides, if they were to prepare them for rural development, how would they do that?

Predominantly, universities have been criticised for training graduates who do not meet their country's economic development needs. Thus, universities' relevance and quality of education have been judged by the type of graduates they produce. This study interrogates the problem in which universities' education in Malawi is considered contextually irrelevant and not meeting the country's development expectations and needs (Mambo et al., 2016). Given the country's rurality, one would expect universities in Malawi to strongly consider graduate preparedness for rural development. Unfortunately, this is not the case as reports indicate high graduate vacancy rates in rural development sectors (Chinsinga & Kayuni, 2008; GoM, 2016), and rural development employers' dissatisfaction with graduates from public universities. Thus, this study explores how universities can foster graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi given the country's rurality and its associated rural poverty.

1.3 Aim of the study and research questions

The study aims to explore how universities can prepare graduates for rural development.

The study's central question is:

How can public universities foster graduate capabilities for rural development in Malawi?

The following sub-questions guide the study:

- i. How do higher education policymakers articulate the roles of universities in rural development?
- ii. How do university stakeholders and students perceive graduates' preparation for rural development?
- iii. How do employers and graduates in rural development sectors perceive graduates' preparedness and preparation for rural development?
- iv. What attributes and capabilities are required to enhance graduate preparedness for rural development?
- v. How can public universities prepare graduates for rural development, given the country's rurality and its associated rural poverty?
- vi. How can universities foster graduate capabilities for rural human development?

The study answers these questions with reference to literature, policy and first hand empirical data. The analysis of the data draws from the capability approach as the central lens throughout the study. Questions one, two, three, four and five are answered in chapters six, seven, and eight respectively. In these chapters, I engage critically with the empirical data on various perspectives on graduate preparation and preparedness for rural development. Question six is tackled in Chapter nine, which provides a multi-layered framework of graduate preparation for rural human development.

1.4 Research methodology

To address the problem of the study, the study employed a qualitative research method. Data was collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with rural development stakeholders (employers and graduates working in rural development), university stakeholders (deans, lecturers, and students), and higher education policymakers (heads of institutions responsible for the management of higher education in the country). There were also four focus group discussions (FGDs) with final-year university students. Several documents were reviewed to obtain more information and further insights on higher education and development issues. All the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, coded into patterns, and categorised into themes that are discussed in the empirical chapters.

The qualitative research method was chosen for its concerns with the meanings that people attach to their lives and experiences. It helped in understanding the participants' perspectives from their own frame of reference and understanding of reality as they experienced it (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The choice of qualitative research was further motivated by its interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and counter-disciplinary approach to the empirical world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For instance, through interviewees' critical reflections, the study explored multiple perceptions of graduates' preparedness and preparation.

Before commencing data collection, ethical approvals were sought. Ethical approval was granted from the Economic and Management Sciences Ethics Committee (Clearance number UFS-HSD2018/1340), of the University of the Free State. In Malawi, the National Committee on Research in the Social Sciences and Humanity, under the National Commission for Science and Technology, also granted ethical approval (reference number NCST/RTT/2/6).

1.5 Conceptualisation of the study

The study applies the capability approach (CA) as a normative framework in exploring and analysing how universities can foster graduate capabilities for rural development. According to Robeyns (2005:94), “the capability approach is a broad normative framework for the evaluation and assessment of individual well-being and social arrangements, the design of policies, and proposals about social change in society.” The CA offers a broad normative framework for conceptualising, interrogating, and analysing universities’ preparation of graduates for rural human development. The CA was chosen for its emphasis on opportunities and freedoms that graduates have in deciding what they want to be and what they are able to do in relation to rural development. University education is regarded as being capable of fostering graduates’ capabilities for rural development; that is enabling them to think and act as agents of rural social change. On adopting the capabilities approach and human development the study is conscious that however momentous they are, they have the same potential of producing and reproducing both old and new opportunity structures and trajectories that are simultaneously uneven and unequal. As such while introspection and inward-looking at the roles of universities in Malawi were a focus, within the thesis the two conceptual lenses have been examined and framed within the complex realities of global world systems, of course without losing touch of the contextual realities.

1.6 Researcher’s positionality

Rural development has been at the heart of my professional career. The study topic is partly as a result of over ten years of personal reflection on my work with rural communities in Malawi. Growing up in a rural area, attending higher education in urban areas, getting international exposure, and coming back to work in, for, and with rural communities, position me with a nuanced personal understanding of rural development. It takes personal knowledge and the first-hand experience of rural poverty to understand its magnitude. Rural people are trapped in multiple forms of deprivations, which limit

capability to live a dignified life. Nevertheless, rural people also have skills, knowledge and experience that can be used to improve their situation. However, they should not be left behind or left to deal on their own with the challenges that rurality brings. From my experience in rural development, most graduates would need to learn the realities of rural life for them to develop a sense of aspirations and agency to contribute to rural human development. As an employer in a large local NGO in Malawi, I witnessed how most graduates are not well-prepared and not motivated to work in rural areas.

Faced with challenges of attracting graduates with the right skills, retaining them in rural areas, and how most fresh graduates struggled to engage in rural development, I began asking questions on how universities prepare them for work in general, but rural development work in particular. My passion for graduates' preparation for rural development is premised on the realisation that the poverty reduction agenda shall remain a mammoth task in Malawi, and globally, if poverty is not addressed from its roots. In Malawi poverty is profound and severe in rural areas. Universities prepare graduates in different disciplines who are expected to assume various roles in rural areas, as nurses, doctors, teachers, extension workers, engineers, among others. The context of Malawi implicitly and explicitly causes graduates from different disciplines to work in rural development, and yet their preparation is devoid of the context of their work.

1.7 Context and background to the case study

1.7.1 A brief on the context of Malawi

Malawi is located in the southeastern part of Africa, with a population of 19.2 million, and more than 83 per cent of the population living in rural areas (GoM, 2018a). It is reported that 69.6 per cent of Malawians live below the poverty line of US\$1.25 a day (IMF, 2017). Malawi is in the low human development category on the Human Development Index (HDI), with a Multidimensional Poverty

Index of 52.6 per cent (UNDP, 2019). The majority of Malawians could be described as caught in what Chambers (1983) calls a ‘deprivation trap’ or an ‘interlocking cluster of disadvantages’. Rurality exposes rural Malawians to severe and deep-rooted well-being deprivations. Poverty in Malawi remains pervasive and largely stagnant in rural areas (IMF, 2017). As such, Malawi’s overarching development policies - such as the Malawi Growth and Development Strategies (MGDS, I, II, III), Vision 2020, Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2005) among others - share the objective and vision of poverty reduction. However, in all these policies, poverty is mostly understood in economic terms, not as a deprivation of well-being opportunities. Consequently, efforts in rural development have heavily focused on agricultural growth as the engine of economic progress for the country (Ellis, Kutengule & Nyasulu, 2003).

1.7.2 History and background of university education in Malawi

Like many African countries, the history of higher education in Malawi dates back to the postcolonial era. The University of Malawi (UNIMA) was established in 1964, as the first public university. It was the only university until 1997 when Mzuzu University (MZUNI) opened doors, followed by Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR) in 2011. Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) was opened in 2014. There are currently four public universities in Malawi. However, in 2019 Parliament passed a bill to delink some constituent colleges of the University of Malawi into two other autonomous and fully-fledged universities², which are yet to open doors for their first intake. The higher education system in Malawi is still in its infancy stages, with less than 0.5 per cent of the population gaining access to university education (Mambo et al.,

² Following the delinking, Malawi Polytechnic became the Malawi University of Business and Applied Sciences (MUBAS). The College of Medicine, which was also a constituent college of UNIMA, joined with Kamuzu College of Nursing to become Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHS).

2016). Nevertheless, higher education is viewed as a key catalyst and tool for the country's economic growth, and development as a whole (GoM, 1998, 2002, 2008). The government of Malawi recognises the potential of higher education in supporting the poverty reduction efforts (GoM, 2013), although universities' roles are not clearly articulated, particularly from the graduate preparation standpoint. However, the higher education system is not well aligned to the national development needs and priorities (Mambo et al., 2016) even though the establishment of each university was underpinned by some ideological or developmental agenda. In the next section, I discuss each of the four universities involved in the study and provide an overview of their establishment, mandates, and missions. The four public universities have been selected for the fact that they produce a lot graduates who by contextual default find themselves working for or with the rural people. Further, public universities carry with them some public good functions as the main source of the needed human resources for the country, which is ruralized.

1.7.2.1 The University of Malawi (UNIMA)

UNIMA was established in 1964, three months after Malawi attained its independence with the first intake in the faculty of political and administrative studies. The UNIMA Act stipulates that

The objects of the University shall be to advance knowledge and to promote wisdom and understanding by engaging in teaching, research and by making provision for the dissemination, promotion, and preservation of learning; by engaging in such university education and research as is responsive to the needs of Malawi and the whole world (UNIMA Act 1974 Amended 1998:326).

The objective spells out a vision of an institution that aspires for excellence and service to society by offering higher education that is credible, relevant, and competitive locally and

internationally. To achieve these aspirations, the UNIMA Act outlines the following functions of the university:

- a) to encourage the advancement and dissemination of learning and research;
- b) to engage in such university education and research as is responsive to the needs of Malawi and the whole world;
- c) to provide facilities for higher education, for research and for the advancement of knowledge in such branches of learning and study and for such persons, whether members of the University or not, as the Council may from time to time determine;
- d) Subject to this Act and the Statutes, to award and confer Degrees and Diplomas, and other academic distinctions, including Honorary Degrees and distinctions (UNIMA Act 1974 Amended 1998:326).

1.7.2.2 Mzuzu University (MZUNI)

Mzuzu University is the second public university in Malawi. It opened its doors with the first intake of 300 students in 1999, operating on the premises of the then Mzuzu Primary Teachers Training College, in the northern city of Mzuzu. MZUNI was established in response to the government's concerns about the declining standards of education at the secondary school level. There was an acute shortage of qualified teachers in secondary schools. Thus, “a decision was made that this University should start with Teacher Education Programmes” (MZUNI, 2014:1). Hence, teacher education has remained the principal niche area for the university. However, over the years, the university has expanded its faculties to include environmental sciences, tourism and hospitality management, information sciences and communication, health sciences, over and above the courses offered by the education faculty.

In accord with the Mzuzu University Act (1997):

The objects of the University shall be to advance knowledge and to promote wisdom and understanding by engaging in teaching, research and training by making provision for the dissemination, promotion, and preservation of learning; by engaging in such university education, research, and training as is responsive to

the needs of Malawi, Africa, and the whole world, by offering an education of a high university standard; and by providing complementary services to meet the technological, social and economic needs of individuals and communities in Malawi.

The framing of the MZUNI objectives drew from that of UNIMA, with the additional inclusion of a university that meets complementary technological services, for the social, and economic development of Malawi. As outlined in the Mzuzu University Act (1997), the following are the key functions of the university:

- a) to encourage the advancement and dissemination of the learning and research;
- b) to engage in such university education, research, and training as is responsive to the needs of Malawi, Africa, and the world;
- c) to provide facilities for higher education, for research, for training and for the advancement of knowledge in such branches of higher learning and study and for such persons, whether members of the University or not, as the Council may from time to time determine; and,
- d) to award and confer Degrees and Diplomas, and other academic distinctions, including Honorary Degrees and distinctions (Mzuzu University Act, 1997).

1.7.2.3 Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)

LUANAR was formerly Bunda College of Agriculture, a constituency college of the UNIMA. It was created into a university by an Act of Parliament in 2011 that transformed Bunda College of Agriculture, integrating it with Natural Resources College (NRC). The aims and objectives of the LUANAR, according to the University Act (2011), include:

- (a) to provide quality education and training in agricultural and natural resources sciences, engineering and irrigation technologies, agro-processing, entrepreneurship, trade, climate change adaptation, sustainable utilisation of natural resources, and environmental preservation of socio-economic development;
- (b) to encourage the advancement, dissemination, and commercialisation of research;

- (c) to promote industrial growth through research and dissemination of knowledge and skills;
- (d) to establish and support science and technology innovation centers of excellence for industrial production and manufacturing of value-added agricultural and natural resources products;
- (e) to develop partnerships with relevant industries for the generation, transfer, adoption, and application of technologies;
- (f) to develop into an institution of excellence in teaching, learning, training, Information, Communication Technology (ICT), e-learning, and research in science, technology, and biotechnology;
- (g) to promote practical university education, research, and training so as to respond to the needs of Malawi, Africa, and the world;
- (h) to provide specialist training in such subjects as may be found desirable by the University Council and the nation; and
- (i) to provide opportunities and facilities for accessing information in support of the programmes of the University (LUANAR Act, 2011:5-6).

From the above aims and objectives, LUANAR's mission is:

To advance knowledge and produce relevant graduates with entrepreneurship skills for agricultural growth, food security, wealth creation, and sustainable natural resources management, through teaching, training, research, outreach consultancy, and sound management (LUANAR Prospectus, 2016:5).

It should be noted that from the founding documents of UNIMA, Bunda College of Agriculture, which is now LUANAR, was established to focus on preparing graduates who would contribute to rural development through agricultural growth. All its programmes were focused on preparing graduates for agricultural development.

1.7.2.4 Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST)

MUST is the fourth public university in Malawi established in 2012, with the first intake of 120 students. The first cohort of students graduated on 5 November 2019. MUST's mission is "To provide conducive environment for quality education, training, research, entrepreneurship, outreach to facilitate economic growth in Malawi and beyond" (MUST Act, 2011). MUST is guided by the following objectives:

- 1) To equip students with the theoretical knowledge and applied skills required to contribute in creating innovative technologies at local, regional, and international scales;
- 2) To enhance greater understanding of issues relating to drivers of innovation, innovation and technology development and management in a competitive world economy and knowledge economy;
- 3) To enhance students' capacity and capability to undertake advanced study by research and manage the R&D functions within high-technology firms; and
- 4) To develop skills and competences for confronting/addressing the social, ethical, legal, and financial constraints within the technological environments (MUST Act, 2011).

MUST is a newly opened science university in Malawi; no graduates from there were interviewed, as it had not yet graduated the first cohort at the time of the data collection. Thus, data from MUST was only collected from lecturers and final-year students.

1.8 Higher education in national development strategies and policies

Vision 2020 (1998), which is/was Malawi's long-term national development strategy, incorporates in the national vision the role of higher education as a key catalyst for development. Vision 2020 paid attention to addressing the challenges of access, equity, quality, relevance and financial management, as faced by the universities. The Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy (MPRS), as the first medium-term national development strategy, had a sub-goal on higher education under the pillar of human capital development. The MPRS aspired to address the challenges of access, which was hampered by limited enrolment due to inadequate accommodation in the universities, and the problem of quality (GoM, 2002). MPRS made a bold statement that it "will transform the higher education system to respond to new realities and opportunities within the context of poverty reduction" (GoM, 2002:54). The issues concerning the quality, relevance, and responsiveness of higher education featured highly in the MPRS, resonating with similar global concerns as raised by Fussy (2018), Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015), and Brock-Utne (2003), among others.

The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS I) made no specific reference to higher education (GoM, 2006) as a catalyst for socio-economic development, industrial growth, and economic development. However, MGDS II clearly articulated the role of higher education in national development, in producing “high-quality professionals with relevant knowledge and skills that meet demands of the economy” (GoM, 2011:88). The MGDS III (2018) also acknowledges the role of higher education in national development through skills development.

With the startling figure of about 85 per cent of rural Malawians depending on agriculture for a livelihood, the development of agriculture remains key to rural development (GoM, 2018). The National Agriculture Policy (NAP) recognises academic institutions and research organisations as key actors in the policies’ implementation (GoM, 2016). The NAP specifically mentions three public universities, LUANAR, UNIMA, and MZUNI, positioning their roles in the implementation of the policy. It calls on them to conduct rigorous research in agriculture or related fields, and on different technologies for the growth of the sector. Thus, the NAP promotes research in universities, which according to Andoh (2017:20) has been considered the “lost mission of the African universities”, with teaching becoming the de facto mission of universities, over research, and community engagement. The NAP argues that through a focus on research, students would be challenged to innovate and supply solutions to the problems of agriculture. Another policy that recognised the role of universities is the Community Development Policy (2016). The Community Development Policy identifies the need for preparing graduates for rural community development, against the background of the high graduate vacancy rate in this sector.

The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) acknowledged the value of higher education (GoM, 2008). However, NESP identified the following challenges with higher education in Malawi:

- Unemployment among Malawi universities' graduates, which is thought to be relatively high;
- University teaching staff remains largely junior in terms of academic rank, with only twenty (20) per cent of staff in University of Malawi and one (1) per cent at Mzuzu University holding PhDs or equivalent qualifications;
- The quality of university education is further undermined by inadequacies and deficiencies in the teaching and learning resources such as the library, laboratories, computer access;
- Lack of mechanism to monitor productivity in public universities, which is adversely impacted upon by staff absenteeism and private work (GoM, 2008).

These challenges reveal some inconsistencies and contradictions within policies. While the NAP and CDP identified high graduate vacancy rates, the NESP talks of the high graduate unemployment rate. The conclusion which could be drawn is that universities are either producing more graduates who are not needed in the country or producing more graduates in fields that do not speak to the realities of national development sectors.

Overall, most of the policies and strategies recognised higher education as an important component of the entire education system. Higher education is valued for “its roles in creating and advancing new knowledge and skills through teaching and research and producing people who have high-level skills that are critical to Malawi’s socio-economic development and implementation of National Development Policies” (GoM, 2013:10). However, there is often a disjuncture between policy statements on paper and policy

statements in practice. As such, focusing on graduate preparation for rural development, this study contributes to our understanding of how and why universities should prepare graduates with capacities to contribute to addressing rural human development challenges.

1.9 An outline of the chapters

This section presents summaries of the ten chapters of this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction, background, and context

This introductory chapter provides a contextual background to the study, defining the research problem, outlining research questions, and explaining the researcher's positionality. It further introduces the chosen research design and the study's conceptual framing. This chapter also includes an outline of the study and definitions of key terms used in the thesis.

Chapter 2: Poverty and rural development: Conceptual framework

Chapter two focuses on unpacking the concepts of poverty and rural development, including a discussion of how poverty has been defined traditionally, and different ways that the rural poor are caught in a 'deprivation trap'. The chapter further looks into the conventional definitions of rural development, historical trajectories, and the periodisation of different approaches to rural development. Gaps in these approaches are identified, which further justifies the need to explore universities' roles in graduate preparation for rural development from a capabilities perspective.

Chapter 3: Higher education and development: A literature review

In Chapter three, I situate the role of higher education in development, drawing from its historical developments, globally, and in Africa. The roles of the African universities from the 1960s to the present day are discussed. The chapter concludes with a review of the literature on higher education in Malawi. The highlight in this chapter is that much as higher education has increasingly been seen as an important pillar for development (Oketch et al., 2014; Peercy & Svenson, 2016; Cloete et al., 2011; Bloom et al., 2006), its contribution has been dominated by economic and capitalist approaches. Hence, this study adopts an alternative approach through the application of the CA.

Chapter 4: Graduate preparation for rural development: A capability approach

This chapter makes a case for the CA as a broader conceptual and analytical lens for exploring how universities can foster graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development. In this chapter, I argue for the CA as an ideal approach for comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of graduate preparation. The chapter discusses key concepts of the CA and their application in the study.

Chapter 5: Research design and methodology

Chapter five details the research design and methodology applied in this qualitative study, justifying my choices. Definition of the study area, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and ethical considerations form part of the chapter content. The chapter further outlines how data was collected and analysed.

Chapter 6: Perspectives on the roles of universities in rural development

This empirical chapter lays the foundation for understanding universities' role in national development, but rural development in particular. It presents emerging thematic issues on the roles of universities in rural development. From the data analysis, six themes are discussed. These are: instrumental roles of universities in rural development; engendering higher education for rural development; concerns on the university's mis/alignment to other sectors; contextualisation and values-based graduate preparation, and graduates' inclination to white-collar jobs. Empirical data from this chapter was heavily drawn from the interviews with higher education policymakers.

Chapter 7: Employers' and graduates' perspectives on attributes and capabilities for rural development

Chapter seven presents the views of employers and graduates on the set of attributes of an ideal graduate prepared for rural development. Critical thinking, effective communication, flexibility and adaptability, and technical qualification emerge as prominent attributes for graduate preparedness for rural development. From the data analysis, the chapter further identifies capabilities that could foster graduate agency and aspirations for rural development. Affiliation and connectedness, practical reasoning, respect and dignity, and integrity and moral consciousness are discussed as central capabilities that would enhance and harness graduate agency and aspirations for rural development.

Chapter 8: University stakeholders' perceptions of graduate preparation for rural development

Chapter eight contributes to answering the thesis question on how universities can contribute to rural development through fostering graduates' capabilities. It explores how universities can cultivate graduate capabilities for rural development. It moves beyond

discussing graduate professional development to consider their capability formation for rural development, which includes their agency and aspirations. Two key thematic issues are discussed: (1) Multi-layered perceptions of graduate preparation, and (2) imaginations on future possibilities for graduate preparation. The theme of imaginations on future possibilities for graduate preparation is centred on two conceptual underpinnings of ‘curriculum relevance’³, and ‘rural sensitive pedagogies’. Interviewees propose key subjects that universities ought to offer to all undergraduate students, regardless of their discipline in an effort to prepare them for rural development across various sectors.

Chapter 9: Conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development

Chapter nine theorises the role of higher education in rural development from the capability approach with a particular interest in graduate preparation. The chapter re-imagines what a university that is oriented towards rural development in its graduate preparation would look like. It proposes a multi-layered framework of graduate readiness which is contextually-oriented, capability-based, and considers various conversion factors in the preparation of graduates. The proposed framework is shaped by rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula which nurture graduates’ agency and aspirations towards rural development.

³ ‘Curriculum relevance’ is the word to describe “applicability and appropriateness of a curriculum to the needs, interests, aspirations and expectations of learners and society in general” (UNESCO, 2013:21).

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Chapter ten does five things. It provides a summary of the key findings, reflections on conceptual insights, remarks on policy implications, describes the epistemic boundaries, and discusses areas for further research.

1.10 Summary

The introduction chapter has set the scene for the study by defining the problem under investigation, providing an overview of the context of the research, introducing the study methodology, and providing chapter outlines. The chapter has made it clear that the study is about graduate preparation for rural development, conceptualised within the capability approach. However, it must be mentioned that given the context of Malawi, as it is elsewhere globally, rural and urban development are imbricated and cannot be isolated from the characteristics that shape nation states and institutions like universities. The particular focus on rural development in Malawi it is because the highest population of the country lives in rural areas, under immense poverty than their urban counterparts.

The next chapter (Chapter two) is a review of the literature on poverty and rural development, which is followed by a review of the literature on higher education and development in Chapter three. Before moving onto these chapters, it is important to define some key terms and concepts that will appear throughout the thesis:

1.11 Defining key concepts

1.11.1 Capabilities

Capabilities are real opportunities and freedoms to enjoy various functionings and achieving that which an individual has a reason to value and wants to be in their lives (Robeyns, 2003). Capabilities represent real opportunities to achieve what an individual reflectively considers valuable (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

1.11.2 Conversion factors

These are factors that determine the degree to which an individual can transform available opportunities into functionings. They represent how much functioning and utility an individual can gain from a resource (Robeyns, 2017).

1.11.3 Well-being

Well-being is the ultimate end of development. It is about how an individual can function – or what she or he can actually achieve in being and doing (Boni & Walker, 2016). It is the standard of living, an achieved outcome of development.

1.11.4 Agency

Agency is a person's ability to pursue and realise the goals she values and has reason to value (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Agency is about an individual's active involvement in shaping their own destiny and that of others; not just remaining "passive and docile recipient[s] of instructions or of dispensed assistance" (Sen, 1999:281). Agency, according to Wilson-Strydom and Walker (2015:314) "involves being able to make one's choices and to act on them. Agency is about having opportunities and choices as well as the autonomy to be able to make one's own decision."

1.11.5 Aspiration

Aspirations concern an individual's wants, preferences, choices, and calculations about their life towards something (Appadurai, 2004). Individuals' aspirations are influenced by their available choices and preferences present (Mkwanzzi, 2019). The aspect of choices and preferences brings the understanding of aspirations in close relation to that of agency. Aspirations and agency ostensibly have a dialectical relationship within a given context and they influence achievements of one's valued well-being (DeJaeghere, 2016).

1.11.6 Human development

Human development as an approach states that development cannot only be assessed in economic prosperity terms but can also encompass non-economic aspects (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009; Ul Haq, 2003; Fukuda-Parr, 2013). Human development is about the enlargement of people's functionings and capabilities, which are the things that an individual values and has reason to value and could do and be (Sen, 1999).

1.11.7 Rural development

Rural development is broadly defined as a strategy to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor, extending, and/or expanding the benefits of development to the rural people - those who seek a livelihood in rural areas (IFAD, 2016; World Bank, 2000; Mehta, 1984). It is a strategy to enable rural men and women to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need (Chambers, 1983).

1.11.8 Rurality

Rurality is defined in terms of geographical remoteness from, and inaccessibility to, the services offered within town centres and urban cities, with limited and poor infrastructural

conditions, and where life is characterised by different forms of deprivations (Chambers, 1983). Rural areas are defined as places of tradition rather than modernity, of agriculture rather than industry, and changelessness rather than dynamism (Chigbu, 2013). This study takes a broad understanding of rural areas which does not only consider nature (physicality and geolocation) but also culture as the way of life that characterises these areas.

1.11.9 Rural human development

Drawing from the capabilities and human development approach, as the conceptualising frameworks of the study, I define rural human development as the expansion of rural people's well-being opportunities. It is about fostering rural people's opportunities, freedoms, and choices for living a life that they aspire for and have reasons to value.

Chapter 2:

Poverty and rural development

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of scholarly works on poverty and rural development, their definitions and approaches. Poverty is understood from four different perspectives - monetary, capability, and participatory approaches, as well as the social exclusion perspective. The chapter undertakes a thorough discussion on poverty and the deprivation trap. The chapter further gives an overview of the major rural development trajectories, models, and paradigms, and discusses the relationship between rural development and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. The *ends* of rural development are discussed before the chapter concludes.

2.2 Definitions and approaches to understanding poverty

Poverty reduction is one of the central goals of development policies. However, there is little agreement on the definition of poverty itself (Ruggeri et al., 2003) as people define it differently in different contexts. “Different countries may have different perceptions of what ‘poverty’ is, making comparisons difficult” (Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003:36). Nevertheless, four approaches to understanding poverty are reviewed in this section, and these are: 1) monetary approach, 2) capability-based approach, 3) social exclusion perspective, and 4) participatory approach. However, this study, while acknowledging different definitions and understanding of poverty, takes a multi-dimensional approach that the capabilities approach offer. It is this capabilities approach that later guides the analysis of the empirical data.

2.2.1 Why is it important to understand poverty?

Poverty continues to dominate development discourse globally and nationally. Poverty reduction remains high on the global human development agenda in the 21st century (IFAD, 2016; UNDP, 2019). It has been a priority goal in both the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Half of the world population is described as living in either one form of poverty or the other. However, global trends indicate that rural populations are the most affected by poverty. It is argued that poverty is not only widespread in rural areas, but most poverty is rural (Ashley & Maxwell, 2001; World Bank, 2017; UNDP, 2016). The rural poor are thus caught in a complex web of deprivations and disadvantages with respect to their well-being (Chambers, 1983). In the context of Malawi, the majority of rural people fall into the category of those trapped in poverty. Currently, there is no comparable study that has been undertaken in the region that highlights similarities and differences of rural poverty between countries.

2.2.2 Monetary approach

Monetary approaches measure and define poverty from economic or income perspectives (Page & Pande, 2018). Monetary perspectives divide the rich and the poor in terms of monetary poverty lines. People are defined as poor based on their shortfalls in consumption (or income) using some agreed poverty line (Davids, 2014). Currently, the global extreme poverty line is among those who live under \$1.90 in consumption per day (UNDP, 2019). The monetary perspective does not take into account social resources and other factors that may contribute to determining the individuals' wealth. The challenge with looking at poverty from income perspectives is that it relies on the simplistic assumption that solutions to poverty lie in economic production and/or full and paid employment (Davids, 2014).

However, poverty is not only about a lack of economic opportunities and prosperity. Nolan and Whelan (2009) in their critique of the reliance on income definitions of poverty, argue that it may lead to missing an important part of the poverty picture, namely the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion.

2.2.3 Social exclusion

The social exclusion understanding of poverty relates to a process through which individuals or groups of people are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in life-giving activities in their society (Ruggeri-Laderchi, Saith & Stewart, 2003). Vulnerability, which is a constitutive element and a defining characteristic of individuals' deprivation, plays a crucial role in conceptualising poverty in terms of social exclusion. In the social exclusion perspective of poverty, there is an inherent call for redistribution of opportunities and services that certain individuals or groups are denied, based on some given grounds and contexts (Davids, 2014; Ruggeri-Laderchi et al., 2003). Rurality excludes the rural poor from life-giving opportunities (Nolan & Whelan, 2009). For instance, in Malawi, as in other contexts, this may consist of food insecurity, educational disadvantages, poor access to health services, inadequate housing, such as grass-thatched houses, poor roads and communication infrastructures, among others (Chinsinga & Kayuni, 2008). Social exclusion is concerned with issues of inequality and social injustice and structures that perpetuate them (Deneulin, Nebel & Sagovsky, 2006). Davids (2014) argues that such an understanding of poverty from an inequality and social injustice framework attempts to address a wide range of issues that are responsible for poverty in society. Although understanding poverty from a social exclusion perspective is multidimensional, it fails to offer a comprehensive framework for human development,

which takes into account opportunities and/or capabilities for well-being as well as the role of agency (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009).

2.2.4 Participatory approaches

Participatory approaches to understanding poverty and development stress the participation of individuals and communities in decision making about what it means to be poor and how to solve their development problems (Martinez & Olander, 2015). Participatory approaches put people at the centre of defining the magnitude of their poverty and finding solutions to addressing it. It is based on the assumption that the poor have the ability to understand and analyse their challenges and realities (Ruggeri-Laderchi et al., 2003). Defining poverty using participatory methods involves several participatory appraisal tools such as wealth ranking, livelihood analysis, resource mapping, trend analysis, social mapping, and transect walks among others (Ruggeri-Laderchi et al., 2003). Participatory approaches to understanding and addressing poverty have the potential of including the voices of the rural poor in poverty reduction strategies. Participatory approaches highlight the poor people's experiences, realities, and perspectives of poverty, as well as the formal and informal institutions with which they interact (Max-Neef, 1991). Sen (1999) argues that it is the people themselves who ought to be directly involved in their development, who must have the opportunity to participate in deciding what should be valued as development, emanating from their understanding of poverty. For Alkire (2002), participatory approaches offer a promising methodology of applying Sen's capability approach at the micro-level, in an effort to answer the key question: How do we identify valuable capabilities? Therefore, participatory approaches provide tools to unpack abstract concepts of human well-being and development, taking into consideration the values and

experience of the poor people themselves (Davids, 2014). Similarly, Nyerere (1978) argued that people cannot be developed, they can only develop themselves, emphasising a participatory understanding of poverty and development. However, when people's freedoms are constrained their participation is limited, and this gives primacy to understanding poverty through a capabilities lens, as a better alternative to analysing, assessing, and measuring poverty.

2.2.5 Poverty as a complex reality

The different ways of understanding poverty discussed above indicate the complexities associated with the concept of poverty. Many factors converge to make poverty a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon. Poverty never results from the lack of one thing, but from many interlocking factors that form a cluster of deprivations. For instance, the causes of poverty would also be affected by one's status and location. The definition of poverty also plays out differently in relation to gender, culture, and other social and economic factors, and contexts (Narayan, 1999).

Given the complex nature of poverty, there is a need for a coherent framework of understanding poverty. Among the four discussed approaches, the capability's approach seems to encompass multiple dimensions of comprehending poverty. The capability approach includes economic dimensions, social exclusions, and participation, without undermining their essence. For instance, understanding poverty in terms of social exclusion prompts questions about issues of social justice, equity, and inclusion, which are core elements of the capabilities approach and the human development frameworks. The participatory approach aligns with the people-centred dimension of the capabilities

approach. The capability approach recognises that poverty is caused by a multitude of mutually interacting, context-specific, socio-economic, political, and environmental factors among others. An integrated definition of poverty, according to Davids (2014), should encompass income perspectives; basic needs perspectives; inclusion; sustainable livelihoods; and human development. Such a definition is possible within the capability approach, which is multidimensional.

2.2.6 Capability approach

A capability approach perspective to poverty, as championed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000), among others, understands poverty as a capability deprivation and/or form of unfreedom (Deneulin, 2006; Sen, 1999). Poverty is regarded as a failure to achieve certain minimal or basic capabilities (Gangas, 2014; Hick, 2014; Wagle, 2009; Sen, 1999). Conversely, within the capability approach, development is understood as an expansion of effective opportunities to lead valuable lives, not merely maximisation of utility or its proxy, income. Moreover, the capability approach questions monetary income as the sole measure of wealth rather than focusing on the freedom to live a valued life (Sen, 1999). The capability approach moves beyond the long-held notion that income or gross domestic product can effectively indicate the state of development (Wagle, 2009). According to the capability approach, development entails individuals' real freedoms for being and doing a range of things that are valued by the individual. Thus, the capability approach focuses on freedom(s) to live a valued life or on what people are effectively able to do and be (Sen, 1999). This approach emphasises a holistic understanding of poverty, and conceptualises anti-poverty processes, as actions that enlarge people's life choices. In the capabilities approach, participation, and agency, therefore, become central in understanding human

development. However, participation entails inclusion (Davids, 2014), and many rural people are often socially excluded

2.3 Rural poverty and the deprivation trap

According to Anriquez and Stamoulis (2007), poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon. This is because most of the world's poor people live in rural areas (IFAD, 2016; Scoones, 2009; Scott, Park & Cocklin, 2000). This assertion does not negate the existence of urban poverty; it only confirms the binary differences that divide rurality and urbanity. Lloyd and Morrissey (1994) argue that in Sub-Saharan Africa, urban migration has neither solved the rural problems nor improved the well-being of rural migrants. Even in countries where the number of rural poor is less than the number of urban poor, poverty rates tend to be higher in rural areas than urban areas (Anriquez & Stamoulis, 2007). Therefore, while abject poverty is shrinking worldwide, rural poverty remains a big threat to human development (UNDP, 2016; IFAD, 2016; World Bank, 2017).

The rural poor “are caught in the vicious cycle of being unable to access the services and opportunities that might take them out of poverty – education, gainful employment, adequate nutrition, infrastructure, and communications – because they are poor” (Atchoerana & Gasperini, 2003:27). Atchoerana and Gasperini (2003:27) further argue that “It is often forgotten that the problem of poverty is, first of all, a problem of rural poverty and food security.”

Diao and Dorosh. (2007) also assert that the majority of the Sub-Saharan African population (to which Malawi belongs) lives in rural areas where poverty and deprivations are more severe, with almost all rural households depending directly or indirectly on

agriculture for livelihood. Therefore, while worldwide progress in poverty reduction has been impressive, Sub-Saharan Africa still lags behind, with slow growth and a high poverty headcount ratio, especially in rural areas (Maertens & Van Den Broeck, 2017). Maertens and Van Den Broeck (2017) further argue that the target of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030, as proposed in the new SDGs, requires substantial attention to the development of rural areas, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Rural areas are where incidences and depth of poverty remain inexorably problematic. This prompts the question: Why has rural poverty persisted despite numerous and longstanding efforts in rural development?

According to Chambers (1983), the rural poor's disadvantages and deprivations are manifested in interlocking forms of *poverty, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation, and physical weakness*. The rural poor are caught in a cause-effect and effect-cause poverty trap, with different forms of deprivation affecting and influencing each other (De Beer & Swanepoel, 2011). For instance, *poverty* is a major problem in itself, but it is inextricably linked to many other social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental problems (Lloyd & Morrissey, 1994). Figure 1 below highlights the rural poverty deprivation trap and illustrates how the rural poor find themselves in a web of deprivations that limit the enlargement of their life choices for well-being. This is a deficit-based characterisation of life in rural areas, which I use to highlight the problems caused by and resulting from rural poverty. However, as Yosso (2005) argues, there are also community cultural wealth or various capitals that rural communities have, which often go unrecognised, and unacknowledged. People living in poverty in rural areas might possess assets such as land which if well utilized might improve their well-being. However, most of the rural poor do not consider land as an important well-being asset. Preparing graduates for rural

development involves a commitment to developing graduates who acknowledge multiple strengths of rural communities in order to foster their well-being opportunities.

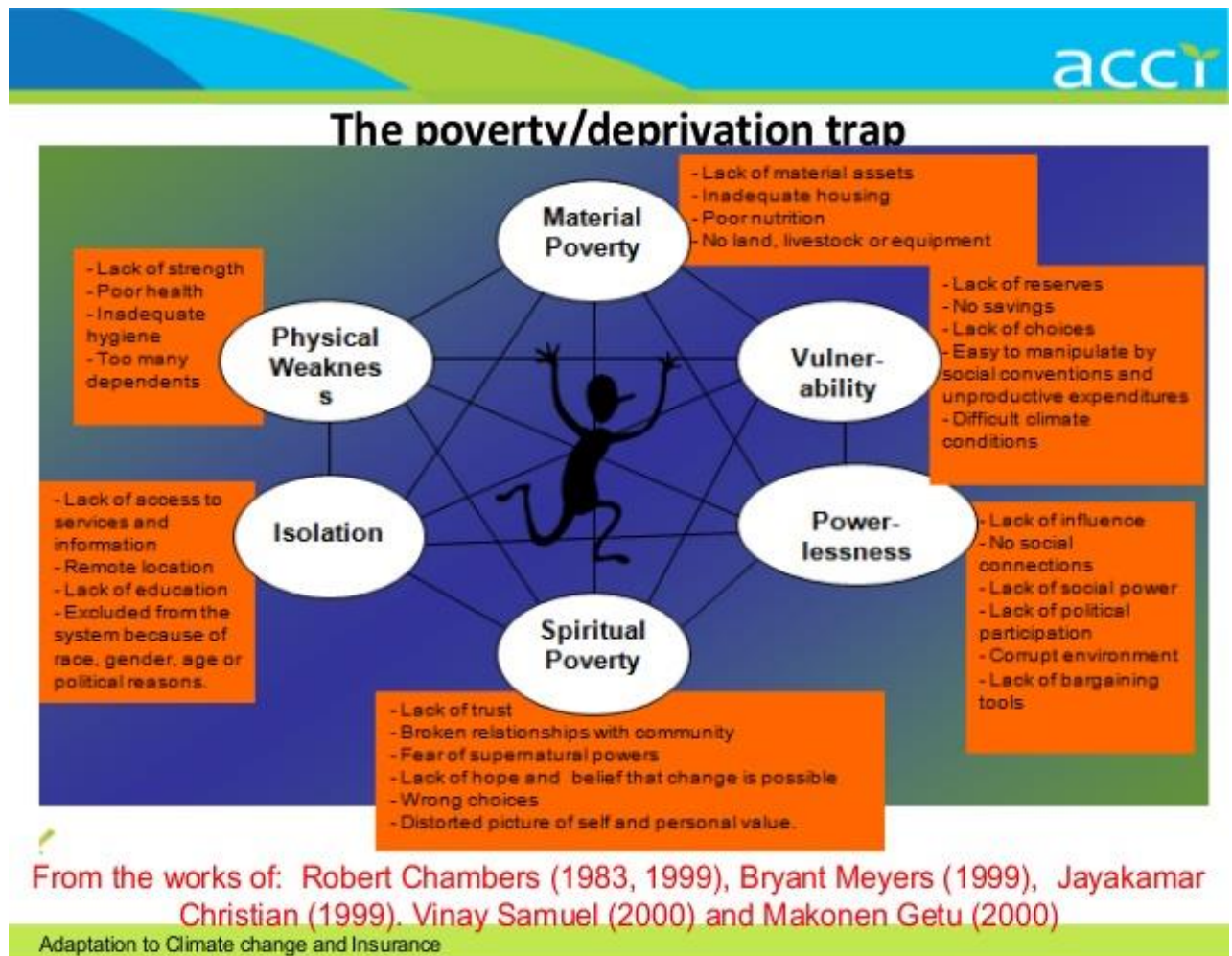


Figure 1. The deprivation trap (Source: Bing online pictures)

2.3.1 Limited well-being

Poverty limits rural people's flourishing and achievement of their whole well-being (McAreavey, 2009). Interlocking disadvantages, as highlighted in the deprivation trap, often reinforce each other, making it more difficult for the rural poor to move out of poverty

(IFAD, 2011). For instance, Atchoarena and Sedel (2003) argue that the vulnerability of the rural poor restricts their livelihood choices for a good life and makes the rural poor prone to manipulation and exploitation. Burkey (1993) further argues that in the poverty trap, one problem causes another, which in turn causes or affects other problems. The cause-effect and effect-cause relationship leads to the vicious cycle of poverty among the rural poor. The poor people have limited well-being as they are unable to access life-giving services and opportunities (Atchoarena & Gasperini, 2003).

Poverty also leads to different forms of ill-being (African Development Bank (ADB), 2002). The rural poor experience physical ill-being, in the forms of hunger, pain, and discomfort, and exhaustion (Speckman, 2007). Further, the rural poor experience negative social relations manifested by exclusion, rejection, isolation, and loneliness, which also limit their well-being. As De Beer and Swanepoel argue (2011), life for the rural poor is insecure, vulnerable, and full of fear, which can result in stress and defenselessness.

Kraybill (2013) and Maerterns and Van Den Broeck (2017) argue that to be poor is to suffer from ill-being. Ill-being, according to Sen (1999), is a manifestation of unfreedom. The rural poor are not free from the bondage of poverty. Rural poverty diminishes the rural poor's well-being. Based on this view, enhancing the well-being of people living in poverty requires an expansion of their freedom to live lives that they deem valuable and dignified. We may then understand this as a central function of rural development.

2.4 Understanding rural development

2.4.1 Definition

Rural development has many definitions. Mehta (1984), Singh (2009), the World Bank (1975, 2000, 2003), and IFAD (2011, 2016) define rural development as extending and/or expanding the benefits of development to the rural poor people. They define rural development as a strategy to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor. Chambers (1983) describes it as a strategy to enable rural men and women to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need. Chambers' definition, especially the assertion he makes of making the rural poor gain for themselves 'more of what they want and need', links to Sen's (1999) conceptualisation of development as expanding the real freedoms that people have, although Sen's understanding is not 'needs-based' per se. Freedom refers to opportunities to achieve that which one has reason to value. Therefore, rural development can be understood as the enhancement of their reasoned choices and effective opportunities for people living in rural areas to achieve their well-being.

Rural development is further understood as the raising of sustainable living conditions of the rural poor by creating opportunities for them to develop their capabilities for well-being now and in the future (Mwabu & Thorbecke, 2004; Kraybill, 2013). However, according to Marsden et al. (2001), one of the gaps in understanding rural development is that past strategies have tended to overemphasise economic growth. This shows that rural development has often been defined without specifically considering how the benefits of such economic growth can be distributed to reach the rural poor in meaningful ways (Marsden et al., 2001). This is part of the reason why the rural poor have been left behind

in development processes. Nolan and Whelan (2009) further identify another pertinent concern; that an economic-focused understanding of rural development loses sight of non-monetary indicators of poverty reduction. This has resulted in misconstrued perceptions that economic growth equals development, yet it is only a means not an end in itself according to the human development perspective (Ul Haq, 2003; Sen, 1999). Another concern with the economic growth perspectives to rural development is that it is based on the assumption that “increased growth per se would lead to a reduction in poverty as the benefits of an expanded economy spread among the people” (World Bank, 1975:16). The economic-centred conceptualisation of rural development fails to embrace the thinking that rural development encompasses other aspects of creating a good life for the rural poor (Scott et al., 2000). Therefore, the human development perspective which promotes the understanding of development as the enhancement of capabilities or well-being opportunities is preferred as a multidimensional and nuanced understanding (UNDP, 1990; Sen, 1999). It is this understanding within the capabilities approach that drives the argument of exploring what role universities can play in rural development, considering that they are tasked with preparing graduates for work. This requires an understanding of the different dimensions of rural development and how they can be achieved.

2.4.2 Dimensions of rural development

According to Singh (2009), rural development can be conceptualised from four different dimensions, as a *process*, as a *phenomenon*, as a *strategy*, and as a *discipline*. Firstly, as a *process*, rural development implies the engagement of rural individuals, rural communities, and rural nations in pursuit of their cherished goals over time. Secondly, as a *phenomenon*, it is conceptualised as the end result of interactions between various physical,

technological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors that affect the well-being of the rural poor. Thirdly, as a *strategy*, rural development is designed to improve the economic and social well-being of a specific group of people, that is, the rural poor, who may have limited freedoms, choices or are denied opportunities of living a valued life through exclusionary and arbitrary controls associated with rurality. Fourthly, rural development as a *discipline* is multidisciplinary, representing an intersection of agricultural, social, behavioural, engineering, and management sciences, among other aspects, aimed at improving the well-being of rural people. What emerges as common in all these conceptualisations is the desire towards the rural poor's well-being. Therefore, in this study, the understanding of rural development encompasses all these dimensions as rural people's well-being enablers.

2.4.3 Historical trajectories of rural development

Since the 1950s to date, efforts in achieving rural development have been implemented through different approaches and strategies (Singh, 2009). Over the years, rural development has gone through different trajectories. In the next section, I briefly describe some rural development pathways over the years.

2.4.3.1 Modernisation

In the 1950s rural development was shaped by the *modernisation* theories that looked at rural development as transitioning of the rural communities into modern societies (World Bank, 1975). In the modernisation theoretical framework, rural development was to be achieved through the progressive development of the agriculture sectors, where 'pre-modern' rural communities would transition into modern societies (Biggs & Ellis, 2001).

Modernisation as a development theory has received criticisms that discredit it. Rivera et al. (2017) argue that the fallacious underlying assumptions in this growth maximisation thinking have been that one sector, such as agriculture, would contribute to the development of other sectors. Further, Goorha (2017:1) argues that “Most troubling, though, is that it [modernisation] displays a poor understanding of the socioeconomic development process, especially when it comes to issues such as economic sustainability, political freedoms, and social emancipation”. Thus, according to Burkey (1993), modernisation efforts, in aggregate, have not contributed to rural poverty reduction (Burkey, 1993).

2.4.3.2 Transformation

The 1960s to 1970s was called the *transformation era*, where thinking on rural development was shaped by community development theories, agriculture mechanisation, the basic needs approach, and integrated rural development (Anriquez& Stamoulis, 2007). It was believed that rural development would result in the overall transformation of rural life by tackling the problem of rural poverty holistically (Narasaiah, 2004; Banks & Marsden, 2001). This thinking has persisted over the years, for instance, Trivelli and Berdegue (2019) use the concept of transformation as a way of looking into the future of rural development. However, like other theories, the transformation theory lacks the *how* part (Holmes & Potvin, 2013), which would potentially bring forth questions on the roles of education and higher education in particular in promoting rural development.

2.4.3.3 Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)

Between the 1980s and 1990s, the thinking around rural development took a different shift, following global calls for structural adjustments. During this period, the thinking and drivers towards rural development were influenced by the market liberalisation, the rise of Non-Governmental Organizations' (NGOs) work, the emergency of the rapid rural appraisal, and the participatory rural appraisal approaches (Biggs & Ellis, 2001). The global discourse on development concentrated on the poverty alleviation calls, which also applied to rural development. SAPs were based on the assumption that the cause of inequalities was deeply rooted in the structures of the economy and could not be addressed through short-term fiscal and monetary policies alone (Rahman, 1992). SAPs questioned the economic-centred understanding of development. Like other approaches and theories, the sectoral approaches to rural development could not adequately address the multiple needs, wants, and choices of the rural poor (McAreavey, 2009). This too fell off as an effective approach to rural development, raising further questions in terms of what is not done correctly or effectively.

2.4.3.4 Participatory and/or actor-oriented approaches

Following the SAPs, the rural development discourse has been shaped by ideas on *participatory* approaches, in what is called actor-oriented rural development. The other dominant themes in the current rural development agenda are: stakeholder analysis, gender and development, sustainable livelihoods, good governance, decentralisation, empowerment, participation, sector-wide approach, social protection, poverty reduction, and sustainable development (IFAD, 2016; Biggs & Ellis, 2001). It is within the participatory and/or actor-oriented approach that the capability perception of rural

development would be situated. We can read the capability approach elements in the critique of modernisation and transformation eras, as these overly emphasised monetary growths at the expense of other, equally important dimensions of human development.

However, it is important to note that these historical trajectories and periodisation are not trapped in time capsules or conveniently organised in decades; there are often overlaps (Ellis & Biggs, 2001). For instance, the agricultural development of the 1950s continues to form part of the rural development transformation agenda in the 2000s and to date (FAO, 2012). Ideas that initially appeared in one decade gained/gain strength in the following decades, and only started affecting rural development practice ten or more years from the time they were put forward (Ellis & Biggs, 2001).

2.4.4 Agricultural growth as the dominant paradigm

Despite different thematic focuses on rural development, agricultural growth has been the dominant rural development paradigm over the decades (IFAD, 2011, 2016; World Bank, 2003). For instance, Singh (2009: xix) argues, “Without agricultural growth in rural areas, redressing rural poverty is an impossible task”. IFAD (2016), FAO (2012), the World Bank (2003), Scott et al. (2000), and Murdoch (2000), among others, share the view that agricultural growth can spur and contribute to economic growth, as a precondition for rural poverty reduction. Thus, agricultural growth is claimed to be the engine for rural development. The underlying factor for agricultural-based rural development has been that many people in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood (World Bank, 1997, 2003; Dorward & Kydd, 2004).

However, while the majority of the rural poor are subsistence farmers, the view of agriculture as a dominant driver of rural development is problematic. It reduces rural development to agricultural and economic growth while rural poverty reduction has other non-economic dimensions (Schaff, 2016; Nolan & Whelan, 2009). Rural poverty has many facets and it is dynamic as it affects rural people's well-being in different ways (Haider et al., 2018). Therefore, rural development ought to focus not only on agricultural or economic growth but harness other non-farming and non-economic sectors that contribute to the enhancement of human well-being (Rivera et al., 2017). For instance, Shortall (2008) calls for rural development programmes that are socially inclusive. He explores an interplay of social inclusion, civic engagement, participation, and social capital in understanding rural development. This is a more encompassing direction, in alignment with the capability approach, which this study uses in understanding rural development, and graduates' roles in the same. Within the capability approach, rural development is understood as enhancing well-being opportunities and capabilities to the rural people. Therefore, the preparation of graduates for rural development is viewed as fostering their capabilities to be effective enablers for rural change.

2.4.5 Rural development models

There are different models for rural development. No one single model is perfect, but understanding them may lead to innovations and holistic learning about rural development. The following are some of the models dominating rural development discourse:

2.4.5.1 Urban development model

The urban development model holds that development should be concentrated in urban areas and the benefits accrued there would trickle down to the rural areas, thereby stimulating rural growth (Achiv et al., 2014). The urban development model is associated with ideas of urban modernisation (Singh, 2009). However, the urban development model fails on the practicalities of the trickle-down effect from the urban growth to rural development (Dixon, 1990). The model only succeeds in further widening inequalities between urban dwellers and the rural poor, in terms of access to services, with the urban dwellers having better access to life-giving services compared to the socially, economically, physically, and politically isolated rural poor (Shortfall & Book, 2015). The urban development model results in urban migration, as the rural poor assume the availabilities of more well-being opportunities in the urban areas (World Bank, 2003). The urban development model is one of the earliest rural development approaches, and the World Bank criticised it as early as the 1970s for its failure in addressing rural poverty (Israel, 1974).

2.4.5.2 Industrial development model

With the industrial development model, the proposition is that rural industrialisation is a pre-condition for rural development. It is argued that rural industrialisation has the potential to stimulate growth in rural areas by creating among other things employment opportunities for the rural poor (Achiv et al., 2014; Harris-White & Janakaraja, 1997). The industrial model appealed to the transformation era of the 1970s, where agricultural industrialisation and mechanisation were perceived that they would greatly contribute to rural development. However, Nwagboso and Duke (2012) argue that this model often fails to bring about rural

development because of poor management and a shortage of funds for rural industrialisation. For instance, the World Bank (2003) observes that rural industrialisation did not receive the much-needed governments' and non-governmental stakeholders' support, as had been envisioned. Achiv et al. (2014) further argue that apart from the lack of governments' support to rural industrial development, the model has failed in meeting rural development needs as in most cases rural-based industries employ skilled labour from outside and only unskilled-labour is sourced from within the rural areas. Again, rural industrialisation results in the exploitation of environmental and natural resources as well as the exploitation of the rural poor themselves, as they are "generally powerless and gullible in negotiations" (Achiv et al., 2014:155). It can be argued that rural industrialisation, working on capitalist theories, focuses on profit-making at the expense of holistic human development goals, which are to enhance the well-being of the rural poor.

2.4.5.3 Sectoral development model

The sectoral development model is grounded on the philosophy that the development of a certain sector or area will result in the overall development of the country, including rural areas (Achiv et al., 2014). Historically, agricultural development has been equated to rural development, with some stakeholders arguing that without agricultural growth in rural areas, there could not be rural development (FAO, 2012; Singh, 2009; World Bank, 2003). Development of the agriculture sector, mostly in developing countries, has been considered a panacea for achieving rural development (Achiv et al., 2014; Nwagboso & Duke, 2012). However, the sectoral development model fails to recognise the multidimensionality of rural poverty; it does not take into account other aspects of what matters for rural life to go well. According to Nwagboso and Duke (2012), the often-overlooked sectors in sectoral

rural development include health, education, social welfare, politics, economics, governance, culture, and religion among others. Therefore, the sectoral development model can lead to an increase in rural poverty as other important sectors, which contribute to people's well-being, are sometimes forgotten.

2.4.5.4 Area development model

The area development model targets rural communities around an identified development resource. Areas are selected based on the resources locally available that are thought to contribute to the development of the rural poor (Achiv et al., 2014). Nominated rural places such as rich agricultural lands, river basins, mineral-bearing zones, and horticultural growth lands among others are identified for comprehensive development. In the same way that the sectoral development approach has the potential of creating 'economic islands,' the area development approach may result in creating a developed area that is surrounded by 'a sea of rural poverty' (Achiv et al., 2014). Attainment of nation-wide rural development is difficult with the area development model, it results in the creation of isolated islands of development.

2.4.5.5 Integrated rural development

Integrated rural development has been touted as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to rural development since the early 1970s when it was introduced by the World Bank (Israel, 1974). Integrated rural development came out of the recognition that agricultural growth alone or on-farm development cannot address multiple challenges that the rural poor face. In the integrated rural development approach, the belief is that the integrated development of all sectors of the rural economy underpins rural development.

According to Achiv et al. (2014), integrated rural development seeks to link the rural and urban economies and ensures equity in the distribution of the gains of increased productivity between the rural and urban areas. Integrated rural development is assumed to be an approach that recognises the different faces of rural poverty. Achiv et al. (2014:155) argue that

It [Integrated rural development] is a development strategy that aims at not just increasing the contribution of the rural sector to the Gross National Product (GNP) but also one that attempts to enthrone equity in the distribution of gains of increased productivity between the urban and rural dwellers. In other words, it seeks to integrate the rural realities into the economic and political mainstream of the nation.

However, while the philosophical underpinnings of the integrated rural development approach are good, it has faced implementation resistance and challenges with the governments' portfolios, which are mainly organised in sectors or departments (Anriquez & Stamoulis, 2007). Government departments and agencies prefer to work in 'silos' to consolidate their power, hence affecting the vision of an integrated approach (Shortall, 2008).

Integrated rural development faces challenges when it comes to deciding on prioritisation and integration of competing rural development needs. FAO (2003:14) argues that for rural development to be achieved, "a more holistic and comprehensive approach is needed than has been achieved through strategies of integrated rural development". However, despite its shortcomings, integrated rural development seems to align well with the capability approach in its multi-sectoral approach, although implicitly it seems to focus on economic growth perspectives but in a multidimensional manner, extending the means of production beyond agriculture.

The World Bank (2003) attributes failures in integrated rural development to human resource and capacity challenges. From the literature reviewed, no efforts were made to consider the role of higher education and more specifically of graduates' preparedness for rural development demands. The closest discussions have come to considering higher education in relation to rural development has mostly been from agricultural growth perspectives. For instance, Maguire and Atchoarena (2003) in a UNESCO study, focus on discussing rural development from the lens of agricultural education.

In summing up the discussion on trajectories and models of rural development, rural poverty continues to manifest itself in different forms, and it remains the top development agenda for the 21st century (IFAD, 2016; World Bank, 2017). Continued challenges with rural poverty would mean that earlier strategies have failed in some areas. This study focuses on the less researched subject of higher education and rural development, particularly on how universities can foster graduate capabilities for rural development.

2.5 A new paradigm for rural development

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2016) warns that without a new framework of rural development in developing countries, it is unlikely that the new SDGs would be met. Continued rural poverty in the 21st century calls for a new paradigm and/or thinking on rural development (World Bank, 2017; Atchoarena & Sedel, 2003). Different rural development stakeholders and scholars argue that the new rural development paradigm needs to be multi-sectoral (Brown & Schafft, 2011; Schafft, 2016; OECD, 2016; De Beer & Swanepoel, 2011; Atchoerana & Gasperini, 2003). According to Ellis and Biggs (2001), the new paradigm for rural development would need to be broad-

based, cross-sectoral, multi-sectoral, and multidimensional. Ellis and Biggs (2001:445) argue:

If a new paradigm of rural development is to emerge, it will be one in which agriculture takes its place along with a host of other actual and potential rural and non-rural activities that are important to the construction of viable rural livelihoods, without undue preference being given to farming as the unique solution to rural poverty. It is in this sense that the cross-sectoral and multi-occupational diversity of rural livelihoods may need to become the cornerstone of rural development policy if efforts to reduce rural poverty are to be effective in the future.

Schaff (2016), Brown and Schafft (2011), as well as Atchoerana and Gasperini (2003) and the World Bank (2003, 1997) further contend that rural development should not have a focus on agriculture or economic growth only, as has been the case in the past. They argue that it should also acknowledge the diversity of human development, promoting broad-based rural growth and service provision, both on-farm and off-farm. For instance, rural development should not only focus on rural areas but also build on rural-urban linkages (Ellis & Biggs, 2001). Rural development should encompass agriculture, education, infrastructure, health, and capacity building for on-farm and off-farm employment. It should strengthen rural institutions, and meet the needs of vulnerable rural groups in a holistic manner (Anriquez & Stamoulis, 2007; Atchoerana & Gasperini, 2003). At the operational level, the OECD (2016) further argues that a new rural development paradigm needs to be multi-agential, and multi-leveled. It was argued that key to the new rural development paradigm should involve the strengthening of alliances with different stakeholders (World Bank, 2003). It was emphasised that rural development should involve not just national governments, but also local and regional governments, the private sector, international donors, NGOs, and the rural communities themselves. This understanding not

only recognises the multidimensional nature of rural human development but also recognises the role of different agents.

Davids (2014) notes that rural development has solely been the responsibility of NGOs, with less effort from the government agencies. However, another gap in rural development programmes is found in how higher education institutions are not prioritised as key actors in the proposed new multi-sectoral rural development paradigm (Grobbelaar & De Wet, 2016; Mahlati, 2011). The new paradigm needs to be broad-based, not only economic-centred, as most past efforts in rural development have centred on economic and agricultural growth, resting on the idea of the failed modernisation theory (Guinjoana, Badia & Tulla, 2016).

Thus, a successful new rural development approach ought to recognise “the heterogeneity of the rural people and social and economic values they hold important to them” (Bentley, 1973:6). Rural development is more than just economic growth. For instance, it is also about social, political, and cultural dynamics (Greco et al., 2015). Again, many of the challenges in rural development “arise from lack of knowledge, incomplete understanding and limited institutional, technical, and financial capabilities” (World Bank, 1975:8). Thus, a new paradigm for rural development is expected to address these challenges. However, the question remains: what would this new paradigm for rural development look like? In this study, I envision the new paradigm through universities fostering graduate capabilities for rural development; a new paradigm where graduates are prepared not only with work competences but also contextual-capabilities to contribute towards enhancing the rural people’s well-being.

2.6 Ends of rural development

According to Singh (2009), the *ends* of rural development are threefold. First, rural development aims at securing the *basic necessities of life*, without which it would be impossible for rural people to survive. Second, rural development ensures *self-respect for the rural poor*, the denial, and absence of which is an indication of lack of development – or unfreedom. Third, rural development *enhances rural people's freedom*. The idea of the *ends* of rural development as freedom is more inclined towards the capability-based understanding of rural development. For instance, according to Sen (1999) development is freedom, and poverty a deprivation. This understanding of freedom, as the *end* of rural development, is multidimensional and multisectoral. It encompasses political, ideological, economic, and social liberties (Sen, 1999). Furthermore, from the capability approach, freedom is about individuals' opportunities to make choices about their lives, or deciding on what they want to be and/or to become, that is their valued being. Thus, the *end* of rural development becomes human freedom, well-being freedom, implying rural individuals deciding on what they want as a good life and what they have reason to value and to be.

The freedom-centred and/or capability-centred understanding of rural development moves the debate beyond economic-centred perspectives that characterised the development discourse of the 1960s to 1970s (World Bank, 2003; Mehta, 1984; Israel, 1974). The freedom-centred perspective critiques development thinking grounded on the concepts of growth maximisation⁴. Therefore, in this study, rural poverty reduction, which is conceptualised as 'rural human development' from the capability approach, is the desired

⁴ Growth maximisation is an idea based on the assumption that the rural poor can gain from the 'trickle down' benefits of rapid overall economic growth (Dixon, 1990).

end of rural development. This conceptualisation does not exclude the consideration of the agenda for sustainable development.

2.7 Rural development and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development

The final report of the MDGs (UNDP, 2015) acknowledges that despite improvements in many areas of human life over the past 15 years (2000-2015), rural poverty remains a development problem. Rural development is a task that cannot be neglected or postponed if nations are to achieve the SDGs. IFAD (2016:21) argues that “there cannot be sustainable development without inclusive rural development”. Similarly, FAO (2015:2) further challenges that “the battle to end poverty must be principally fought in the rural areas where almost 80 per cent of the world’s hungry and poor live... investing in rural development is key to achieving inclusive and equitable growth while tackling the root causes of poverty and hunger.”

Therefore, to achieve the SDGs, as Atchoerana and Gasperini (2003:23) argued with the MDGs, there is a need for clear strategies that address the “world’s biggest neglected majority – the rural people.” The United Nation’s *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* recognises the centrality of rural development in sustainable development. For instance, SDG number one calls for eradicating poverty *in all its forms and dimensions*, as an indispensable requirement and/or precondition for sustainable development. The SDGs commit to ensuring that “*all people* must enjoy a basic standard of living” (UN, 2015, Art. 24). *All people* in the article implies the inclusion of rural communities. The SDGs also specifically highlight nations’ commitments to rural development through devoting resources to develop rural areas - “We will devote resources

to developing rural areas and sustainable agriculture” (UNDP, 2015, Art. 24). However, there is no clarity in the SDGs on *how* this rural development will be achieved; a situation that risks rural development calls remaining mere rhetoric. It has been argued that for the next generation, poverty reduction will be achieved primarily through agricultural and rural development since some 80 per cent of the world’s poor live in rural areas (Brandt & Otzen, 2004; FAO, 2012; IFAD, 2016).

Given the multidimensionality of rural poverty and the high numbers of people living in poverty in rural areas across the globe, rural development is the only way to come closer to the goal of eradicating ‘poverty in all its forms and dimensions’. For instance, in ruralised contexts like Malawi, success in most of the 17 SDGs would fundamentally depend on rural development. *Ending Poverty in all its forms everywhere* links directly to the aspirations of integrated rural development. Additionally, to *End hunger, achieve food security, and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture* addresses the core issues in rural development. The OECD (2016) and IFAD (2011, 2016) argue that without a new framework for rural development in developing countries, it is unlikely that the new SDGs would be met. However, the key question remains: How would this happen? This study proposes a re-evaluation of universities’ roles in national development with particular attention to their role in graduate preparation for rural development.

2.8 Conclusion

Chapter two has provided an analysis of the literature review on poverty and rural development, looking at their dominant trajectories and approaches over the past decades to date. From the review of sequential themes, approaches, and models to rural

development since the 1950s, it has transpired that rural poverty remains a development challenge. Different perspectives on a new paradigm for rural development were discussed. However, missing in the new thinking about rural development is the role of higher education. It has been identified in the literature review that there has been less scholarly focus on universities and rural development and much less on graduate preparation for rural development. Nevertheless, the literature has suggested that universities ought to produce graduates who understand the implications of different models of development, so that that they are well-prepared to contribute in reducing multidimensional poverty which characterize the rural people. My study contributes to filling this gap by looking at how universities would foster graduate capabilities, which would enhance their agency and aspirations for rural development. Given that graduate preparation happens within the broader higher education context, the next chapter discusses a review of literature on higher education and development, with a particular focus on rural development.

Chapter 3

Higher education and development

3.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the observations made in Chapters one and two that there is limited scholarly work on higher education and rural development, particularly on graduate preparation for rural development. Therefore, as a way of contextualising the role of higher education in rural development, this chapter provides a review of literature on this area. The chapter is divided into six sections. These are: (1) Introduction, (2) Situating higher education in development, (3) Historical developments of the roles of higher education, (4) Role of universities in graduate training/preparation, (5) Higher education and development in Malawi, and (6) Conclusion. In the chapter special attention is given to graduate preparation and its implications for rural development.

3.2 Situating higher education in development

Higher education is considered “the engine of development in the new world economy” (Castells, 1994:14). Tilak (2003:809) argues that higher education not only provides educated workers to society, but “creates attitude, and makes possible attitudinal changes necessary for the socialisation of the individuals and the modernisation and overall transformation of societies”. Thus, “higher education institutions are seen by many as playing a key role in delivering the knowledge requirements for development” (Cloete & Maassen, 2015:3). Higher education institutions serve as incubators for the knowledge base and human capital needed to promote and sustain human development across many sectors (World Bank, 2017). Higher education promotes income growth, enlightens graduates with

a breadth of knowledge and technical skills, expands people's choices, and increases individuals' relevant skills for human development (Boni & Walker, 2016; Botha & Muller, 2016).

The role of universities in national development has become the subject of much discussion in higher education studies (McCowan, 2016; Peercy & Svenson, 2016; Mosha, 1986). Universities, through graduates' preparation for work, are accorded a central role in addressing development challenges facing their contexts (AAU, 2012). What this entails is that the university context is expected to shape its graduates' preparation so that higher education becomes relevant to its local needs. Calls for universities to respond to contextual needs date back to the 1960s/1970s (Sawyerr, 2004). Botha and Muller (2016: i) further assert that "the role of universities will increase in modern-day societies as societies become even more reliant on knowledge and the knowledge of workers." It is expected that graduates would offer the needed workforce for the development of many sectors. However, it would appear that consideration of the graduate's context of work remains subdued in their preparation, with the ongoing various stakeholders' dissatisfaction with graduate preparedness (Yorke, 2006). For instance, rurality is a dominant context predictor in most developing countries like Malawi. However, less is written in terms of how universities prepare graduates for rural development.

The focus of most studies related to graduate preparation has been on cultivating their attributes for work (Osmani et al., 2015). For instance, Mathebula (2018) has a compelling study on engineering education for sustainable development. While she addresses the question of teaching for public good engineering, she does not dwell on defining the context under which these engineers would work. For example, being a public-good

engineer and doing socially just engineering, in the context of rurality, would entail having agency and aspirations for engineering issues as they affect, relate to, concern, and impact on rural people. It is for these reasons that in this study I advance the argument towards the notion of contextualising graduate preparation in the context of rurality.

Preparing graduates with contextually relevant capabilities would relate to calls concerning the relevance of African universities as argued by Mosha (1986:93), that “the major purpose for establishing universities in these countries was, and still is, for the institutions to play a pioneering role in addressing problems of poverty, social disorganisation, low production, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, and diseases, i.e. the problems of underdevelopment which appear/d to be common on the African continent”. In the context of Malawi, these problems are compounded within the context of rurality, as such they would warrant higher education institutions’ attention as they prepare graduates. In the next section, I provide historical developments and/or trends in the roles of higher education, a discussion that further locates gaps in how universities have not adequately paid attention to graduate preparation for rural development.

3.3 Historical developments of the roles of higher education

3.3.1 Early universities

Universities are among the oldest institutions in the world. It is posited that the first universities were established as early as the twelfth century (McCowan, 2016). According to Haddad (2000), the first universities in Europe were founded in Bologna, Italy, and Paris, France, with a strong influence of the church. Thus, these early universities were primarily established and guided by theological priorities and ecclesiastical functions (DeVitis &

Sasso, 2016). Their mission was mainly the deepening and preservation of the church's authority and dogmas, law, medicine, and arts. Omotola (2000) argues that as such emphasis on the early universities was on teaching and learning classics, philosophy, and theology. Al Azhar University, dedicated to teaching on Muslim studies, is considered the oldest institute of higher learning in Africa, before the emergence of Timbuktu in the 16th century (DeVitis & Sasso, 2016).

The training of graduates in medieval universities was mainly in the professional field of studies such as law, medicine and theology, among others (Clark, 1983). In the very first medieval universities, learning was more focused on knowledge for its own sake, unlike today when the emphasis has shifted to the pragmatism of higher education (Altbach, 2008).

Overall, early universities were known for their conception of the intrinsic value of knowledge – knowledge for its own sake. For instance, the *Humboldtian University* maintained upholding the intrinsic value of knowledge but later added to the university an instrumental or pragmatic role through research and discoveries (McCowan, 2016; Roper & Hirth, 2005; Benneworth et al., 2008). *Humboldt University* was created in 1809 as an institution of higher education composed of a body of teaching and research units, institutes, and research laboratories (Haddad, 2000).

The emergence of the *developmental university* was motivated by a shift from the intrinsic value of knowledge for its own sake, to an entirely instrumental value, with concerns about societies' interests and the public good (McCowan, 2016). Related to the thinking on the developmental university, as far as the 1860s, the *Land-grant universities* were established

in America, as engaged universities, with the purpose of fostering agriculture extension services and skills (McDowell, 2003). It integrated research and extension. Therefore, the concept of land-grant universities emerged “with the distinct merit of contributing to local development through fostering technical skills for agriculture and industry” (McCowan, 2016:509). *Land-grant universities* combined research, teaching, and community service (Haddad, 2000). It can be deduced that *Land-grant universities* were higher education institutions with a contextual purpose and objective. They were established for a specific contextual mission, promoting agricultural development and extension in rural America.

What seems to emerge from the foregoing discussion is that early universities were established for different purposes. The implication of this is that assessing universities’ contributions to development would have to be aligned to why they existed in the first place. What this means is that universities’ relevance is somehow context-bound. In this study, I analyse how universities in Malawi would be relevant to the context of rurality, particularly through the kind of graduate they produce. However, Malawi belongs to the African continent, which has its own share of higher education history, and which has affected and continues to affect its roles in development.

3.3.2 History of African universities and their anticipated roles

Institutions of higher learning first appeared in Africa in Egypt, Ethiopia, Timbuktu as early as 331 AD (Assié-Lumumba, 2006; Ajayi et al., 1996; Lulat, 2005). The first institutions of higher learning were predominantly devoted to religious, philosophical, moral, and medical studies to meet the demands of the local people (Ajayi et al., 1996). From history, it has been argued that universities in Africa, at their establishment, were

seedbeds of nationalism, in the formerly colonised nations (Altbach, 2008). They were expected to be key contributors to the high-level human resource needs of their countries (Cloete et al., 2015).

However, over time perceptions of the roles of universities in Africa have evolved. A historical trajectory of African universities' roles in development provides a good starting point for exploring universities' roles in graduates' preparation for rural development. As far back as 1963, UNESCO posited that universities in Africa must be conceived of in relation to their country's development requirements. During the conference in 1962, it was argued that "the mission of the [African] university is to define and confirm the aspirations of the society, which it is established to serve" (UNESCO, 1963:2). However, from the pre-colonial period to the 1990s, "higher education institutions in Africa have been carrying out various roles of economic development, Africanisation, nation-building, and engines of knowledge economy; at the same time executing foreign roles which have not been owned by African societies" (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013:35). From their establishment, African universities have been expected to function as central institutions for national development and serve their contextual needs (Altbach, 2008). However, it would appear that these expectations have faced challenges as the question of the roles of universities in development keeps recurring.

Altbach (2008) further observes that public universities, in most developing countries, continue to serve as central institutions of nation-building, research, and training. In poor and developing countries, in which Malawi fits, public universities are often, if not the only sites of scientific knowledge production (Botha & Muller, 2016).

Service to the nation was the highly anticipated universities' learning outcome, which the African postcolonial higher education system aspired to achieve (Lulat, 2003). Universities were expected to produce graduates prepared to take up the economic and political developments of their countries (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2013). Thus, university knowledge was not sought for its own sake, but the education system carried with it its contextual development pragmatism. The higher education system was supposed to benefit the society at large, through the graduates they prepared. For instance, there were calls for a developmental university in Africa; a university that predicates its work programmes upon national priorities, producing high-level human resources, who would fulfill economic and social responsibilities (Yesufu, 1973; Court, 1991). As mentioned elsewhere, national development was conceptualised homogeneously, with no particular attention to contextual factors, such as urbanity or rurality, which would be used as measures of responsive education.

3.3.2.1 Developmental roles of the African universities

History shows that most African nations strove to establish at least one national university immediately after independence. According to Mosha (1986:93), "the major purpose for establishing universities in these countries was, and still is, for the institutions to play a pioneering role in addressing problems of poverty, social disorganisation, low production, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, diseases". Thus, these universities aimed to solve the problems of underdevelopment which appeared to be common on the African continent. Developmental roles formed much of the conception of early African universities (Ajayi et al., 1996). For instance, during the Accra workshop on higher education, it was agreed that an African university would be:

A university, which would signify its commitment, not just to knowledge for its own sake, but to the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of, and for the amelioration of the conditions of the common man and woman in Africa. The African University must ... not only wear a different cloak but must also be differently motivated. It must be made of a different and distinctive substance from the traditions of Western Universities and must evolve a different attitude and a different approach to its task. The truly African University must be one that draws its inspiration from its environment, not a transplanted tree, but growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil (Yesufu, 1973:40).

This time, although the developmental idea was not fully-fledged, the higher education narrative was to try to Africanise African universities. Universities were expected to serve society, by supporting the economy, promoting the quality of life of its citizens, and contributing to the task of poverty alleviation (Yesufu, 1973; Courst, 1991). As such, universities' curricula and pedagogies needed to pay attention to the local and contextual challenges of their societies (Cloete et al., 2011). However, there has been so much generalisation in understanding what contextual challenges are. For instance, fewer studies have focussed on education and rural development (Peercy & Svenson, 2016) and much less particularly focusing on higher education (Schaff, 2016). Rural development is a pertinent contextual issue in ruralised contexts like Malawi and requires special attention from universities.

A key feature of a developmental university is its relevance, applicability, and its development impact on society. According to McCowan (2016), a developmental university fosters the instrumental value of knowledge, which is oriented towards the public good. McCowan (2019:3) articulates “the link of higher education with development and the idea of a public good in societies marked by high levels of poverty and inequality”. The values of any developmental university activities are judged by their effectiveness in solving critical problems facing the society, and in enhancing economic growth, ensuring poverty reduction and promotion of sustainable development (Alexander & Conlon, 2011). However, it has been argued in Chapter two that sustainable development cannot be attained without inclusive rural development, placing the roles of universities in rural development in the foreground.

Thus, questions on the role of universities in national development date back to the establishment of universities in the twelfth century and they continue to dominate higher education debates to date. The literature reviewed reiterates the continued questions on the role of universities in development. It is further observed that little research has been done, which “focuses on characteristics and dynamics of the relationship between higher education and development, or on the contextual and institutional factors that facilitate these relationships” (Cloete et al., 2011:8). Oketch et al. (2014) indicate the need for studies that can look at the impact of higher education on a range of human development outcomes. By focusing on public universities’ preparation of graduates for rural development, the present study contributes to addressing what Oketch et al. (2014) identify as a critical lack of research that considers the impact of universities on local communities’ needs. However, there is limited literature on universities and rural development in Malawi, and Africa at large, despite the relevance of the subject to development. The reviewed literature largely focuses on higher education and development.

3.3.3 *Basic functions of universities*

According to Castells (2017b), higher education performs four basic functions. These are: producing values and social legitimisation; selecting the elite; training the labour force and producing new knowledge. The last two functions – training the labour force and producing new knowledge – are crucial to development (Bank, 2018). According to the European Union Report (2011), universities have the potential to play a vital role in the social and economic development of their regions. Castells (2017b) concurs that universities are central actors of scientific and technological changes, but also other dimensions of human development. Castells (2017a:57) further stipulates that,

Universities also become the critical source of the equalization of chances and democratization of society by making possible equal opportunities for people. This is not

only a contribution to economic growth, but it is also a contribution to social equality or, at least lesser inequality.

Castells (2017b) and Cloete and Maassen (2015) discuss the four core functions of the university as contradictory. They argue that the critical and perilous element in the structure and dynamics of the university system would be to combine and make compatible these seemingly contradictory functions. For instance, while it is a function of the university to form the elite, calls in graduates preparation for rural development would seem to eclipse the elitism element among graduates. The paradox in understanding the roles of universities is what has kept the debate going for centuries. Peercy and Svenson (2016:146) argue that “while linking the effects of higher education to micro- and macro-economic gains is a logical place to start for determining its private and public impact, it is insufficient for understanding the more holistic ways in which post-secondary schooling may affect the evolution of human development”. For instance, Bloom et al. (2006) discuss the question of higher education’s public good from the human capital perspective. They argue that university education promotes entrepreneurship, job creation, improved economic and political governance, and health maintenance, thereby enhancing the nations’ economic well-being and productivity. However, from the capabilities approach, economic well-being and productivity, be it for individual or public benefits, is not an *end* in itself but a *means* (Sen, 2009, 1999; Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). Within the capability approach, economic well-being is just a *means* towards human development, which is diverse and multidimensional (Walker & Boni, 2013). The study conceptualizes the basic function of a university as preparation of graduates, without undermining the other outlined functions. Public good is one of the basic function of universities, in the next section I expand on debates on higher education and the public good.

3.3.4 Higher education and the public good

The discussion of higher education and the public good has evolved over the years. The idea has included universities accounting to society, suggestions that knowledge itself is a public good, and more recently public good to higher education has been linked to social justice (Williams, 2014). Walker and McLean (2013) argue for the public good perspective to higher education within the human development approach. They argue that universities play a special role in preserving human well-being through their various functions and the graduates they produce. They also argue that the impact of higher education cannot be restricted to those who directly study in the universities, but can potentially permeate through the entire society. Universities are important and crucial social institutions in the human development process (Botha & Muller, 2016). Concerns and conceptions about the public purposes and social uses of the university education have given rise to the public-good discourses in higher education (Singh, 2012; Leibowitz, 2012; Nixon, 2011). The lexicon of public good arises from the fact that higher education has the potential to foster graduates' opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge required for the improvements in the conditions of poverty and other inequalities (Walker & Fongwa, 2017).

However, Williams (2014) argues that within the public good conceptualisation of higher education, university education not only looks at how graduates are prepared but accentuates their aspirations and agency as socially and civically minded citizens. She further asserts that for universities to play a critical role in society, knowledge in universities must be explored in relation to their social, political, historical, and cultural relevance. In this endeavour, universities would require a living curriculum that engages and challenges students' personal and social values (Walker, 2010). Discourses on

universities' public roles form part of the higher education engagement with society in contributing to addressing its complex challenges (Burkhardt, 2006), such as rural poverty.

Several issues are noted in the exploration of the relationship between universities and their framing as public good institutions. First, education, higher education, in particular, is valuable to each individual's freedom or human development. It has both intrinsic and instrumental values in fostering human development (Akala, 2019; Bank, 2018; Walker & Boni, 2013; Drez & Sen, 1989). Higher education offers opportunities to individuals and societies to live the life they have reason to value.

Second, higher education as a public good enriches both the individual and all of society (Walker, 2006). For instance, the framing ideas for the public good dimensions of higher education would centre on the civic engagement mission of universities (Mtawa, 2019). Universities produce graduates who have a sense of humanness towards others in their undertakings, in what Nussbaum (1997) calls 'cultivating humanity'. However, training graduates for the economy, through enhancing their employability attributes, has been the dominant view. Nussbaum (2010) argues that if universities continue with this way of training graduates, they risk producing graduates who are self-regarding, individualistic, and who do not care about others. As such, we need a different kind of graduate training that fosters their capabilities to become agents of rural social change, especially in ruralised contexts like Malawi.

3.4 Role of universities in graduate training/preparation

There is an emerging global call for universities "to produce graduates who are engaged and socially responsible, critical, sensitive, reflective, employable, and innovative" (Mtawa

& Nkhoma, 2020). Thus, the role of universities in graduate preparation has recently become a key issue in higher education institutions (González-Roma, Gamboa & Peiro, 2018) and highly valued among employers (Kline & Gibbs, 2015). “Given the rapidly changing nature of the workplace, the extent to which graduates are "work ready" is seen as indicative of their potential in terms of job performance and career advancement” (Caballero & Walker, 2010:13). The knowledge-driven economy requires graduates with the types of knowledge, skills, and creativity potential that meet the contextual development challenges of their societies (Tomlinson, 2007).

Mtawa and Nkhoma (2020) highlight a major observation that universities are preoccupied with producing employable graduates, with less concern on enhancing their social consciousness. That observed, this study goes further to suggest that universities ought to prepare graduates who not only possess work competences and/or attributes but capabilities, which would foster their agency and aspirations. Agency and aspirations are understood as inner self-driven drivers towards contributing to change. As Campbell and McKendrick (2017) argue, graduates require different capabilities and attributes to successfully navigate the world of work. While it is also the responsibility of the industry to foster career-readiness or work-readiness in students, so that they are confident of their abilities, this ought to form the key strategic focus for higher education (Jackson, 2018).

It is argued in the literature that employers want better-prepared graduates, pushing universities to think of graduates’ long-term contributions to human development (Osmani et al., 2015). In relation to the question of the roles of universities in development,

universities are under pressure to remain relevant, through producing employable graduates (McGann, White & Moss, 2016; Bridgstock, 2009). This has seen the emergence of ‘graduate employability’⁵ as an important discourse in higher education (Yorke, 2006).

According to McCowan (2016), the graduate employability debate is nuanced by ideas on higher education’s transformative role in societies. It is grounded on the questions of how students can use their university education in the workplace. The question which is not asked concerns the context of the workplace. For instance, it is hard to get literature on graduate attributes for rural development. A google search on the same yielded no results, suggesting that not much research on this topic has been conducted and/or published.

Although the dominant narrative of graduate preparation is very much about employability, Walker and Fongwa (2017) and Mtawa, Fongwa and Wilson-Strydom (2019) argue for a more expansive notion of graduate employability. In their argument, they link employability to how it can foster human development. They present graduate preparation within the “crucial concern with the relationship of higher education and society, [and] the wider development agenda” (Walker & Fongwa, 2017:4). Thus, students’ preparation is understood as a life-long process, aimed at producing not only employable but also engaged graduates who can contribute to human development (Walker & Loots, 2016). Thus universities ought to “enable graduates to acquire hard technical skills and become agents of change, conscious, and humane” (Mtawa & Nkhoma, 2020:113).

⁵ Employability is “a set of achievements - skills, understandings and personal attributes - that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Yorke, 2006:8).

Walker and Fongwa (2017), in their conception of employability that is imbued with elements of human development, also identified four key skills which employers expect from graduates. These are “skills and understanding; knowledge and intellectual ability; workplace skills and knowledge application; and personal or interactive skills” (Walker & Fongwa, 2017:19). These attributes are generic and central in graduate preparation; they are applicable to different contexts, but it is important to understand how they are defined within those different contexts. For instance, personal and interactive skills for graduates working in rural areas would be different from those working in offices. The role of universities in graduates training/preparation is a central focus of this study, hence the identified issues above remain relevant in shaping the study arguments.

3.5 Higher education and development in Malawi

3.5.1 A historical context

Like many African countries, the history of higher education in Malawi dates back to the postcolonial era. The University of Malawi was established in 1964, as the first public university. Msiska (2006) reveals that universities in Malawi were established mainly for their roles in socio-economic and political transformation. These roles relate to the kind of graduates universities produce and what they are prepared to do, and possibly how. Writing on higher education and development in Malawi, Msiska (2006:5) further asserts that “the main purposes for establishing universities in developing countries, Africa in particular, was, and remains, to play a pioneering role in addressing problems of poverty, social disorganisation, low productivity, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, [and] diseases”. Thus, while the roles are defined here, the context is assumed as homogeneous.

Nyerere (1978) argued that universities must be concerned with the preparation of students to understand society and know the society's problems so that they are equipped with the right weapons to engage with the three key enemies – poverty, ignorance, and diseases. This in principle entails graduate preparation that foregrounds contextual realities of the host nation of the universities. Currently, Malawi has four public universities and “the mandate of these universities is to train middle and top-level professional, technical and administrative human resources to engender, facilitate, and review socio-economic and political development programs and activities in the country through teaching, research, consultancy and outreach programmes” (Msiska, 2006:7). How these functions of the universities are equitably distributed within the universities' operation is not the focus of this study. One of the observations from the literature is that of a lack of clear mechanisms and/or strategies on how universities would accomplish their development roles in the Malawian context of rurality.

Bunda College of Agriculture, which is now LUANAR, was formed to focus on preparing graduates for rural development with major courses concentrating on agriculture. However, across the LUANAR there is no undergraduate programme specifically focussing on rural development. The only programme that constitutes elements of rural development is that of the department of agricultural extension services offered to students studying agriculture extension. This confirms the observation made in Chapter two that rural development has for long been narrowly defined in terms of economic and agricultural growth. This study takes a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach to rural development given that the well-being of the rural people depends on many other non-economic dimensions.

3.5.2 Access to university education

Demand for higher education in Malawi is high, with many students qualifying for university education but failing to get admission because of limited spaces (Chimombo, 2003; Msiska, 2006). Mambo et al. (2016) in the World Bank study, *Improving Higher Education in Malawi for Competitiveness in the Global Economy*, states that enrolment in higher education (inclusive of all post-secondary training) is 0.4 per cent (80 students per 100,000), and 91.3 per cent of those enrolled in higher institutions come from the wealthier and urban richest quintile section of the society. The poorest quintile accounts for just 0.7 per cent of higher education enrolment, who are predominantly rural. Malawi's university enrolment is the lowest when compared to some Southern African countries (Castel et al., 2010). Limited infrastructure, in terms of personnel, learning spaces, and accommodation constrain the growth of university education in Malawi (Mambo et al., 2016).

Private universities in Malawi are a welcome development as they augment public universities' efforts in increasing enrolments. However, the contribution of private universities is still quite small despite their numbers (World Bank, 2010). Enrolment in private universities is still low because the majority offer a limited number of fields, often confined to humanities and the social sciences. Chivwara (2013:6) further brings a political and historical argument for the slow growth of the private universities in Malawi:

The private university sector is a late comer in Malawi because prior to 1994 it was impossible for individuals or organisations to establish a private university due to strict government regulation. For instance, the one party government era spanning from 1964 to 1994 had very strict policies primarily aimed at controlling the quantitative output of graduates so that the ideal numbers produced were easily absorbed by industry as well as quality concerns.

It is interesting to note how this 'controlling political legacy' has affected graduate preparation in Malawi. It is later discussed that graduates in Malawi, are viewed as an elite class, and this has

consequently affected their motivation and aspirations for working in rural areas. This should be linked from the statistics shared above that the majority of those joining universities do not have a rural background. Given that the government is the main financier for public universities through subventions, for both capital and recurrent expenditures, public expectations from the graduates are high (Lombe, 2013).

A study by Chirwa and Matita (2009) found that higher education in Malawi has a higher rate of economic return. They attributed their findings to the fact that higher education in Malawi has expanded at lower levels, as the number of those who enter into universities is relatively small. Hence, the high rates of return reflect the short supply of graduates. The findings indicate that university education in Malawi offers strong economic opportunities to graduates. Ironically, the Malawi Educator Sector Plan (2008), and the Malawi National Education Policy (2013), both report high graduate unemployment. Interestingly, this is against the background that the National Community Development Policy (2013) and the National Agriculture Policy (2016) report high graduate vacancy rates in these ministries. These contradictory observations indicate a missing link in graduate preparation. It would appear that universities are producing graduates who are irrelevant to the industry or not meeting the needs and expectations of the world of work as observed by Mambo et al. (2016) and Hall and Thomas (2005).

Students are selected into the public universities through the National Council on Higher Education (NCHE). While the harmonised application form for the public universities provides four options to the students to choose their desired programmes of study, often they are not selected into their programmes of choice. Again, despite many students qualifying for university education, access is limited by limited infrastructure, as the World Bank (2010:157) observes:

The current infrastructure at both public and private universities has been the single largest constraint on expanding enrolment in higher education. In the public institutions, the existing infrastructure was designed for small classes and programs that did not require extensive facilities. It is difficult to adapt them in order to increase enrolments and accommodate the diverse programs...In addition, there has been insufficient funding allocated to maintain the infrastructure, which is in very poor condition. There is limited student accommodation; insufficient classrooms, laboratory, and library space, and dilapidated buildings. Libraries are poorly resourced and ICT is not yet widespread because of its cost.

This, together with inadequate teaching and learning materials, has limited the expansion of the public higher education system in Malawi.

3.5.3 Higher education's roles in national development

The National Education Policy (2013) acknowledges the role higher education plays in the generation of new knowledge and the strengthening of skills critical to the implementation of the country's national development policies. Nevertheless, reports have indicated employers' concerns about the relevance of higher education programmes offered in Malawi. For instance, the distribution of enrolment by field of study according to Mambo et al. (2016) is not in alignment with the critical national development areas. Malawi higher education fails to respond to the needs of the key growth sectors identified in the MGDSs (World Bank, 2010).

The current Malawi Growth and Development Strategy III (2018) has five key priority areas, which are: Agriculture, Water Development and Climate Change, Education and Skills Development, Energy, Industry, and Tourism Development, Transport and ICT Infrastructure, and Health and Population. It is observed that enrolment in disciplines, relevant to accelerate the achievement of the MGDSs, is very low. For instance, few students are enrolled in irrigation and water development, built environment, environmental sciences, engineering science, and ICT (World Bank, 2010; Mambo et al., 2016) despite their importance in the implementation of the national development agenda. Again, in most of the literature, there is no mention of how graduate preparation in different

disciplines takes cognizance of rurality. Rural poverty manifests itself in different areas, such as health, education, agriculture, water, sanitation, and communication infrastructure among others, necessitating the need for rural consciousness in the preparation of graduates in these various disciplines.

The concern that higher education programmes in Malawi inadequately address the needed skills gaps, calls for some reflection. A study by Hall and Thomas (2005:76) concluded that most of the programmes offered in higher education institutions in Malawi “reflect the needs, concerns and issues primarily relevant to the 1970s, 1980s and earlier”. This observation implies that Malawi’s higher education system would be perceived as stuck in its past, and not sensitive and responsive to contextual needs. Mambo et al. (2016: xv) further add that “In terms of the quality and relevance of programmes offered in the sector [higher education sector], available evidence suggests that the limited increase in enrolment is not aligned with the needs of the labour market and that universities have weak linkages with the private sector with regard to programme development and curriculum review”.

Mkandawire et al. (2018) in their study also observed that there is a lack of synergies between universities and the industry, and as such universities produce what the country does not need. The gap identified would be that university preparation does not take consideration of the context under which graduates will work. For instance, in the situation analysis of community development in Malawi, Chinsinga and Kayuni (2008:31-32) argued for graduate preparation that takes consideration of contextual needs:

In the event of developing community development policy, the policy needs to encourage the education system to develop skills [in graduates] that are not only relevant to the national communities. Currently, skills being promoted are suitable for white-collar jobs and not local

communities. This possesses challenge to [rural] community development as the critical mass, which might fully take part in community activities is lacking.

It would seem higher education in Malawi falls short of developing skills among graduates that would contribute to steering the country's developmental agenda, particularly rural development.

3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has provided a review of the literature on higher education and development, identifying issues of concern in relation to graduate preparation for rural development. From the literature reviewed, the identified concerns and unanswered questions in rural development and higher education can be summarised in the following five points:

First, *questions on the role and contribution of universities to development* have continued to dominate the higher education debates in Africa since independence. However, despite rich scholarly works on the subject, the role of higher education in rural development has received less attention. The area remains under-researched, yet relevant. There are seemingly scant studies dedicated to graduates' preparation for rural development. This study contributes to the knowledge deficit in graduate preparation for rural development.

Second, generally, understanding of *graduate preparedness and preparation* has *hugely focussed on work-readiness and employability attributes*. For instance, there are few scholarly works on how universities would foster graduates' capabilities for human development, much less for rural human development. Much of the discussion on graduate preparation leans more towards the human capital perspective of higher education. A related concern identified from the literature on graduate preparation is about universities' lower levels of attention to the context that graduates would work in upon graduation. For

instance, it would seem rurality does not form a greater part of graduate preparation in different disciplines despite poverty being very much rural, multidimensional, and crosscutting.

Third, *concerns about higher education's inability to align research and academic programmes/project to development priorities* would be linked to a lack of universities' engagement with various development stakeholders. The literature reviewed revealed a mismatch of what universities are producing and what employers expect and want. There are also concerns that programmes offered do not reflect the country's development aspirations.

Fourth, *the call for universities to continually engage in search of real alternative solutions to problems confronting their societies* remains significant. However, further definition of what contextualisation entails is lacking. In understanding the role of universities in national development, the context of Malawi is understood homogeneously, by implication rurality and rural poverty are obscured. This 'blanket understanding [of] development' has potentially serious ramifications for how universities prepare graduates as agents of development. For instance, it would be assumed that a qualified nurse would function equally in both urban and rural settings, yet experience shows that rural health service provision has its own dynamics which ought to be considered in graduate preparation. This holds for all professions.

Fifth, it can be deduced from the reviewed literature that what needs to be emphasized here is that the developmental role of universities in Africa is indeed central, but it means

different things for different stakeholders. Hence the various models of human development or rural human development. But the central concern is that as lifelong and intentional learners, graduates need to understand the complexity of both urban and rural development and that universities need to be empowered to develop strategies for enabling graduates to acquire capabilities that allow them function and flourish in any given context and contribute to wellbeing and common good.

The present study addresses some of these concerns by looking at how public universities in Malawi can contribute to rural development through the preparation of graduates with the required attributes and capabilities. The next chapter discusses the capability approach as the underpinning and conceptual theorisation approach of the study.

Chapter Four

Theorising graduate preparation for rural development:

A capability approach

4.1 Introduction

This chapter makes a case for the capability approach, as a nuanced and expansive conceptual and analytical lens for exploring how universities can foster graduate capabilities and graduate attributes⁶ for rural development. The chapter provides theoretical answers to the fourth question of the thesis, which is: What attributes and qualities are required to enhance graduate preparedness for rural development? The chapter is further guided by the following questions:

- 1) What kind of capabilities and attributes should graduates possess to contribute to rural development?
- 2) What opportunities and resources do graduates need to be who they want to be and do what they value in relation to rural development?
- 3) How can universities expand or contribute to creating capabilities and attributes for rural development?

In answering these questions, the chapter starts with a discussion on human capital as the dominant approach to graduate training. This I do by recognising its strengths and weaknesses, before justifying why the capability approach is a more nuanced and robust

⁶ Graduate capabilities and graduate attributes are discussed distinctly in this study, although at times there are overlaps in their conceptualisation.

alternative. The chapter further discusses the evolution of the capability approach, its development, and its conceptual application in graduates' preparation for rural development.

4.2 Human capital approach

The history of human capital theory dates back to Adam Smith and William Petty when it was introduced to analyse individuals as producers and to measure their abilities to engage in productive activities (Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2012). The human capital approach, as pioneered by Schultz (1961) and later expounded by Becker (1964) and Mincer (1974), has continued to be an important tool in the microanalysis of economic well-being. The founders of the human capital approach defined human capital as an individual's productive ability (Shultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). Within this definition, consumption becomes the ultimate goal of economic activity and it is suggested that the value of an individual's human capital can be measured as the value of goods and services which an individual directly or indirectly produces (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2012).

The human capital approach treats labour as a commodity to be sold (Sen, 1999). In analysing the role of education and higher education, in particular, it considers "educational choices as investment decisions" (Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2012:1). The approach is economic-centred⁷, in which the value of universities is evaluated in terms of how much economic returns the graduates would bring to themselves and their society (Tikly & Barrett, 2009). For instance, in human capital terms, higher education provides the knowledge base, skills,

⁷ In human capital approaches, the role of education is considered highly in its instrumental and functionalist values (see Sen, 2009, 1999).

and training for graduates to perform specific tasks, and jobs that will earn them and the nation income. In other words, education is valued as it adds competency to the national capacity for economic growth (Thomson et al., 2008). As Thomson et al. (2008:5) state, “capacity development is another similar term sometimes used to describe this utilitarian aspect of education”.

The human capital approach is more relevant in developing countries, as the expansion of production forms the body of development discourse where economic poverty remains one of the big threats to human development. Tikly and Barrett (2009) argue that the human capital approach to education is significant for Africa which is increasingly being left behind in economic terms by the globalisation process. In this thinking, higher education or university education is considered an investment aimed at increasing the value of human capital⁸, to obtain higher returns in the future (Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2012). Therefore, investment in higher education is valued in terms of its return in investments, not necessarily the intrinsic value of education. Although the human capital approach has been a dominant approach to microanalyses in education, it has not gone without its challenges, which has led to the development of alternative approaches.

The human capital approach became a dominant approach in higher education analysis because “In the classical paradigm, human capital refers to the skills, knowledge, and competences of an individual, which he uses to increase his utility” (Tiwari & Ibrahim, 2012:4). Thus, graduate outcomes are evaluated and assessed in terms of their economic utility values. In the human capital approach, productivity and economic prosperity are

⁸ Human capital consists of the “knowledge, skills and abilities of the people employed in an organization” (see Schultz, 1961:141).

traded off for quality of life. Thus, economic growth becomes the normative framework for development, and synonymous with well-being. In this case, the value of higher education from the human capital approach is justified in as far as it fosters economic growth rather than holistic notions of human development (Walker, 2011, 2012). The higher end of higher education becomes the generation of necessary human capital for individual and national economic growth (Thomson et al., 2008). Better performance on the labour market, which enables higher earning capacity, becomes a definitive measure of education outcomes (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2012). Therefore, applying the human capital approach in exploring graduates' capabilities for rural development, would focus on increasing graduates' economic productivity, obscuring the 'broader social and cultural objectives of higher education'⁹ (Naidoo, 2003).

4.2.1 Criticisms of the human capital approach

Despite its strengths, several scholars in higher education have leveled criticisms against the human capital approach (Walker & McLean, 2016; Boni & Walker, 2013; Nixon, 2011; Boni & Walker, 2016; Nussbaum, 2010).

Nussbaum (2010) argues that thinking about the aims of education in human capital terms has gone disturbingly awry. So much focus has been on national economic growth. It is as if the primary goals for education were to teach students to be economically productive rather than to think critically and become knowledgeable and empathetic citizens. With its

⁹ The broader human development promise in higher education is that "University education goals ought then to be aligned, in some way, with improving the lives of the vulnerable living in conditions of poverty, if universities are to be, and seen to be, socially responsible by diverse publics" (Walker, 2010:486).

strong economic and instrumentalist orientation, the human capital approach fails to fully acknowledge how education affects graduates in different respects, both at the personal and collective levels. For instance, at the collective level, education can potentially enforce social cohesion, democracy, reduce poverty and inequality, and increase the social fabric of a community (Nussbaum, 2006).

Boni and Walker (2013:5) further contend that “while education can enhance human capital, people benefit from education in ways that extend its role in human capital for commodity production”. Boni and Walker (2013) challenge the notion that the principal rationale for investing in education lies in the contribution that education makes to economic growth, arguing for more expansive ways of conceptualising the role of higher education in human development. The human capital approach emphasises productivity and the economic benefits of education, with less focus on cultivating graduate attributes and capabilities that can broadly contribute to the societal public good (McLean & Walker, 2016). As Chiappero-Martinetti and Sabadash (2012:4) further argue, the human capital approach “considers the worker as the unit of analysis and conceptualises him/her as an economic entity”. This conceptualisation is reductionist; it runs the risk of valuing graduate training only in terms of the economic benefit it may have on society regardless of the non-economic contribution it can bring to society, such as creating socially just societies.

Sen (1999:293) also argues that “literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities” (Sen, 1999:293). Applied in graduate training this would entail shifting the value of higher education from what it can holistically achieve for graduates and society to focusing on products and services that can be sold. Thus, human capital approach subjects, and limits analysis, assessment, and

evaluation of graduate preparation to economic dimensions, as if everything about graduate preparation is about their economic gain. Human capital perspectives have the potential of limiting the thinking about graduate preparation to encompass preparing them as rural development agents. Therefore, in analysing graduate preparation “we must go beyond the notion of human capital, after recognising its relevance and reach” (Sen, 1999:10) to encompass a more nuanced and multidimensional approach. This study proposes the capability approach as a normative tool of exploring graduate preparation, with its weight on capabilities and functionings.

If we apply a human capital approach in graduate training, the intention of university education would be solely focused on the preparation of skilled labour that would support commercial economic activities of the society through specialised knowledge (Boni & Gasper, 2012). This conceptualisation has the likelihood of limiting universities’ roles, including graduate training, from addressing the broader social and political issues related to human development in its totality. For instance, from the human capital approach, the value for graduate preparation would only be measured in terms of how they can contribute to the production and economic growth of their communities and for themselves. However, without undermining the value of economic growth, graduates' preparation ought to focus on expanding their well-being capabilities so that in turn they would foster those of others.

The human capital approach fails to embrace the centrality and wholeness of the quality of human life (Sen, 1999), which is multidimensional and multifaceted. For instance, in the case of higher education, the human capital approach values knowledge and skills learned at university only in terms of their utility, not their intrinsic ideals. Moreover, in the human capital approach, the utility value is limitedly defined in terms of mental conditions of

pleasures, happiness, and desire-fulfillment. However, “happiness or desire fulfillment represents only one aspect of human existence” (Sen, 1984:512). Human capital fails to address inequalities and differences between human beings (Sen, 1987).

Thus, exploring graduates’ capabilities for rural human development requires a more expansive approach that not only looks at the economic gains of university education but also holistic human development aspirations. As universities are continuously producing graduates that society expects to be good citizens, we must ask, “What a good citizen of the present day *should be* and *should know*” (Nussbaum, 1997:8 – my emphasis).

In relation to graduate preparation for rural development: If universities are to produce graduates who we expect to improve the lives of rural communities, we must ask, “What should a graduate of the present day be and what should he/she know?”

Graduate preparation for rural development demands an integral, holistic, and transformative approach. This study recognises that “the benefits of education exceed its role as a human capital” (Sen, 1999:294) and that “higher education ought to form people’s capabilities” (Walker & Boni, 2013:20), which are their freedoms to be and to do in ways they have reason to value (Sen, 1999). For these reasons, the CA is proposed as an alternative approach to conceptualising and evaluating graduate preparation for rural development. The next section engages with the CA in further detail.

4.3 The Capability Approach

The capability approach was first introduced by the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen in 1979. It came out of Sen’s critique of inequality measurement in welfare

economics, for being too exclusively focussed on income (Sen, 1985, 1999). Highly concerned with assessing and analysing poverty and what development should entail, Sen (1999, 2003) proposed that in development analysis we should focus on the real freedoms that people have for leading a valuable life, which he calls ‘capabilities’.

In its evolution, the capability approach can be traced back to Aristotle’s theory of political distribution and his analysis of *eudemonia* – ‘human flourishing’¹⁰. Clark (2012:2) further observes that Sen’s capability approach “acknowledges strong connections with Adam Smith’s (1776) analysis of ‘necessities’ and living conditions and Karl Marx’s (1844) concern with human freedom and emancipation”. Freedom and opportunities that an individual has to lead the life they have reason to value form the thrust of the capability approach (Sen, 1999). In the capability approach, the objective of both justice and poverty reduction centres on the expansion of the freedom that the deprived people have to enjoy valuable beings and doings (Alkire, 2005). The capability approach reflects on social changes in distinctly human terms (Hick, 2012); hence, it is humanistic in its orientation. The capability approach is concerned with elements that intrinsically matter, that is the person’s capabilities (Sen, 1985, 1999). Robeyns (2003:63) argues, “The capability approach advocates that we focus on people’s capabilities when making normative evaluations, such as those involved in poverty measurement, cost-benefit analysis, efficiency evaluations, social justice issues, development ethics, and inequality analysis”. Walker and Unterhalter (2007) further contend that the capability approach offers a broad normative framework for conceptualising, evaluating, and analysing social issues, such as

¹⁰ The concept of *eudaimonia*, translated as human flourishing and/or human happiness in other versions of Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics* runs dominant in Aristotle’s theory of social justice.

individuals' well-being and poverty, freedom, development, gender bias, social injustices, and inequalities.

Nussbaum is another prominent scholar of the capability approach. In her book *Creating Capabilities*, she argues that the capability approach should be “defined as an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and theorising about basic social justice” (Nussbaum, 2011:18). Nussbaum (2000, 2011) presents her conceptualisation of the capability approach as being about either comparative quality of life analysis or social justice. Robeyns (2017) acknowledges Nussbaum’s understanding of the capability approach, but takes the debate further, arguing that Nussbaum’s definition excludes analysis of other public values. Robeyns (2017:369) argues that apart from social justice and quality of life, “there are other values that we can develop conceptually, or analyse theoretically or empirically, from a capability perspective”. Robeyns (2017:399) further argues that the capability approach can be used to assess “institutions and practices based on one or several public values that are conceptualised in capability terms”. She singles out the conceptualisation of education from the capability approach, which may not fall under either the rubric of social justice or comparative analysis of life. Nussbaum’s conceptualisation of the core characteristics of the capability approach offers a refined characterisation of the core descriptors of the capability approach, and more so as they would apply in the conceptualisation of graduates’ capabilities for rural development. In Table 4.1, I provide an analysis of Nussbaum’s core characteristics of the capability approach and show their connectedness and relevance to the conceptualisation of graduates’ capabilities for rural development.

Table 1. Capability approach core tenets and relevance to graduates' capabilities for rural development

Core tenets	Description	Practical expressions of graduates' capabilities for rural development
The capability approach treats each person as an end	It is a central principle, which is human-centred, but also recognises the individual wealth of the person; does not limitedly subject individuals to some aggregate or collective goals.	It is central to understanding opportunities universities create for graduates <i>to do</i> and <i>to be</i> in relation to the capabilities to contribute to rural human development.
The capability approach focuses on choice or freedom and achievements	Its philosophical underpinnings point to a focus on <i>capabilities</i> (opportunities) and <i>functionings</i> (achieved beings and doings), in assessing development.	In exploring graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural human development, the focus ought to be on the agency opportunities students acquire in the universities, and what they can choose to do and achieve through these opportunities for the rural poor.
The capability approach is	Pluralism recognises the heterogeneity of the capability	Pluralism and heterogeneity offer a caveat in the framework of

pluralistic about values	approach, at the same time acknowledging that a single case or value “may be so important for political or pragmatic reasons that we are justified in paying the price” (Robeyns, 2016:402).	analysing graduates’ capabilities and attributes for rural human development, in that rural development in itself is complex, multifarious, and multidimensional.
The capability approach is deeply concerned with entrenched social injustice and inequality	Based on the grounding theorisation of the capability approach by Sen, first in <i>Equality of What?</i> , and in his subsequent works, <i>Development as Capability Expansion</i> , <i>Development as Freedom</i> , concern for social injustice and inequalities become of central concern.	Graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural human development ought to be conceptualised within the framework that the rural poor are caught in an interlocking set of deprivations, which subject them to social inequalities and injustices. Rurality, with its structural capabilities deprivations, subjects the rural poor to injustices and inequalities.
The capability approach ascribes an urgent task to government and	While Robeyns (2016) dismisses this characteristic, it is imperatively pragmatic given that individuals as agents and	Graduates’ capabilities and attributes for rural human development ought to form part of the poverty reduction policy

public policy	<p>participants of development exercise the expansion and contraction of their capabilities within the confined set of government policies. Therefore, policies would enable or impair an individual's well-being development. Policies are an example of conversion factors, through which graduates can translate resources into capabilities and/or capabilities into functionings.</p>	<p>agenda in ruralised contexts. Policy environment, for higher education and rural development, is instrumental within the operating contexts if graduates are to effectively contribute to rural human development. Rural development policies would be enablers to graduates' preparation for rural human development.</p>
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Source: Developed and modified from Nussbaum (2011)

The above core characteristics of the capability approach form the foundational blocks for the conceptualisation of graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development. This theorisation is also based on the understanding of the potential transformative roles of universities because "Universities can be spaces where relations of equality, respect for difference, and concerns for contributing to society are nurtured; and where original, creative and life-enhancing knowledge is produced" (Walker & McLean, 2013:16).

4.3.1 The Capability Approach and higher education

The capability approach has been applied in poverty and development analyses in many ways. However, in this context, it is applied as a lens through which to explore how

universities could produce graduates prepared for rural development. The capability approach “set[s] out to produce a narrative which articulates a guarded optimism about higher education as a site for personal engagement, transformation, and change” (Walker, 2006:3). The foregrounding idea for the capability approach is that through university education students acquire analytical skills, learn to be humane, and cultivate citizenship values (Walker & McLean, 2013; Nussbaum, 2002). Thus, the capability approach provides conceptual underpinnings for the values of higher education to society. Walker (2006:6) postulates:

The idea of higher education as a public good, enriching both the individual and all of society, has arguably been overtaken by a rhetoric of business models and market relations, together with an audit and accounting regulatory culture. Higher education is as a result increasingly regarded as a private commodity rather than a public good.

The capability approach broadens the discourse that universities are not only for economic benefits as is the case in the human capital approach. The capability approach argues for substantive analysis of higher education, placing the cultivation of graduate capabilities, as opportunities to decide on what they have reason to value at the centre. With its focus on what people are able *to do* and *to be* as opposed to what they have, or how they feel (Sen, 1999), the capability approach provides “a larger scope of the benefits of education, which include enhancing the well-being and freedom of individuals and peoples, improving economic production and influencing social change” (Boni & Walker, 2013:46).

The capability approach conceptualisation goes beyond the economic orientation to assessing the values of higher education. It fosters the production of professionals who possess public good capabilities and display public-good functionings (Walker & McLean,

2016). Therefore, graduates' preparation for rural development would have to focus on the intrinsic values of what graduates can do or be for the rural poor. The focus ought not to be only on the economic gains they can acquire from working in rural development.

The capability approach “has not been developed as an educational theory, but as an approach to human development and quality of life, particularly poverty reduction” (Walker, 2005:31). However, in the capability approach conceptualisation, education has an instrumental role, intrinsic importance, instrumental social role, instrumental process role, and empowering and distributive role¹¹ (Walker, 2006). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, conceptualising graduates' capabilities and attributes from the capability approach requires the identification and interrogation of the *doings* and *beings* that matter most in graduates' preparation for rural development.

Thus, the focus of the study is not only on the pedagogical arrangements within the universities but also on the context within which universities operate, in this case, a rural context. Therefore, if universities take graduates' preparation as a social good, with the potential to contribute to rural poverty reduction, such purposes may influence the universities' pedagogical decisions, practices, knowledge, and learning outcomes (Walker, 2016). Walker (2006:12) further argues that “if we are to be committed to higher education as a public good and to public values we need to pay attention to the framing of our

¹¹ *Instrumental role* is about helping the individual achieve many things, *intrinsic importance* means being educated is a valuable achievement in itself, *instrumental social role* involves its role in political and social arrangements, and *instrumental process role*, about how it broadens one's horizons, and finally *empowering and distributive role* is about how it facilitates the ability of the disadvantaged, marginalised and excluded to be organised (see Walker, 2006:31).

educational purposes and their pedagogical realization”. The capability to be educated through university education plays a substantial role in the expansion of other capabilities for current and future purposes. The expansion of capabilities, enabled by education, extends to the individual’s advancement of multiple capabilities for well-being (Terzi, 2007; Mok & Jeong, 2016).

Figure 4.1 illustrates the process of how graduate capabilities for rural development can result in enhanced rural people’s well-being.

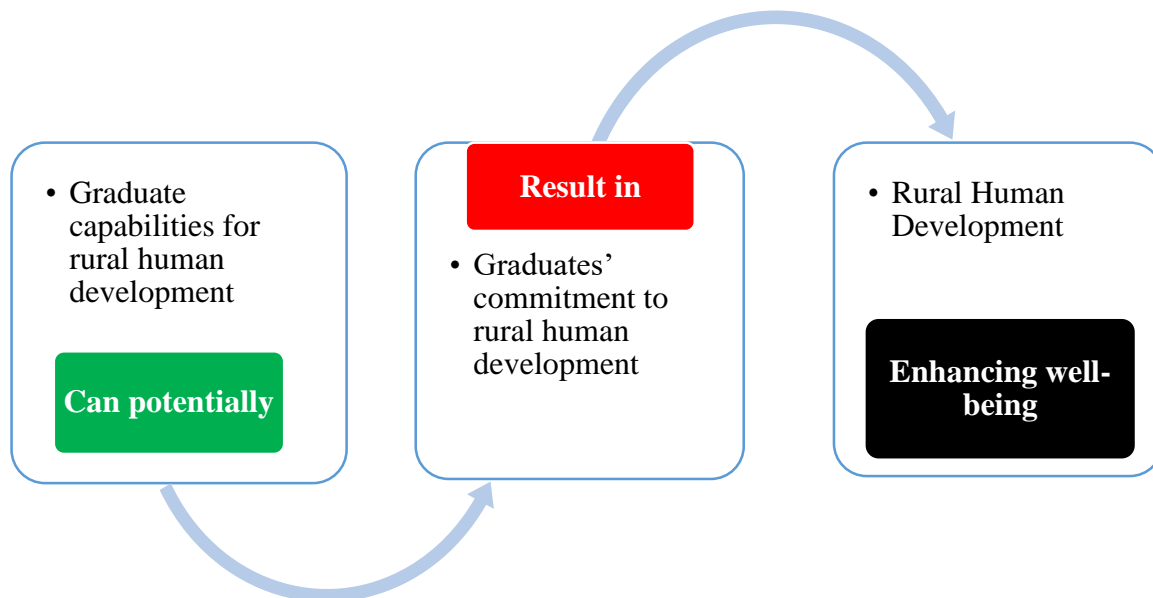


Figure 2. Conceptual map for graduate preparation for rural development

Source: by the author

4.3.2 Criticism against the capability approach and justification for its application

The capability approach has its criticisms, but they do not limit its application in this study.

Firstly, the approach is blamed for being a theoretical framework that has an excessive

degree of complexity¹² in that it lacks specificity and it is difficult to apply at an empirical level (Chiappero Martinetti, 2006). Without denying the complexity of the capability approach, the complexity is actually a strength, because understanding complex phenomena such as graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development, requires such a complex and multifaceted approach. Moreover, rural poverty reduction in itself, the domain in which we expect graduates to add value through their capabilities and attributes, is complex¹³.

Secondly, the capability approach is critiqued for being vague, with fears that when a concept is not delineated by clear boundaries, it is not accurate (Sugden, 1993; Roemer, 1996). It is often argued because the capability approach is multidimensional, it lacks clarity and specificity on how the dimensions are selected and assessed. While acknowledging the multidimensionality of the capability approach, I stand with its proponents (see Walker, 2011; Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 2002) arguing that rather than multidimensionality being the weakness, it should actually be the primary reason for its adoption. The rich and unrestricted nature of the capability approach makes it appealing and useful in addressing the plurality of issues within a multiplicity of contexts, such as that of preparing graduates for rural poverty reduction. The capability approach is clear enough on how its dimensions are selected and assessed; based on the definition of

¹² The meaning of complexity is elastic; it describes the multifaceted, multidimensional concepts consisting of many interrelated elements and patterns, of which the whole cannot be fully understood by separately analysing its components (see Chiappero-Martinetti, 2006: 3).

¹³ It was argued in chapter two that rural development is complex, multifarious and multidimensional and requires a complex approach in analysing graduates' attributes and capabilities for it.

capabilities as real possibilities and opportunities of leading a life an individual has reason to value (Sen, 1999). I argue that the capability approach offers an opportunity in capturing linkages and details of analysing graduates' effective opportunities for rural development that cannot be fully perceived through a partial and fragmented lens such as the human capital approach. The capability approach has the potential of capturing the intrinsic complexities of preparing graduates for rural poverty reduction in a multidimensional way.

Thirdly, the capability approach is said to be an incomplete approach (Chiappero Martinetti, 2006). Walker (2005) on the other hand, argues that the capability approach does not seek ordering of non-negotiable options, while Sen (1999) explains how incompleteness is fundamental to it and its pragmatism. The incompleteness or vagueness of the capability approach framework allows individuals to decide for themselves the capabilities which should count as valuable (Walker, 2005). That is, the capability approach "does not stipulate which capabilities should count, nor how different capabilities should be combined into an overall indicator of well-being and quality of life" (Walker, 2005:106). Therefore, this openness and incompleteness in the capability approach are pragmatic in exploring graduates' capabilities for rural development, for rural poverty itself is an open-ended and not a 'fixed' phenomenon.

Therefore, the strengths of the capability approach override its criticisms. It is "an ethically or normatively individualistic theory" (Robeyns, 2003:65). As a normative individualistic theory of analysis, each graduate is taken into account in the normative evaluation; making graduates a normative unit of judgment, as individuals, not the whole higher education

system as an entity¹⁴. Hence, this study specifically focuses on how universities can contribute to rural poverty reduction, *through* fostering graduates' capabilities, mindful that there would be many other ways through which universities can contribute to rural development.

Importantly, the capability approach recognises the heterogeneity of cases but also acknowledges that a single case or value may be so important to merit its evaluation (Robeyns, 2016). The approach acknowledges human diversity such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, geographical location (Robeyns, 2003), and, in this case, rurality. Conceptualisation of graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development, therefore, requires such a broad-based approach that recognises diversity. For instance, although not writing on graduates' preparation, Sen (1992: xi) argues that, "Human diversity is not a secondary complication (to be ignored or to be introduced "later on"); it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality". Universities in preparing graduates ought to acknowledge the diversity of rural poverty so that they produce graduates who do not only have professional knowledge, skills, and competences, but also the capabilities to support the expansion of the rural poor's well-being capabilities.

Many scholars have shown how the capability approach can be used to theoretically and empirically explore the relationship between higher education, poverty reduction, and human development (Walker & McLean, 2013) in a trio-integration informed by the three

¹⁴ Robeyns, (2003:65) argues that a normatively individualistic theory does not assume atomistic individuals, nor that functionings and capabilities are independent of concern for others or of the actions of others. Societal features, such as social norms and/or practices are taken into account as conversion factors.

goals of education: instrumental, intrinsic, and social¹⁵. The capability approach also reflects many ways through which human lives can be blighted (Hick, 2012); as it offers a promising framework for poverty analysis.

The capability approach sees human beings from a broader perspective. It goes beyond the notion of human capital, by acknowledging the instrumental value of education in promoting productivity, economic growth, and individual incomes. However, the capability approach at the same time highlights the direct relevance that education has in terms of individual well-being and freedom, as well as for social development (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2012). The capability approach recognises that “while education can enhance human capital, people benefit from education in ways that exceed its role in human capital for commodity production” (Boni & Walker, 2013:5). Approaches such as those informed primarily by human capital theory, which emphasises material goods for consumption¹⁶, can be misleading as frameworks of analysis in conceptualising graduates’ capabilities and attributes for rural development. Other approaches neglect the notion of capabilities, agency, and aspirations, where individuals are only considered as beneficiaries of the development process, not as development agents or participants in the development process (Sen, 1999). The search for freedom, well-being, and dignity of the individual is absent in the human capital approach. While the human capital approach collapses graduates’ roles into a utility-based materialistic worldview¹⁷, the capability approach is a

¹⁵ For Sen, the goals of education are threefold: instrumental (preparation for economic opportunities), intrinsic (example, the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake), and social (oriented to pressing civic problems). See Dreze and Sen (2002).

¹⁶ These are approaches such as the basic need approach, HCA, utilitarianism.

¹⁷ Where material support in meeting the rural poor’s basic needs would suffice as graduates’ learning outcomes, yet the rural poor’s well-being is more than meeting their basic needs.

more holistic approach that embraces all aspects of development: economic, social, basic needs, political and cultural; hence its application in this study.

4.3.3 CA constructs and their application in theorising graduate capabilities for rural human development

The capability approach constructs that inform the study's conceptualisation of graduates' capabilities for rural development are capabilities, functionings, well-being, conversion factors, aspirations, and agency. In this section, I start by defining each one and then apply them in relation to graduates' preparation for rural development.

4.3.3.1 Capabilities

Sen (1999:30) defines a capability as “a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being”. Thus, capabilities are real opportunities and freedoms an individual has to enjoy various functionings and achieving that which they want to be in their lives (Robeyns, 2017; Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Therefore, a ‘capability set’ represents an individual's freedom to achieve various functioning combinations (Sen, 2003). The expansion of one's capabilities entails empowerment (Deneulin, 2006). Universities offer spaces for empowering graduates to realise their capabilities¹⁸; that is having freedom “to undertake the actions and activities that they want to engage in and be whom they want to be” (Robeyns, 2005:95). Embedded in the concept of capabilities are freedoms as the opportunities that an individual has to make choices from his or her capability set. Robeyns (2005:95) aptly says:

What is ultimately important is that people have the freedoms or valuable opportunities (capabilities) to lead the kind of lives they want to lead, to do what

¹⁸ Graduate capabilities here would refer to what the graduate is able to do and be, that which the graduate has reason to value.

they want to do, and be the person they want to be. Once they effectively have these substantive opportunities, they can choose options that they value most.

In conceptualising graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development, two central questions emerge: (1) how teaching and learning might take place in universities if they are to address graduates' preparation for rural development, and (2) what would university education look like if fostering graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development were a priority in contexts of rurality? I reflect on these questions in the view that "the capability approach gestures towards curricular and pedagogical processes that are not only dialogical and relevant but also normative" (Deprez & Wood, 2013:148). Universities are called upon to produce graduates who not only know doing what the workplace needs in terms of employability attributes, but who can also think in order for them and others to live a meaningful life; a life one has reason to value. The university has wider social and political benefits, and is considered an important social good (Schuller et al., 2002; Jonathan, 2001). As conceptualised in this study universities are responsible for the cultivation and expansion of graduates' capabilities and attributes that can inspire graduates' agency and aspirations to work towards contributing to rural social changes.

As universities plan to prepare graduates, they ought to reflect on which capabilities might need to be developed among students to stir their agency and aspirations (Walker, 2010) towards contributing to rural people's well-being. The question of 'which capabilities?' has received mixed reactions in the capabilities debate. Nussbaum (2000) provides a list of what she calls central human capabilities, which are life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination and thought; emotions; practical reasoning, affiliation; other species; play and control over one's environment. Nussbaum (2000) argues that people ought to

possess these capabilities to live a minimally flourishing life. However, Sen (2004) argues against the idea of a fixed and final list of capabilities or a list that can be assumed usable for every purpose. Instead, he says that public dialogue and deliberation are necessary for identifying capabilities. Walker (2005) is in agreement with Sen on public dialogue and at the same time sides with Nussbaum on the possibilities of the list of capabilities. She argues, “A list of capabilities cannot be pre-selected without public consultation” (Walker, 2005:107). Wilson-Strydom (2016:147) also supports the idea of the capabilities list but cautions, “the value of capabilities lists depends partly on the criteria and processes used to formulate the list, the purpose of the list and the manner in which specific lists are used.” For example, graduates’ capabilities for rural development discussed in this thesis would have to emanate from theory *and* consultative processes with employers, university officials, graduates, rural community members themselves, and students as stakeholders who have an interest in rural development.

Nussbaum (2000), Walker (2006), Wolf and De-Shalit, (2007), and Wilson-Strydom (2016) have developed capabilities lists related to higher education. They have all done so in different contexts. These capabilities provide a useful point of departure in exploring graduates’ capabilities for rural development. The threshold touchstone in proposing a list of graduates’ capabilities for rural development lies in how universities consider rurality as constitutive of practice that is critical to graduates’ preparation. The study’s assumption of universities’ role in fostering graduates’ capabilities for rural development is delivered from the civic and public good values of university education (Walker & McLean, 2013).

4.3.3.1.1 Nussbaum's three citizenship capabilities

Graduate preparation has focused on marketable skills, negating humanistic abilities which are crucial to promoting human development. Nussbaum (2006) proposes a three-pronged model of developing students' capabilities through education, focusing on critical thinking, global citizenship, and imaginative understanding. The three citizenship capabilities are most suitable for consideration for students being prepared for rural development as they are people-centred. Nussbaum (2006, 2009) describes the three capabilities as follows:

- (a) **Critical thinking** helps students to examine themselves and to think about the reasons why they are inclined to support one thing over another, for instance, to promote the well-being of the rural poor.
- (b) **Global citizen** is the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation – world – and to understand something of the history and characters of the diverse groups that inhabit it, for instance, including those living in rural poverty.
- (c) **Narrative imagination** is the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone might have. Narrative imagination would potentially lead to the cultivation of sympathy and affiliation. These capabilities foster the graduate to see another human being as a full person, rather than a thing (Nussbaum, 2009), hence they are central in conceptualising how universities would foster graduate capabilities for rural development.

Table 4.2 summarises my theorisation of *how* and *what* each dimension would mean for graduate preparation for rural development.

Table 2. Nussbaum's three capabilities in relation to graduate preparation

Capability	Practical expression of graduate preparation for rural development
Critical thinking/self-examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspires graduates to examine themselves and to think about the reasons why they are inclined or are not inclined to promote rural poverty reduction. • Leads graduates to appreciate the rural poor's well-being. • Fosters students' dialogue and debate about life and society, with orientation and affiliation towards the rural poor, and • Challenges students to agree or disagree with different approaches to rural poverty reduction based on their education.
World/global citizenship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triggers students' recognition that they are not simply citizens of some local region, but above all bound to other human beings, including the rural poor, consequently cultivating public good values. • Spurs students on to learn more about people living in poverty and rural communities in their countries. • It instils in students an appreciation of the heterogeneity, diversity, and complexities of rural people's lives, which otherwise might be traditionally viewed in a simplistic and monolithic way.

Narrative Imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulates students to think about what it might be like to be in the shoes of the rural poor, potentially cultivating graduates' agency and aspirations for change. • Supports students to be intelligent readers or insightful of the rural people's stories, potentially cultivating graduates' critical affiliation, agency, and empathy for the rural poor. • Cultivates in students a tie of recognition, concern, empathy, and affiliation towards the rural poor.
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Source: By the author. Adapted and modified from Nussbaum (2006)

The underlying assumption in applying the capability approach is that universities would expand graduates' capabilities, who in turn are to expand the capabilities for the rural poor, consequently enhancing their well-being. Table 3 discusses higher education graduate capabilities as identified by Walker (2006), Nussbaum (2000), and Wolf and De Shalit (2007). The focus here is on how they would be used in relation to rural development.

Table 3. Graduates' preparation for rural development

Graduate Capability	Description	Practical expression of graduates' capabilities for rural development
Practical reason ¹⁹	Being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, intellectually	The graduates' ability to reflect on their social contributions to the rural poor; contributing to creating an

¹⁹ Practical reason has been identified as capability for education by Walker (2006) and Nussbaum (2000).

	acute, socially responsible, and reflective choices. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.	enabling environment where the rural poor live longer, healthy and creative lives.
Educational Resilience	Being able to navigate study, work, and life. Able to negotiate risk, to persevere academically, to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive constraints, Self-reliant. Having aspirations for a good future.	The graduates' ability and flexibility to navigate their life and education goals towards rural poverty reduction. Graduates' adaptability to working under difficult and challenging rural contexts for the good of the rural poor.
Knowledge and imagination	Being able to gain knowledge of a chosen subject – disciplinary and/or professional – it is a form of academic inquiry and standards.	Graduates' ability to understand multiple dimensions of rural poverty, think critically about them, and; imagine him/herself as an agent of social change.

Learning disposition	Being able to have curiosity and desire for learning. Having confidence in one's ability to learn.	Graduates' interest in learning about rural development issues; motivation to study and work in rural development.
Social relations and social networks/ Connectedness	Being able to participate in a group for learning, working with others to solve problems and tasks.	Graduates' ability to realise that they are part of the social whole in ruralised contexts, with agentic traits in solving rural poverty problems in collaboration with others.
Respect, dignity, and recognition	Being able to have respect for oneself, for, and from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued.	Graduates' recognition, valuing, and respect for the social and demographic diversities including rurality, with its associated poverty.
Emotional integrity, emotions	Being able to develop emotions for imagination. Understanding, empathy, awareness, and discernment.	Graduates' empathy, affiliation, emotional and ethical considerations for the rural poor. Feeling and thinking for the rural poor.
Bodily integrity	Safety and freedom from all forms of physical and verbal harassment in the higher education environment.	Graduates' concerns for the rural poor's safety and freedom from all forms of exploitation and deprivations.

Affiliation	Being able to live with and towards others, recognising and having concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interactions, to be able to imagine the situation of another.	Graduates' connectedness, integration, and robust motivation towards addressing the rural poor's deprivation of, and inequalities in their capabilities for well-being. Demonstrating a sense of being one with the rural poor, imagining their situation.
Doing good to others ²⁰	Being able to care for others as part of expressing your humanity. Being able to show gratitude.	Graduates' capacities to become publicly engaged in rural poverty reduction initiatives; having concern for the flourishing of the rural poor.
Language competence and confidence	Language is instrumental for communication.	Graduates' ability to understand, read, write, and speak confidently in the rural people's local languages.

Source: By author. Adapted and modified from Walker (2006), Nussbaum (2000), and Wolff and De-Shalit' s (2007) various capability lists.

The eleven capabilities were theoretically discussed as being relevant to graduates' preparation for rural development, so was the case with the three citizenship capabilities by Nussbaum. The above discussion forms the framework for what it would mean for

²⁰ See Wolff and De-Shalit (2007:48).

universities to foster graduates' capabilities for rural development. Theoretical insights of the CA suggest universities as public good pathways to rural poverty reduction and social change. Hence, Boni and Walker (2016:180) argue that

A good university (by implication a university that promotes social change) would then be a university-based on human development principles and values and such a university would in turn, for example, promote more justice by contributing to poverty reduction; participate in the economy; undertaking research and producing knowledge to understand how to reduce and eradicate poverty; working with communities outside the academy to share this knowledge, also inclusive process of knowledge-making; and making contributions to the lives of people living in poverty [such as the rural poor].

Thus, in conceptualising graduate capabilities for rural development, I interrogate what universities need to do to prepare graduates and what they ought to do in order to make graduates *to be, to know, to live, and to do*, as ethically and socially sensitive citizens in ruralised contexts. However, it is important to also consider the factors, circumstances, and resources that can either get in the way of or promote the achievement of university graduates' contributions to rural development. In capabilities language, these are called 'conversion factors', which I discuss next.

4.3.3.2 Conversion factors

Conversion factors are the elements that determine the degree to which an individual can transform capabilities into functionings, or turning resources into a capability. Thus, according to Robeyns (2017), conversion factors represent how much functioning and utility an individual can gain from a resource or capability. Conversion factors are categorised in three ways: Firstly, as *personal factors*, that is factors that are internal to the person. Secondly, as *social factors*, meaning factors that emanate from the society, such as

social norms, rules, values, public policies, discriminating practices, power relations and societal hierarchies among others. Thirdly, as *environmental factors* which are related to the physical or built environment in which an individual lives, and includes geographical locations such as urban and rural settings (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1999).

Therefore, in exploring how public universities can foster graduates' capabilities for rural human development, conversion factors are important. This is because many factors can influence the conversion of graduate capabilities into valued beings. Nussbaum (2000) appropriately puts it that an individual's ability to convert available resources into well-being can be enhanced, constrained, or inhibited by many factors. In this case, graduates' preparation for rural development can be enhanced or constrained by factors such as the curriculum, teaching and learning environment, pedagogical practices in and out of class, among others. Beyond these factors, the social and contextual environment would also affect graduates' preparedness for rural development. An example of this is the availability or unavailability of guiding policies or frameworks, which can stimulate the universities' orientation towards preparing graduates for rural development. Nevertheless, the conversion of capabilities into functionings ought to potentially lead to well-being (Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015).

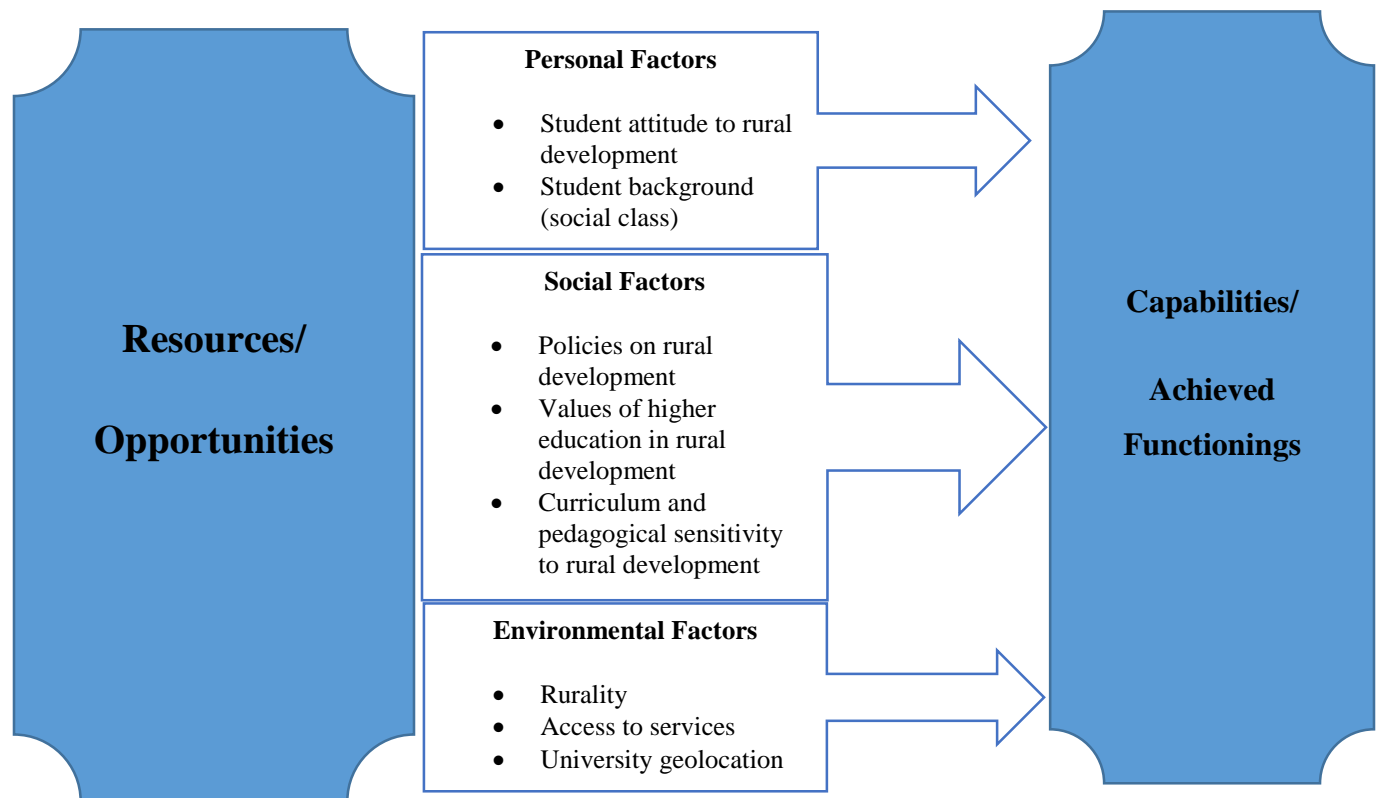


Figure 3. Conceptual representation of the conversion factors

Although conversion factors may predispose or discourage graduates to work towards rural development, graduates' agency, and the choices made from their capabilities set is instrumental in the process. Agency prompts individuals to act with a purpose (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Thus, agency is another relevant concept in the theorisation of graduates' capabilities for rural development.

4.3.3.3 Agency

Agency is a person's ability to pursue and realise goals she or he values and has reason to value (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009). While well-being is about the *opportunity* aspect of freedom, agency is about the *process* aspect of freedom (Boni & Walker, 2016). Agency

is about individuals' active involvement in shaping their own destiny and that of others; not just remaining passive recipients of the fruits from the development process (Sen, 1999). Agency is rooted and anchored in the human motivational system, as the key driver of human development. To give an illustration, when life becomes an opportunity to thrive, individuals begin to value agency highly. Individuals are motivated to swiftly act on something that they have reason to value or they would want to be. As Wilson-Strydom and Walker (2015:314) state, "agency involves being able to make one's choices and to act on them. Agency is about having opportunities and choices as well as the autonomy to be able to make one's own decision." Applied in understanding graduates' preparation for rural development, agency would imply graduates' *acting* on their capability sets to improve the well-being of people living in rural areas.

Graduates agency for rural development would infer their determination in challenging the structural, institutional, and cultural bottlenecks that affect the development of the rural poor. It is important to acknowledge that agency can take place in different ways: firstly, through *personal or individual agency*, which is concerned with a single graduate's action to bring about change that she or he values, and secondly, *social or collective agency*, which has to do with graduates acting together for the good of their society, in what Leibowitz (2012) calls public good and democratic citizenship. Since education is one essential way of enlarging people's 'reasoned agency'²¹ or empowerment (Mok & Jeong, 2016), the questions to ask are: How can or how do universities cultivate these agentic

²¹ Reasoned agency is that which helps individuals to achieve substantive freedom and expand capabilities (see Mok & Jeong, 2016:506).

traits in graduates? How can universities make graduates aspire to take action and bring about social change for the rural poor, as individuals but also collectively? This question signifies the importance of aspiration alongside agency, which is described in the next section.

4.3.3.4 Aspirations

Aspiration is one of the key constructs in understanding graduates' capabilities for rural development. According to Appadurai (2004), aspiration concerns itself with an individual's wants, preferences, choices, and calculations. Thus, individuals' aspirations are influenced by their available choices, and preferences. The aspect of choices and preferences brings the understanding of aspirations in close relation to that of agency. Aspirations and agency ostensibly have a dialectical relationship within a given context and they influence achievements of one's valued well-being (DeJaeghere, 2016). Walker and Unterhalter (2007) argue that individuals' choices are deeply shaped by the structure of opportunities available to them, such that individuals adjust their hopes to their probabilities. For example, poverty as a deprivation of capabilities can limit individuals' aspirations for well-being.

The freedom and possibility of aspiring (Hart, 2012) is largely influenced by different social and cultural contexts – conversion factors. Mkwanzani (2019) argues that aspirations inform and influence individuals' understanding of a good life. Ray (2006) refers to this process as an 'aspirations window', "through which individuals can see the gap²² that exists

²² According to Mkwanzani (2017), the aspiration gap, i.e. the difference between what they aspire to and their current situation, affects an individual's agency.

between their current situations and that which they desire” (Mkwanzani, 2019:60). Aspirations are conceptualised with the framework of graduates’ preparation for rural development in that although individuals have their own aspirations, sometimes they are persuaded to pursue alternative aspirations by others (Hart, 2012). Since aspirations are largely influenced by the individuals’ environment, upbringing, cultural and social contexts (Appadurai, 2004), the study considers universities as an arena where graduates’ aspirations for rural development can be nurtured and cultivated through sensitive curriculum and pedagogical practices.

Aspiration plays two roles in the conceptualisation of graduates’ capabilities for rural human development: firstly, capabilities selection and secondly, agency unlocking (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013). Aspiration has the potential to unlock or motivate graduates’ latent agency leading to the expansion of capabilities. As Douglas (2004:87) argues, “the greatest danger is in not having aspirations at all”; aspirations are key to enhancing graduates’ capabilities. Aspirations provide hopes and ambitions to individuals to achieve something - aspirations drive people into action. Ray (2003) and Appadurai (2004) have argued that cultivating people’s aspirations is an important element of an anti-poverty strategy. “Expressed aspirations tell us which capabilities are the ones that are not yet realised, which makes voicing of aspirations an excellent tool to decide which dimensions of well-being to target in a human development initiative” (Conradie & Robeyns, 2013:7). Therefore, when provided with the opportunities and freedom to form their aspirations, graduates would be willing to take the necessary actions to achieve what they value. As such, it is important for universities to inspire among students the desire and aspirations to

improve the lives of people living in rural poverty so that they are willing to take action towards rural development once they graduate. This could be through their professional work, through advocacy, or through how they treat the rural poor in everyday situations. The value of aspirations then, is that they can stimulate behaviour leading to the advancement of capabilities (Ray, 2006) that are central to well-being achievement. The centrality of well-being in development is discussed further, next. Aspirations influences someone to not to focus on rural development and or to want to focus on it.

4.3.3.5 Well-being

Well-being is the ultimate end of development. As such, development is about seeking well-being, through the expansion of an individual's capabilities and functionings. However, this well-being can only be achieved if an individual or group of people are provided with sufficient capabilities and functionings to choose what they value. This is because well-being is assessed in terms of opportunities and freedoms that individuals have to achieve what they value doing and being. As Mtawa (2019:77) argues that the "primary aim of the CA is to ensure that different dimensions of people's well-being are achieved". Thus, well-being, as the development end-result, encompasses several interrelated processes.

Logically, if achieved functionings are constitutive elements of an individual's well-being, then capabilities represent the real opportunities an individual possesses to have well-being, and these involve the individual's freedom to have alternatives to choose from (Chiaperro-Martinetti, 2000). Therefore, if the type of education a student receives determines the kind of life they live; including whether or not they succeed in doing and being what they value, then education affects well-being too. In this sense, we could view

education as a means of and an end to well-being. Similarly, rural development can be seen as both a means and an end to well-being. In the next section, this idea is discussed further.

4.4 Rural development as a *means* and an *end*

It was observed in Chapter two that rural development can be conceptualised from several dimensions, as a *process*, as a *phenomenon*, as a *strategy*, and as a *discipline*. In conceptualising graduates' capabilities for rural development the expected goal is that universities should strive to provide graduates with necessary skills, attributes and capabilities that can make them agents of rural human development. *Human* development, in general, is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. *Rural* human development then is about the rural people achieving their freedoms, well-being opportunities, and/or enlarging their choices, which would enhance their well-being. Therefore, while the process aspects of rural development are valued in themselves, as *means*, such as economic development, the desired *end* is rural human development.

What this entails is that graduates prepared for rural development ought to create an enabling environment for the rural poor to flourish. Universities are expected to produce graduates who can foster rural people's capabilities for them to acquire things that they have reason to value. Fostering implies enabling, that is graduates who have the much needed skills to facilitate development of the rural people. Fundamental to the enlargement of the rural people's choices is the building of their capabilities – that is the range of things that they can do or be in life (UNDP, 1990). The framing conceptual undertone is that graduates ought to be prepared with necessary capabilities so that in turn they would contribute to fostering well-being opportunities for the rural poor. “With more capabilities

and opportunities, people have more choices” (UNDP, 2016:25) towards what they have reason to be and to do. Expanding choices is at the core of human development, and these are the very choices that the rural poor lack, due to different factors and forms of unfreedom (Sen, 1999), among which are: vulnerability, powerlessness, poverty, and isolation.

Fostering graduates’ capabilities for rural development is conceived within the notion that enlarging the rural people’s choices or freedoms would be “through universities educating professionals who are critically aware of the society in which they will work and [helping them to become] oriented to understanding and acting on their own individual and collective responsibility to bring about improvements” (Walker et al., 2009:566). University education becomes an enabler for expanding individuals’ capabilities and enhancing their freedom, who in turn would expand those of the rural people. Graduates ought to be specifically prepared for rural development because “overcoming rural poor’s deprivations requires putting empathy, tolerance, and moral commitments to global justice and sustainability at the centre of individual and collective choices” (IFAD, 2016:6).

Therefore, rural human development, which is the *end* sought after, strives towards the expansion of the rural poor’s choices (opportunities and capabilities) for the fullness of their valued beings and doings. Thus, from the human development perspective, the objective of rural development becomes the creation of an enabling environment for rural people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives (Ul Haq, 2003; UNDP, 2016). This is so because:

In the human development framework, development is about people’s well-being and the expansion of their capabilities and functionings. Expansion of material output is treated as a means not an end (Fukuda-Parr, 2003:117-118).

Rural human development is then grounded within the notion of building human capabilities, by the people themselves through their active participation in the processes that shape and improve their lives (UNDP, 2016). Thus conceived, graduates' preparation for rural development becomes a catalyst, or an enabler for the rural poor's well-being enhancement (Chiappero-Martinetti & Sabadash, 2012). Inherent in this conceptualisation is the expectation that universities produce graduates with ethical commitments and democratic values, formulated within the public good notion, to act in a socially good way and contribute to rural poverty reduction (McLean & Walker, 2009; Walker, 2010). Higher education is thus taken as a social good, committed to public good values (Walker, 2006), which can foster graduates to enable the rural poor to live really humanely (Walker et al., 2009). Universities are therefore called upon to contribute to building a more just society with human dignity effectively available to all (Nussbaum, 2000). This would entail graduates acquiring the capabilities and attributes which foster their aspirations and agency towards working for the well-being of the rural people.

4.5 Graduate attributes for rural development

Graduate attributes are “the qualities, skills, and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen” (Bowden et al., 2000:1). They are different from capabilities, which are more than what employers look for in graduates. Capabilities encompass ways in which a graduate prioritises his or her life; means of judging reasonably what course of action counts as valuable; and the construction of one's life in ways that contribute to society as a whole (McLean & Walker, 2013). Thus, while graduate attributes and graduate capabilities may

share common features, there is a significant differentiation between them. For instance, graduate attributes, while intrinsic to graduates' citizenship as public or social good focus more on employability. Graduate capabilities, on the other hand, focus more on opportunities, abilities, and choices or freedoms to be what an individual has reason to value more broadly (including but not limited to being employed).

In this study, graduates' attributes and graduates' capabilities are treated distinctly from each other; although in some cases there are overlaps where attributes may become capabilities and/or influence each other. Graduate attributes are considered more as core, generic employability qualities (Barrie, 2005, 2007). They are knowledge, skills, competencies, and values that graduates have gained or developed as a result of completing their university education (Hill, Walkington & France, 2016).

As Boni and Walker (2013:71) argue, "The purpose of foregrounding graduate attributes in higher education would be to make the system run more smoothly and be more *compliant* and *attractive* to the corporate world". Much as the focus on graduate attributes is on the employability (or lack thereof) and graduate attributes are key in the conceptualisation of graduates' preparation for the world of work, a person does not need to be employed to contribute to rural human development. As mentioned before, this can be achieved in part through advocacy for the rural poor, or through how graduates treat the rural poor in everyday situations. While capabilities have more to do with opportunities, attributes have more to do with qualities, but both are central in preparing graduates for rural human development. In Table 4.3, I discuss some generic graduate attributes and their practical implications for graduates' preparation for rural development.

Table 4. Graduate attributes and practical implications for rural development

Graduate attributes	Practical implications for rural development
Critical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters graduates' intellectual curiosity on rural poverty issues; • Prompts students' deeper levels of analysing rural development; • Stimulates graduates' intellectual reasoning for rural social change.
Analytical reasoning/ Research and inquiry skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps students question the social inequalities and injustices associated with rurality; • Stirs graduates' research literacies for rural development; • Supports the comprehension of macro- and micro-systems in rural development.
Problem-solving Reflective judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivates a sense of agency in solving rural societal problems; • Assists students to explore problems of rural poverty beneath the surface; • Instrumental for planning, organising, coordinating, and facilitating rural development processes.

Effective communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures the dissemination of research and information about rural development to different stakeholders.
Leadership Teamwork skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters group/teamwork in rural development; • Nurtures students' ability to motivate and influence others to respond to calls for rural poverty reduction.
Information literacy Digital literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eases the transferability of skills from multidimensional occupations in the context of multifarious rural problems.
Self-awareness Self-confidence Personal autonomy/self-reliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fosters person-based learning; adaptable and flexible to rural development; • Enhances relational understanding of the self and 'the rural other'; • Cultivates a sense of agency, ethics, and self-reflexivity; • Key for self-management skills in rural development
Flexibility and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports graduates' adaptation to any environment in the rural setting • Triggers students to come up with new ideas on rural poverty reduction
Ethical, moral and social responsibility, integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultivates a sense of responsibility that goes beyond oneself in contributing towards a well-functioning rural society.

and cross-cultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspires graduates’ affiliation with the rural poor and, respect for diversity associated with rural poverty; • Creates enthusiasm about rural development, trustworthiness, tolerance, reliability, and professional conduct.
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Source: By author. Adapted from Hill *et al.* (2016) and Boni and Walker (2013)

Both graduate capabilities and graduate attributes focus on what students would be able to do and to be at the end of their degrees. Capabilities supersede attributes in that they attend to “what valuable beings and doings students need to achieve by the end of their study at a higher education institution” (Boni & Walker, 2013:72). For instance, a graduate may have attributes that she/he does not value or has no reason to value beyond employability, whereas capabilities would be valued for the beings and doings they enable beyond employability. However, both capabilities and attributes can be cultivated through university education. Hence the present study calls for a new framework of graduate preparation, in which through the cultivation of certain capabilities *and* attributes graduates’ agency and aspirations for rural human development are fostered.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the core theoretical aspects of the capability approach while relating them to their application in conceptualising graduates’ preparation for rural human development. Acknowledging the strengths and shortfalls of the human capital approach, I have argued for the capability approach as a multidimensional and heterogeneous approach to development befitting conceptualisation of graduates’ preparation for rural development. It has been demonstrated that the capability approach

challenges the presumed link between expanding income and expanding human choices (Alkire & Deneulin, 2009), while of course recognising that “income is such an important means to capabilities” (Sen, 1999:90). It has been theorised in this chapter that university education is one essential way of enhancing graduates’ reasoned agency and aspirations, which would help them to achieve substantive freedoms and expand rural people’s well-being capabilities, resulting in human development.

Chapter 5

Research design and methodology

5.1 Introduction

This study arises from the unresolved issues and questions observed from the review of literature on higher education and rural development, in particular graduate preparation. Chapter five provides detailed explanations of the research design and methodological orientations and motivations. It offers an outline of the research approach, study design, definition of the study area and participants, data collection techniques, and data analysis strategies applied. Further, the chapter reflects on ethical and practical considerations as well as the fieldwork experiences.

The study's main question is: How can public universities foster graduate capabilities for rural development in Malawi? In answering the above question, the study is guided by the following sub-questions:

- i. How do higher education policymakers articulate the roles of universities in rural development?
- ii. How do university stakeholders and students perceive graduates' preparation for rural development?
- iii. How do employers and graduates in rural development sectors perceive graduates' preparedness for rural development?
- iv. What capabilities and attributes are required to enhance graduate preparedness for rural development?
- v. How can public universities prepare graduates for rural development, given the country's rurality and its associated rural poverty?

- vi. How can universities foster graduate capabilities for rural human development?

Therefore, this chapter provides detail on the methodological aspects of what happened to obtain empirical evidence that answers the above questions.

5.2 Research approach

A qualitative approach was opted for in this study. Distinct from quantitative and mixed methods, qualitative studies emphasise words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). The qualitative approach was chosen for its concerns with meanings that people attach to things in their lives. It helped the researcher in understanding the study participants from their own frame of reference and understanding of reality as they experience it (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The choice of qualitative research was further motivated by its interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and counter-disciplinary approach to the empirical world (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). For instance, the study engaged academic officials (deans, lecturers, and heads of departments) from the four public universities in Malawi, which offer diverse programmes. Further, it sought the perspectives of students, rural development stakeholders (employers and graduates) working in various non-governmental and government institutions in Malawi.

Using the qualitative approach, the study has explored multiple views on the question of public universities' role in graduates' preparation for rural development in Malawi. The study targeted various groups, as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue in qualitative research all perspectives are worthy of study; there is always something to be learned in different settings and groups. Therefore, targeting different groups helped to triangulate the information in the quest to obtain substantial generalisations. Through the qualitative approach, insights and understanding of the subject under research were developed from the patterns in the data, unlike in quantitative methods where data would have been

collected to assess the preconceived model or hypothesis. The study leans towards constructivism and interpretivism in terms of ontological and epistemological orientations respectively.

The study ascribes to constructivist worldviews, in terms of ontological positioning. From the constructivist worldview, meanings of the social world, in this case, graduate preparation, are constructed from multiple social realities which are subject to the social rules of time and space. Snape and Spencer (2003) underscore this constructivist worldview, arguing that the social world exists independently of the individual's subjective understanding (subtle realism), but it is accessible through the respondents' interpretations of realities, which are further interpreted by the researcher. Constructivism acknowledges that reality is diverse and multifaceted. This worldview was relevant to this study, which looks at graduates' preparation for rural development in different academic disciplines. This is mindful of the fact that rural development itself is multidimensional. Thus, diverse respondents were targeted to provide their perspectives on graduates' preparation for rural development.

Epistemologically the study is grounded on the interpretivist paradigm, which asserts that knowledge is interpreted from reality; that it is *posterior* not *apriori*. In qualitative, unlike quantitative studies, knowledge of the world is based on understanding, which arises from thinking about what happens to us, not just having a particular experience (Snape & Spencer, 2003). The strength of an interpretivist perspective is that the views of research participants are not fitted into already coded research answers, but generalisations and conclusions are made by analysing their views. Thus, knowing and knowledge transcend the basic inquiry. The researcher and the social world researched impact on each other (Snape & Spencer, 2003). The study leans towards the interpretivism paradigm with its basis that there is no one reality, but many. Diverse perceptions of graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development were identified by seeking views from varied participants.

Therefore, the choice of the qualitative approach was motivated by their overtones that “peoples’ experiences, conceptions, perceptions, and meanings are developed, created and embedded in the interactions they make” (Mtawa, 2019:106) with the world around them.

5.3 Case study research design

This is a case study, a case of Malawi’s four public universities preparation of graduates for rural development. A research design is a plan or a blueprint that explains how the researcher intends to conduct his or her research (Mouton, 2001). It is a roadmap for planning the execution of the research (Berg, 2001). This study followed the case study research design as the “logical plan for getting from *here* to *there* where ‘*here*’ is the initial set of questions to be answered by the participants and ‘*there*’ is some set of conclusions derived from the findings” (Yin, 1994:20). Data for the case was collected through interviews with various stakeholder – universities’ officials, policymakers, students, alumni, and employers. Some data was also obtained through document reviews. The purpose of opting for the case was both to establish what is the current situation in relations to preparation for rural development and could and should be. The case study methodology guided the study to diverse results from the problem under investigation, which was graduates’ preparation for rural development. Among the “five different types of research designs: experimental design; cross-sectional design or survey design; longitudinal design; case study design; and comparative design” (Bryman, 2012:50), I opted for the case study design. While any of the other four research designs would also enable me to answer the proposed study question, a case study design was chosen for its detailed analysis and understanding of complexities on a particular issue and attention to details (Bryman, 2012). A case study enables the researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context (Zainal, 2007). A case study allows in-depth and contextualised analysis of the topic under investigation. The case study design was further motivated by its closeness to real-life situations and

great wealth of details, which have the potential of leading to a more nuanced view of the reality under investigation (Flyvbjerg, 2004). The questions of “how” and “why” are best answered in a case study approach, where the logic is based on the assumptions that the context, in this case, rurality and its associated rural poverty, and the phenomenon, in this case, universities and their graduates’ preparation, are tightly linked and should be treated together (Yin, 1994). Case study designs are compelling in research as Flyvbjerg (2004:422) argues,

Sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something! Proof is hard to come by in social science because of the absence of ‘hard’ theory, whereas learning is certainly possible.

Through the case study research design I studied as many as possible different views related to graduate preparation in public universities in Malawi, particularly for rural development. Given that good social research is “problem-driven” not “methodology-driven” (Lewis & Ritchie, 2003); in this case study, my purpose was to conduct an intensive and detailed examination of how universities prepare graduates for rural development in Malawi. Therefore, I conceived of the case as comprising lecturers and deans from the four public universities, rural development stakeholders (employers and graduates), and students in their final year. All these were confined to specific faculties as discussed below. However, although this is a case study of Malawi, its findings on graduate preparation for rural development can apply in any related contexts of rurality.

5.4 Definition of the study area and participant selection

Malawi was purposively chosen for the case study. Its rurality makes the academic research on graduates’ preparation for rural development relevant. Again, one of the primary purposes of research

is “to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in everyday conduct of their lives; to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being of human persons and communities” (Bradbury & Reason, 2008:4). This study contributes to the scarce literature on higher education and rural development, graduate preparation in particular. Study participants were categorised as public universities’ officials, rural development stakeholders, policymakers, and students. In the next section I discuss how they were sampled, why and how many were engaged in the study.

5.4.1 Public university officials

Fourteen (14) officials from the four public universities were interviewed. They comprised of deans of the selected faculties, heads of departments, and lecturers. The four public universities are: University of Malawi (UNIMA), Mzuzu University (MZUNI), Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR), and Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST). In each of the four public universities, one faculty was targeted. The selected faculties fitted in any of the following criteria set: oldest faculty, produces more graduates who are engaged in rural development, and offers programmes relatable to rural development. Table 3 provides details of the university officials interviewed. Data was collected through face to face semi-structured interviews in their offices.

Table 5. List of public university officials interviewed

Respondent	Institution	Faculty	Department
Dean 1	University 1	Development Studies	Development
Dean 2	University 2	Environmental Studies	Agri-sciences

Dean 3	University 3	Built Environment	Land Surveying and Physical Planning
HoD 1	University 3	Social Sciences	Sociology
HoD 2	University 3	Education and Media Studies	Journalism and Media Studies
HoD 3	University 4	Academy of Medical Sciences	Biological Sciences
Lecturer 1	University 1	Development Studies	Extension and rural development
Lecturer 2	University 1	Development Studies	Agribusiness management
Lecturer 3	University 2	Environmental Sciences	Agri-sciences
Lecturer 4	University 2	Education	Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
Lecturer 5	University 2	Humanities and Social Sciences	Theology and Religious studies
Lecturer 6	University 3	Social Sciences	Political Science
Lecturer 7	University 3	Education and Media Studies	Technical Education
Lecturer 8	University 3	Built Environment	Land Surveying and Physical Planning

5.4.2 *Graduates working in rural development*

Twenty-two (22) graduates working in rural development from three²³ of the four public universities were interviewed. The graduates were purposively selected from institutions which are working in rural development in Malawi. Consent was sought from both the employer and the graduate before the interview. Most of the graduates were from the faculties of social sciences, development studies, humanities, built environment, education, and media sciences, environmental sciences, and medical sciences. Faculty members from these were also interviewed as above (Table 5.1).

Graduates were identified through a purposive sampling of institutions/organisations that have a heavy presence in rural communities. The target was for graduates who are well experienced and grounded in rural development. Therefore, participants were targeted and sampled based on the following criteria set:

- 1) ***For practical reasons*** - graduates who were closer to rural communities were targeted as they provided more depth in their articulation of issues.
- 2) ***Feasibility*** - given the time and resources, the researcher reached out to graduates in thirteen (13) of the twenty-eight (28) districts in the country.
- 3) ***Value addition to the study*** - Graduates were chosen based on the value they would add to the study's objectives. For instance, a deliberate effort was made to target respondents who are working on different thematic areas with rural areas, such as health, education and agriculture among others.

Table 6. Description of graduate interviewees

²³ At the point of data collection, Malawi University of Science and Technology had not yet graduated its first cohort, hence the graduates were only from LUANAR, MZUNI and UNIMA, working with different organisations in the rural development sector.

Interviewee	Gender	Field of study	Field of work	Institution
Graduate 1	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture extension	Local NGO
Graduate 2	Male	BSc. Environment and Natural Resources Management	Agriculture Health Education	International NGO
Graduate 3	Female	BA. Humanities	Community development Gender Advocacy	Local NGO
Graduate 4	Male	BSc. Nutrition and Food Sciences	Monitoring and Evaluation	International NGO
Graduate 5	Male	BSc. Economics	Health Education Agriculture	International NGO
Graduate 6	Male	BSoc. Sociology	Governance Justice and Peace	Local NGO
Graduate 7	Female	BA. Education Humanities	Community development	Local NGO

Graduate 8	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture Community Development Health	International NGO
Graduate 9	Male	BSc. Agricultural economics	Agriculture Community development	Government
Graduate 10	Female	BSc. Nursing	Health Sanitation	International NGO
Graduate 11	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture Community Development Education	International NGO
Graduate 12	Female	BSc. Environmental Sciences	Agriculture Community Development Advocacy	Local NGO
Graduate 13	Male	BSc. Agriculture Extension	Agriculture Rural community development	International NGO

Graduate 14	Female	BA Humanities	Rural development	International NGO
Graduate 15	Female	BSoc. Sociology	Gender	Local NGO
Graduate 16	Male	BSc. Agriculture	Agriculture	Government
Graduate 17	Male	BA. Journalism	Agriculture	Local NGO
Graduate 19	Male	BSc. Agriculture	Agriculture	International NGO
Graduate 20	Female	BSc. Nutrition and Family Sciences	Rural development	Local NGO
Graduate 21	Male	BSc. Water Resources Management	Water development	Government
Graduate 22	Male	BSc. in forestry	Rural development	International NGO

5.4.3 Rural development stakeholders (employers)

The study interviewed directors or senior managers from ten (10) institutions (government or non-governmental), whose work focuses on rural development. Table 5.3 provides a list of the institutions, which were targeted, the type of institution, and the reasons why they formed part of the study.

Table 7. List of rural development institutions targeted and reasons for their choice

Name of Institution	Type/Category	Why Chosen
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1	Catholic Development Commission (CADECOM)	Faith-based	National coverage, implements integrated programmes in rural development
2	Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services in the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development,	Government	Nationwide presence, focus on rural development, and employs more graduates
3	Department of Social Welfare and Community Development	Government	Nationwide presence, integrated work in rural development, and employs more graduates
4	Farmers Union of Malawi	Local NGO	Nationwide presence, works with rural smallholder farmers, employs many graduates
5	Civil Society Agriculture Network (CISANET)	Network of NGOs working in Agriculture	National coverage and employs many graduates; works with diverse NGOs implementing rural development projects
6	Africa Institute of Corporate Citizenship (AICC)	International NGO	National wide presence, works with smallholder farmers on governance

			and advisory, access to markets, agribusiness
7	Oxfam	International NGO	Implements integrated programmes in rural development
8	Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN)	Network on health	Represent rural people's voices on health and well-being
9	Civil Society Education Coalition (CSEC)	Education network	Works with NGOs and Institutions that implement education projects in Malawi.
10	Directorate of Rural Development in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development	Government	Nationwide, employs more graduates in rural development work

The following set of criteria motivated the choice of these institutions/organisations:

- i. **Coverage** – the researcher was interested in interviewing institutions that have wider coverage in the country, who can ably represent the diverse views on graduates' experiences with the rural areas.

- ii. ***Representational balance*** – there was a deliberate effort not to interview institutions of the same category, thus, faith-based, civil society, local and international organisations, networks, in different areas of rural development were considered.
- iii. ***Diversity*** – diverse organisations with different mandates within the broad rural development sector were targeted.
- iv. ***The number of graduates it employs*** also influenced the choices of the institutions as some local NGOs only employ diploma holders from vocational and technical colleges in rural development; here the interest was on those who employ graduates.

5.4.4 Higher education policymakers

Policymakers' perceptions of graduates' preparation for rural development were obtained from the four (4) semi-structured in-depth interviews which the study conducted. Thus, policy views were sought from the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), Malawi Institute of Education, and the Directorate of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MoEST). NCHE and MoEST are regulatory bodies for higher education in Malawi. Their views on graduates' preparation for rural development, from the policy perspective, were necessary, given that rural poverty reduction features in many of the national development strategies and policies. Malawi Institute of Education is responsible for the quality of education in Malawi, with a particular focus on curriculum development.

Table 8. Policymakers' interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Institution/Department	Rank/Position
Policymaker 1	Male	Ministry of education	Director

Policymaker 2	Male	National Council for Higher Education	Director
Policymaker 3	Female	Ministry of education	Director
Policymaker 4	Male	Malawi Institute of Education	Director

5.4.5 *Final-year university students*

Four (4) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with final-year students, one from each of the four public universities. Each FGD comprised of seven (7) students who were selected through the lecturers, on the following criteria set: (i) having a rural background, (ii) having an urban background, (iii) demonstrating interest in working in rural development (iv) discipline of study within the chosen faculties in the university, and (v) willingness to participate in the study. Final-year students were targeted to explore their motivations and ‘fit for purpose’ perceptions of rural development work, by exploring capabilities and attributes they have acquired through the university education.

Table 9. Description of students who participated in FGDs

FGD Name	Institution	Faculty	Number of participants
FGD 1	University 1	Development Studies	Seven

FGD 2	University 2	Environmental Sciences	Seven
FGD 3	University 3	Social Sciences	Seven
FGD 4	University 4	Academy of medical sciences	Seven

Overall, a total of 78 (20 females and 58 males) people participated in the study, representing fifty interview sessions. Table 5 below presents a breakdown of the study's participants, and the number of interviews conducted.

Table 10. Summary of the study participants

	Group of respondents	Number of respondents	Number of interviews
1	Public Universities' Officials	14	14
2	Former Public Universities' graduates working in rural development	22	22
3	Rural Development Stakeholders	10	10
4	Higher Education Policy Makers	4	4
5	Final-Year Students (FGDs)	28 (7 from each faculty)	4
	TOTAL	78	50

Source: by the author

5.4.6 *Limitations of the sampling techniques*

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling face criticisms of not being statistically representative. For instance, Stake (1995:4) argues, “participants selected through purposive sampling are unlikely to be a strong representation of others”. The argument is that data that has no statistical support cannot be generalized. However, this study was interested in the depth and not the breadth of the perceptions, and I hold the belief that generalisations are made from units of cases, which would be purposively sampled. Another criticism leveled against purposive sampling is that it is prone to biases and that consequently some interviewees would be deliberately avoided (George & Bennett, 2005). While this may hold, the reason for purposive sampling was to involve participants who have rich experience and knowledge on the subject under discussion, to get more insights from their interviews. As Ghauri and Gronhaug (2002:85) argue, “Which methods and techniques are most suitable for which research depends on the research problem and its purpose”. Thus, purposive and snowball sampling were considered fit for the purposes of answering the present study questions.

5.5 Data collection methods

Data was collected using three methods. They are: document reviews, semi-structured interviews, and FGDs. The next paragraphs provide details on each.

5.5.1 *Document reviews*

The study used document review to complement the empirical data gathered through interviews. The use of both interviews and document analysis is based on the recognition that “almost all likely sources of information, data, and ideas fall into two general types: documents and people” (Bardach, 2009:69). Document reviews allowed me to gain a rich contextual and policy understanding of how the roles of higher education are articulated.

Some of the key policy and national development strategies reviewed were: Universities' Acts, Education Sector Policies, Rural Development Sector Strategies, National Development Strategies, such as the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (I, II & III), Malawi Vision 2020, and the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, among others.

Document reviews provided the context for some of the responses in the data analysis. For instance, universities' missions and core functions gave an idea of how they are positioned for national development. The interviews were also transcribed into word format packages, and thus became documents, which were analysed. Review of higher education-related policies was key as "a university (any university) is in its documents rather than its buildings; the charter together with other documents name the university" (Owen, 2014:10). The practical challenge with document reviews was that some documents were hard to get, as they were said to be restricted to authorised staff. An example of this constitutes universities' strategic plans, and caution was made that they needed to be treated with high confidentiality. However, this did not compromise the data in any way.

5.5.2 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a conversation with a purpose, through which knowledge about the social world is constructed (Legard et al., 2003). The interviews covered among other things participants' views and perceptions on graduates' preparation for rural development (detailed sample of the interview guide is included as appendices A-E). Semi-structured interviews gave me the advantage of making follow-ups, to probe given responses, and to

get more insights on an issue. Thus, participants' answers were also used as forms of inquiry through triangulation and probing (Yin, 2003).

Through the 50 semi-structured interviews, perceptions on graduates' preparation for rural development were obtained from diverse groups of people. Each interview was unique as it was shaped by the responses and probes that followed. Semi-structured interviews proffered a depth of exploration of graduate preparation. Therefore, the use of semi-structured interviews was chosen for their flexibility and richness in seeking details from the participants. Practically, semi-structured interviews were easier to carry out. Interviews were done wherever the interviewees felt most comfortable. Again, I was able to fit into the participants' available times for the interviews. Thus, semi-structured interviews are ideal for studies that target busy people, who might be difficult to bring together, for instance, in FGDs or in responding to a questionnaire. Semi-structured interviews constituted perception seeking and the meanings participants attributed to such perceptions. The perceptions have been analysed and presented in the subsequent empirical chapters.

5.5.3 Focus group discussions (FGDs)

Four FGDs, as interactive discussions comprising of seven pre-selected participants in each, were done. I moderated each FGD, as the researcher, who knew the particular focus of the discussions. Each FGD entailed an informal and yet formal discussion with students on graduate preparation for rural development. The participants were selected based on 'set criteria'²⁴ relevant to the topic under discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Mertens, 2005).

²⁴ See section 5.4.5 on how students were selected for participation in FGDs.

All FGDs were dialogical, conversational, and moderated within the topic of graduate preparation for rural development and the broader question of universities and development. Participants would give diverse views, argue, agree, and disagree, in some cases reaching consensus on a topic of discussion (Mertens, 2005). FGDs offered more in-depth perceptions of students' preparedness for rural development. Through probing and debating it was ensured that the discussions got richer, and that clarity and varied perspectives emerged.

In all the four (4) FGDs²⁵ my interview techniques were threefold: I first posed the main question which focused on their perception on how universities have prepared them for rural development. Based on the responses then follow-up questions followed, which were more of a debate, with others arguing they were well-prepared, while others holding a different view. Thus, follow up questions were followed by probes based on the responses. The follow-up questions, in both FGDs and semi-structured interviews, ensured that I pursue detail, depth, vividness, richness, and nuances on the empirical data. Therefore, through probes, "interviews were also responsible for clarifying some of the ambiguities, contradictions, and silences" (Mtawa, 2019:123). All the interviews took place in environments that were conducive for both the researcher and the participants.

5.5.4 Summary of the data collection process

²⁵ FGDs involved seven (7) students from each of the 4 public universities from the faculties of Social Sciences at Chancellor College, Environmental Sciences at Mzuzu University, Development Studies at Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Academy of Medical Sciences at Malawi University of Science and Technology.

In summary, the whole process of data collection commenced after I was granted approval by the Economic and Management Sciences Ethics Committee in November 2018 (see appendices J-K). In Malawi, ethical clearance was granted in February 2018 by the National Committee on Research in Social Sciences and Humanities under the National Commission for Science and Technology (see appendices). Data collection was conducted during a six-month period, from February 2019 to July 2019. The process involved traveling to all the four universities and in different districts to interview graduates. All the interviews were audio-recorded, but I also kept a journal of field notes on issues that got my immediate attention during the data collection.

5.6 Data transcription

All the semi-structured interviews and FGDs were audio-recorded. The data was later transcribed verbatim, using Express Scribe Transcription Software, and typed into Microsoft word format for thematic analysis. The data transcribing process, while time-consuming, frustrating, and at times tedious (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was an excellent way of starting to familiarising myself with the data. Data transcription was a key phase towards analysis. I started observing thematic patterns in my data from listening to the audios during the transcription. Data transcription was not just an act of putting audio words down on paper, but making meanings of the data, and advancing the understanding of it (Kamler & Thomson, 2006). Transcriptions were cleaned, which involved editing without altering or changing the interview meanings. Editing involved removing interjections and repetitions

for the transcripts to form complete sentences. It formed a bridge between data collection and analysis. Data was transcribed from July 2019 to September 2019.

5.7 Data analysis

Data analysis followed transcription of the audios into Microsoft word format. From August 2019 through June 2020, I was engaged in the ‘iterative process’ concerning the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), making sense of various responses. Data analysis involved a systematic and rigorous identification of patterns, coding, and thematic categorisation. Through this process, diverse perceptions of graduates’ preparation for rural development emerged. Data analysis was informed by the research questions, on graduates’ preparation for rural development.

Data analysis began during the data collection phase, where I started to pick up some patterns from the responses. However, the actual analysis phase involved constant moving back and forth between the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to establish themes. A theme was anything that I valued as “important about the data in relation to the research question and represented some level of patterned responses or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). Table 6 illustrates the summary of the processes I went through in the thematic data analysis.

Table 11. Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Description of the process
Familiarising with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.

Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
Reviewing identified themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts. Generating thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Writing the thesis	Selection of vivid, compelling excerpts for use as examples. Final analysis of selected extracts, relating back the analysis to the research questions, and literature. Producing a scholarly thesis.

Source: Adopted and modified from Braun & Clarke (2006:87)

5.8 Ethical and practical considerations

Ethical and practical considerations concern the fact that the study involved interactions with human beings in the generation of information. As Bryman (2012:130) argues “Ethical issues cannot be ignored, as they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved”. Thus, recognising the role of ethics and values in research, my study had to abide by the

ethical procedures. Ethical approvals were sought both in Malawi and from the University of the Free State (see section 5.5.4). During data collection, before the interviews, permission, and consent to participate were requested from all the institutions and individuals involved. Ethical considerations noted throughout the study were:

5.8.1 Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants

The issue of confidentiality in qualitative studies raises particular difficulties (Bryman, 2012). In this study, I endeavoured not to record the names of participants during the interviews and FGDs. Care has been taken in the writing of the thesis, such that possibilities of identification of the participants is abated. Throughout the study, respondents are identified according to their categorisation as policymakers, employers, graduates, lecturers, deans, or heads of departments. No further identifier is provided that can expose the identity of the respondents. Every effort has been made through generalisations “to ensure that the identities of participants are never revealed or linked to the information they provide without their permission” (Padgett, 2008:67).

5.8.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

All study participants were verbally briefed about the study at the beginning of the interviews for consent. They were requested to sign a consent form that outlined information about the study. All participants were given as much information as “might be needed for them to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study” (Bryman, 2012:138). The information included the purpose of the research and the approximate time it would take in the interview. Participants were informed that they would withdraw at any point in the interview should they find reasons to do so. A sample of the consent form is included in the appendices (F-G)

5.8.3 *Do no harm principle*

The issue of harm to the participants was considered in the design of the study instruments, such that they did not contain any elements which had the potential of causing humiliation or of jeopardising anyone. For instance, all study questions were centred within the subject of the study, and no probing was done in a manner that would embarrass the participants. All interviews were carried out in a dialogical, respectful, and free conversational manner (see attached as an appendix an example of the transcript - Appendix M)

5.9 *A brief note on the field experience*

Data was collected in Malawi through a series of semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and document reviews. Audio recording allowed me to concentrate on what was being said rather than on the taking of dictation notes. I learned during the transcription that audio recording had an “advantage of capturing laughter, sighs, and sarcasm – aural aspects of the interview that are vivid and revealing” (Padgett, 2008:121). The aural aspects of the interviews were instrumental in the data analysis. Sometimes they connoted emphasis or importance and/or lower importance of an issue or idea. They helped in “getting an appreciation of what the interviewee sees as significant and important in relation to each of [my] topic areas” (Byrman, 2012:473).

Three events coincided with the data collection and analysis period. Firstly, in March 2019, Malawi was hit by cyclone Idai, one of the worst tropical cyclones on record to have affected Africa and the Southern hemisphere, leaving thousands dead and colossal damage to property. The most severely affected populations in Malawi were rural smallholding farmers. Reacting to the event, there were references to graduate preparation for disaster risk management, which did not emerge in the earlier interviews before the cyclone.

Secondly, data collection was done during the pre- and post general elections period. Malawi went to the polls for the tripartite elections on 21st May 2019, where they elected the President, Members of Parliament, and Ward Councillors. Events surrounding pre-elections and post-elections in some cases affected the planning of the interviews, as some interviews had to be rescheduled at short notice for security reasons, especially in the post-election violence that followed.

The third event relates to the outbreak of the coronavirus, popularly referred to as COVID 19, which affected, and/or has affected life in many aspects. Following South African government lockdown measures, which came into force while I was writing the thesis, physical supervision meetings were terminated. We had to resort to virtual meetings for supervision; which essentially meant that I had more time to myself to reflect on my data, although from a social perspective, it was challenging to be isolated for months.

5.10 Study limitations

There are a few limitations worth reflecting on the study. Firstly, while the study focusses on graduates' preparation for rural development, the research did not directly engage the rural communities in seeking their perceptions on how they feel about graduates' preparedness or for them to describe rurality and its associated challenges based on their lived experiences. While this would have been valuable, especially for enhancing the diversity of perspectives provided in the thesis, targeting rural communities was beyond the practical scope of the present study. Nevertheless, my own experience of coming from rural Malawi, my work experiences in rural development, and what is known about rural life from the literature, provide enough contextual understanding about some of the hardships faced by rural communities.

Secondly, data triangulation relied on document reviews, and despite easy access to most of the key government policies and strategies; it was difficult to access universities' strategic plans, which some institutions refused to share.

Thirdly, the sample size for the qualitative study was smaller in comparison to what it would have been if the study was quantitative. However, the focus of this study was on the depth of perceptions regarding graduates' preparation for rural development, not breadth, and statistics representation. Relatedly, I only sampled a few faculties, as it was practically impossible to cover all faculties given the scope and time frame for the Ph.D. completion. Similarly, for rural development stakeholders, the study focused on a few who were deemed partially representative of other stakeholders in the rural development sector based on the set criteria discussed earlier.

5.11 Conclusion

This chapter has described the research design and methodological approaches that guided the data collection. The chapter has further explained the reasons for opting for the qualitative approach and using the case study research design. Discussion on the case study was followed by the definition of the study area, sampling procedures, and targeting details. Data collection methods, semi-structured interviews, FGDs, and document reviews were explained with reasons motivating their choices. The chapter further discusses data transcription and analysis processes, before an outline of the ethical and practical considerations is given. I concluded with the study limitations. The next chapters, six, seven and eight present empirical findings on policymakers, employers, graduates, lecturers, deans, and students' perspectives on graduate preparedness and preparation for rural development. These chapter draw from the emperical data obtained through the interviews. Chapter nine is a theorization chapter, which brings the dicussion of the findings into a multi-layered conceptualization of graduate

preparation for rural development. Chapter ten is the concluding section of the thesis, which highlights the main findings, recommendations and areas for further research.

Chapter 6

Perspectives on the roles of universities in rural development

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents perspectives on the roles of universities in rural development, and the other part discusses perceptions on what empede the effectiveness of these roles or limitations of the universiteis to achive these roles in rural development. The chapter focuses on the first research question:

How do higher education policymakers articulate the roles of universities in rural development in Malawi?

Although the chapter draws heavily from higher education policymakers' views, it also refers to employers' perceptions in discussing some emerging themes. Higher education policymakers in this study refer to high ranking government officials. These are people whose offices are mandated to formulate and implement regulations, plans and policies, and enactments related to education and higher education in particular. I refer to them as 'policymakers' in the discussion. The other key stakeholders in the discussion are employers from government and non-governmental institutions in the rural development sector. They are referred to as 'employers' in the discussion.

The chapter is divided into six separate but related sections, representing a consolidated discussion of participants' perceptions. Section one provides background information for the chapter and participants. Sections two, three, four, five, and six discuss the findings according to the identified themes from the analysis. The identified themes are: the instrumental roles of universities in rural development; engendering higher education for

rural development; concerns on universities' alignment to other sectors; contextualisation and values-based graduate preparation, and graduates' inclination to white-collar jobs. The last section sums up the discussion, highlighting contradictions, implications, and silences on understanding universities' role in rural development.

For the sake of anonymity, respondents are referred to as Policymaker 1, 2, 3, and 4, and Employer 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, without specifying their institutions. Tables 6.1 and 6.2 describe the individuals who were interviewed.

Table 12. Description of policymakers

Interviewee	Gender	Institution/Department	Rank/Position
Policymaker 1	Male	Ministry of education	Director
Policymaker 2	Male	National Council for Higher Education	Director
Policymaker 3	Female	Ministry of education	Director
Policymaker 4	Male	Malawi Institute of Education	Director

Table 13. Description of employers

Interviewee	Gender	Type of Institution	Areas of work	Rank/Position
Employer 1	Male	Local NGO	Health, community development	Director
Employer 2	Male	Local NGO	Agriculture	Head of Programs

Employer 3	Female	Government	Rural development	Director
Employer 4	Male	INGO	Agriculture, education, health	Director
Employer 5	Male	Local NGO	Agriculture, health, education, community development	Director

6.2 Instrumental roles of universities in rural development

Drawing from the data analysis, policymakers and employers' views indicate that universities are potentially expected to play multiple instrumental roles in rural development. Universities are perceived as instruments for addressing the socio-economic, socio-political, and/or socio-cultural challenges facing their rural societies. Scholars hold the related view that universities are spaces where concerns for contributing to equitable human development are nurtured and life-enhancing knowledge is produced (Walker & McLean, 2016; Percy & Svenson, 2016). From the policymakers' and employers' perspectives, universities are viewed as instruments for driving rural poverty reduction. The following three interpretations of the universities' instrumental roles in rural development emerged as significant: the production of rural extension workers, researching rural societies, and harnessing rural service delivery.

6.2.1 Production of rural extension workers

Almost all policymakers held the view that universities are responsible for the production of the human capital resources needed for the development of the country. The agreed upon

perception was that universities should produce graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge required for the development of the country. The underlying assumption of this view mirrors Cloete et al.'s (2015:19) assertion that “universities have a concentration – even surplus – of expertise which should be applied to solving pressing social problems”. For instance, employers held the opinion that universities are expected to produce rural extension workers. Rural extension workers were viewed as “*graduates ably trained to engage with the rural poor in the delivery of different development initiatives*” (Employer 4). However, inferring from employers’ views, this role was merely uttered as a wish. There were strong perceptions that universities are not doing much in producing graduates who meet rural development demands.

It was assumed that through teaching, universities would contribute to rural development. Most employers seemed to argue that universities are expected to foster students’ skills, competences, and build the knowledge needed to solve rural development problems. This resonates with Walker and McLean's (2013) concept of ‘public good professionals’, i.e. graduates who are expected to possess “values, knowledge, and skills to provide services to the public, which expand the opportunities to lead better lives (capabilities) and the achievement (functionings) that their clients have reason to value” (Walker & McLean, 2013:1-2).

The view of universities as instruments for social change in rural communities was also shared by policymakers. An excerpt below provides evidence from one of the policymakers:

Universities provide skills to individual students to prepare them for the social development of rural areas. Development of rural areas require skilled graduates,

talk of health, agriculture, and education itself, all these require people who have gone to university. If the rural areas are to have a good road, someone with an engineering university background must have worked there. So the examples are many, universities have got a very big role in providing necessary skills, knowledge, and students' attitude required for the development of the rural areas (Policymaker 1).

Deducing from the excerpt, rural extension is conceptualised beyond the 'agriculture-only model of rural development', which has proven inadequate in addressing poverty reduction (Gasperini, 2000:2). For instance, there is mention of health, agriculture, education, infrastructure, and engineering, all within the conceptualisation of social development. These perceptions imply that rural development is about the holistic and multidimensional development of rural people.

6.2.2 Researching rural societies

Policymakers and employers valued universities for their roles in knowledge production that would lead to rural social change. Positioning higher education as a public good, which aims to foster rural social development, challenges universities to overcome an 'ivory tower' mentality. Policymakers and employers' views would be interpreted as framed alongside that of Maassen and Cloete (2010) as well as Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley's (2009) conceptualisation of 'universities as engines of development'. The overriding idea from both policymakers and employers was that universities are centres of knowledge production for social development. Interviewees were clear that universities would fulfill these roles not only by strengthening their teaching functions but also knowledge production through researching rural development. The following excerpts are illustrative::

Universities are extremely important in our national development agenda in Malawi. They drive the production of knowledge required to change societies, including the rural societies you are talking about. They do this through various types of research that feed into national policies (Policymaker 3).

It is from universities that we rely on well researched and scientifically viable development knowledge which we can replicate in our programming. The research functions of universities are key to rural development in Malawi (Employer 2).

First of all research. Universities need to do a lot of research on the dynamics of rural development in Malawi from where they can draw key elements to be included in the numerous course offered in the universities. I am not talking about research that is desk review, or looking at what others have done; we need to invest in defining what are the rural poverty reduction needs in Malawi and how can we prepare graduates for this work. We are caught in between old methodologies that is why all our efforts in rural development just go into agriculture development forgetting other dimensions (Employer 1).

There were some nuances in both employers' and policymakers' voices related to what Arjen et al. (2004) call university education for integrated rural development. While research has been described as the missing mission of African universities (Atuahene, 2011), the participants' views seem to suggest a new paradigm shift that pushes universities to re-think and re-consider this role in the wake of continued rural poverty.

The importance of research to society is also acknowledged by non-academic stakeholders from different non-government organisations and government departments. They argued that through researching rural societies, students would acquire knowledge, skills, and capabilities on a broad spectrum of issues related to rural development. Employers identified research as the weak areas in the universities, and they seemed to argue that students and lecturers are involved in research that is not contextually relevant, doing research for its own sake, and not to change anything. Employers argued how universities lose opportunities in exposing students to rural areas through their dissertations. They

argued that given the context, students should be encouraged to research issues related to rural development, and come up with practical suggestions for rural poverty reduction.

6.2.3 *Harnessing rural service delivery*

The role of universities in harnessing rural service delivery is framed within the notion that there are linkages between education and human development (Boni & Gasper, 2012; Flores-Crespo, 2007; Walker, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000). Policymakers and employers argue that universities are instrumentally important as service providers. Both policymakers and employers hold the notion that universities do not exist in a vacuum; they are part of the larger society to which they are also accountable for service delivery. The idea of ‘harnessing service delivery’ was particularly linked to universities’ roles in citizenship education:

Universities do not operate in a vacuum; their missions and priority programs are expected to be responsive to rural social needs. In other words, societal demands should drive what the universities are offering. In my view, any university programs should be directed at its contribution to producing graduates who can add value to the implementation of development in its society. Otherwise, they would be training graduates who are of not much value to their societies (Employer 2).

I think our universities need to redirect their focus towards preparing graduates with special attention to solving rural poverty issues if the country is to develop holistically. Rural poverty remains our greatest social challenge, of course, this is not to downplay urban poverty, but numbers of the rural poor tell stories of the magnitude of rural poverty in our county (Policymaker 1).

The interviewed employers and policymakers hold the view that universities can harness students’ capabilities for social change in rural areas through fostering their public good agency, i.e. by preparing them with the mind to be of service to the public in their various professions. However, based on the excerpts above, these participants do not speak with

affirmation, that this is what universities are actually doing. Both employers and policymakers seem simply to make propositions for the universities' roles in harnessing community engagement. Their ideas would be interpreted as pushing towards the idea of 'university-community engagement' (Mtawa, 2019), which would potentially contribute to universities' fulfilling their contributions to rural development, as universities would become more engaged with rural societies.

6.3 Engendering higher education for rural development

Engendering higher education for rural development was perceived to intentionally mean raising consciousness or awareness of the roles of universities in rural poverty reduction. Poverty reduction essentially leads to human development, where poverty is understood as a deprivation of basic well-being capabilities (Sen, 1999). Description of engendered higher education for rural development was prefaced by the following three somewhat functional views of universities: expanding spaces for rural poverty reduction, enhancing rural livelihoods, and cultivation of robust and agentic graduates.

6.3.1 Expanding spaces for rural poverty reduction

The conventional core functions of universities (teaching/learning, research, and community engagement) are all linked to the broader concept of knowledge production. However, the question remains, knowledge for what? Interviewees were expressive that universities would expand their roles by involving themselves more *through* and *in* rural poverty reduction. Their views of expanding university roles as 'spaces for rural poverty reduction' support other scholars' views on the developmental roles of universities (Teferra, 2008; Lulat, 2003,). Thus, engendering higher education for rural development

was seen as universities expanding their roles to contribute to rural poverty reduction. Expanding spaces for rural poverty reduction, aside from the other functions that universities have, means that they can go the extra mile by preparing graduates towards rural development. By implication, this would involve universities producing graduates who have skills, knowledge, attributes, and capabilities to contribute to the enhancement of the rural people's well-being. The excerpt below sums up views on expanding spaces for rural poverty reduction:

The university does not serve society only in training its potential leaders. The university must be able to feel the needs and aspirations of different groups of people who are to benefit from its products [graduates]. In our context [ruralized], university education should not depart from preparing graduates who are knowledgeable and capable of dealing with the problems of rural poverty (Policymaker 1).

Therefore, this notion of expanding spaces for rural poverty reduction challenges universities to pay attention to fostering graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development.

6.3.2 Enhancing rural livelihoods

Policymakers' arguments for the 'service-oriented functions' of the university were illustratively made in reference to enhancing rural livelihoods. It is against this background that the rural poor's well-being is often constrained by limited well-being capabilities and opportunities. By way of definition, a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living (DFID, 2000). Policymakers' views posit that universities are influential in enhancing the rural people's livelihoods. They referred to how universities are contributing to the living conditions of the rural poor

through human resource training in the sectors of agriculture, health and education among others. One policymaker supported this claim, arguing that “*Our universities train a lot of nurses and teachers who work in rural hospitals and schools*” (Policymaker 3). However, this view was opposed by employers who lamented that most rural institutions, such as community secondary schools, agriculture planning areas, and rural health centres do not have graduates working there.

Notwithstanding, the consensual view among policymakers was that universities are playing an important role in rooting out the fundamental obstacles hindering the improvement of the rural people’s livelihoods. However, they failed to articulate how this is done in practical terms with the rural people. It is one thing to train teachers and nurses, and another to motivate them to work in rural areas. The observation that most graduates are not interested to work in rural areas is also acknowledged by others, including government development policies (GoM, 2016; Chinsinga & Kayuni, 2008).

Enhancing rural livelihoods was envisioned by policymakers as universities’ ability to address the structural challenges that constrain the rural people’s well-being. This would require universities to analyse and dissect rurality and its associated poverty in their teaching, research, and community engagement functions. Thus, by implication, this would relate to Cloete et al.’s (2015:2) assertion that “universities cannot be single-purpose institutions, but rather must be pluralistic in the sense of combining various functions”. Pluralistic views are based on the fact that livelihood is a broad development area, encompassing many others such as health, education, agriculture and governance etc. Excerpts below provide empirical illustrations of policymakers’ perceptions on universities’ role of enhancing rural livelihoods:

Our university system in Malawi would be seen contributing to rural development if they can ably produce graduates who will contribute to enhancing rural livelihoods, rural health, rural education, and rural self-governance. These are areas that define rural poverty in Malawi... we cannot talk of eradicating or reducing poverty without a clear focus on these areas, and as a nation, we depend on the caliber of graduate universities produce to undertake development in these key areas (Policymaker 2).

I would say universities are failing to meet one of their principal missions, that of community service and the larger part of the community here in Malawi is rural. You know, although we are a rural-based country, our knowledge of rural development in this country is very low, and studies or researches on rural development are very sketchy. Check it out, you will not find many publications, if any, on rural development in Malawi (Policymaker 1).

Without disregarding the other roles of universities, the purpose of this study is to explore how they can foster graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development. The assumption is that well-prepared graduates would be committed to social change in rural communities and contribute to addressing multiple deprivations faced by the rural poor.

6.3.3 Cultivation of robust and agentic graduates

Although universities are not primarily frontiers of rural development, it is argued in this thesis that they should contribute to it through fostering graduates' agency and aspirations. Universities' cultivation of robust and agentic graduates is argued as “*awakening students to the realization of the social inequalities existing within the societies, which are associated with the binary division of urbanity and rurality*” (Policymaker 4). Another policymaker further argued that “*our universities have a bigger role in preparing graduates to work in rural areas apart from enhancing their professional accolades* (Policymaker 2). These views imply that while discipline-specific knowledge is important, students ought to be instilled with a sense of agency towards change for the rural other,

meaning that, as graduates, they should be moved and motivated to contribute to rural development. Having agency towards contributing to rural social changes aligns with Nixon's (2011) idea of 'public good citizenship', Walker and McLean's (2013) 'public good professionalism', and Nussbaum's (1997) 'global citizenship and narrative imagination'. It means graduates who do not only think about themselves but are also connected and affiliated to the rural people such that through their university knowledge they imagine and are motivated to contribute to enhancing the rural people's well-being. Thus, from the policymakers' views, they 'aspire' to produce graduates whose acquired university knowledge is used in society as a public or common good. I use the word 'aspire' as their voices did not clearly indicate that universities are currently doing this.

My understanding of the concept of 'cultivating robust and agentic graduates' draws from empirical statements of policymakers. For instance, the following excerpts provide examples:

When universities are preparing graduates, they ought to consider the context graduates are going to work in, where they are going to work, with whom and how they are going to work and cultivate in them the sense of being responsible and accountable to their society (Policymaker 2).

It has been our expectation that universities prepare graduates who are charged with the desire to contribute to the development of the country. But how can they be said to contribute to the development of the country if they shun working in rural areas? We need people, like graduates who can drive the development of rural areas, and universities have a big role in preparing such graduates, graduates empowered and motivated to work as citizens of Malawi (Employer 3).

Policymakers' views seemed to position graduates into a spin of action towards rural poverty reduction. However, in doing this, universities would need to adopt pedagogical and curriculum practices that are dynamic in fostering graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development.

6.4 Contextualised and values-based university education

The idea of universities' relevance to local contexts has been discussed by many scholars such as Cloete et al. (2015), Assié-Lumumba (2006), and Brock-Utne (2003). University education is valued for the roles it plays in the socio-economic and human development of its society. Policymakers and employers' perceptions of the roles of universities in rural development seem to position universities towards *"building local capacity to solve its local context-specific problems related to poverty"* (Policymaker 1). This is where the concept of 'contextualised and value-based university education' is drawn from, based on its frequency in the policymakers' responses. 'Values-based university' means educating for a contextually relevant purpose, with adherence to the belief that knowledge without action is insufficient (Bosio, 2019). Thus, the thinking about contextualised and values-based university education carries with it aspects of agentic values, meaning graduates knowing the context of poverty and inspired to take action for change based on what they have reason to value.

The depiction of 'contextualised and value-based university education' is represented in this discussion by several related conceptual themes. The thematic concepts are: citizenship competences, fostering local needs, shared humanity, social/public good, and theory and practice integration. I discuss these conceptual themes by providing their explanations with empirical evidence from the interviews' excerpts, quotations, and summaries.

6.4.1 A quest for cultivating citizenship capacities

Universities in their teaching and learning functions are expected to produce graduates who can engage with the development needs of their contexts. Policymakers' views appear to

suggest that universities are mandated to shape graduates' values as responsible citizens of their country. It was argued that one of the universities' unique contributions to the development of the country is *"by producing caring and responsible graduates, who do not only have competent skills to work but also and more importantly, the heart to serve their country through their work"* (Policymaker 2). This is what I conceptualise as a quest for cultivating citizenship capacities among students.

The concept of 'citizenship competences' and/or 'citizenship capacities', as also discussed by Luescher-Mamashela et al. (2015) and Cloete et al. (2015), is an essential part of understanding contextually relevant education. Interpreted within the framework of citizenship capacities and competences, policymakers' views of universities' role in rural development is that they should foster citizenship education, meaning that they should produce graduates who are responsible to their nations. I call this citizenship education because policymakers seem to argue that universities shape civic values, democratic principles, and capacities, which reflect the society of which they are part. However, this view was challenged by that of certain employers who seemed to argue that universities are not producing graduates competent enough to address contextual development challenges, such as rural poverty.

Notwithstanding employers' divergent views, policymakers appear to describe citizenship education as universities' capability of preparing graduates who can contribute to rural social changes. The excerpt is an example of how policymakers viewed university education:

...the thing is education must reflect the society where it comes from ...most of the time, for a long time now; our education has been removed from the people. We

teach our students foreign things leaving contextually relevant examples. Maybe, I do not know about your primary school, but in our time, we learned about the Great Lakes, and never learned about streams or rivers that are behind our own schools. That is not good education. I am giving you an example of primary school because the problem of education's relevance to society affects all levels of our education system. Our students end up memorizing things that are not relevant in their society; they fail to connect to their life most of the things they learn in schools, as they are contextually alien to them (Policymaker 1).

Views from policymakers seemed to indicate that citizenship competence includes university education that prioritises graduates' preparation, particularly with respect to their capacities and competencies to address contextual needs. These perceptions imply that university education is designed to develop a citizenry capable of engaging with the most intractable problems of their societies, including rural poverty. Therefore, such being the case, the value of university education is directly related to its ability to develop its society.

Further, by implication from the above, a contextualised and value-based university education would avoid "being rejected by their own societies and [be] considered alien to their problems and struggles" (Castells, 2001:213). Therefore, fostering citizenship competences would be described as universities' ability to produce graduates with high-level excellence, acumen, and commitment to rural development. One policymaker posited that *"We should be proud that to a certain extent our universities produce responsible citizens, for instance, some of our leaders, and ourselves are graduates from University of Malawi"* (Policymaker 1). Views of citizenship competences, as deduced from the empirical data, align with what Cloete et al. (2015:232) call "a complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes, and desire" for human development. Therefore, what may appear to be promulgated by policymakers' views is a call for

universities to produce graduates who are not just professionally qualified but who also have the capabilities for being critical citizens in their contexts.

6.4.2 Engaging in promoting local needs

Employers' defined universities' roles and relevance in terms of their ability to foster and cater for local needs. They seemed to place a strong emphasis on 'university education relevance' being defined by its practicability in addressing the country's development needs. The recurring argument from employers was that universities must not be cut off from local and valued contextual issues. On the other hand, policymakers were of the 'opinion' that universities ought to develop programmes that are geared towards addressing not only global issues but local challenges in their society. I use the word 'opinion' as their articulations were often not quite emphatic. This is what some policymakers said:

Universities in Malawi should not only fulfill international standards but also local requirements and needs. Our universities should produce graduates who have the passion and zeal to contribute to the development of their country (Policymaker 1).

Universities first exist for the development of this nation. As such we always ensure that their programs are aligned to the development needs of this country (Policymaker 2).

In most of the interview responses, policymakers frequently used normative phrases, not being unequivocal on their positions as policyholders, enactors, and overseers. For instance, in the above excerpts, we read "universities *should*", not "universities *are*". Normative responses may suggest silences which in turn point at the fact that universities are not doing something which they are supposed to do. Their tendency to make propositions for the universities' new direction, puts them in the category of higher education commentators, not guardians and overseers of policy and practice. I further raise

concerns that policymakers' idealising of universities' roles, instead of giving concrete and systematic policy evidence, raises concerns. One wonders how much the so-called policy institutions influence universities' functions and roles when they can only argue like outsiders on matters they are supposed to speak about with practical examples at their fingertips.

6.4.3 Shared common humanity

The concept of 'shared humanity', which I have drawn from the data analysis, is closely linked to individuals' interconnectedness. I use the concept of 'shared common humanity' to explain participants' views that *"universities and [their] constituents are part of the larger society; affiliated and depend[ent] on each other"* (Policymaker 1). Policymakers argued that universities and their constituents co-exist in what I would call a 'symbiotic relationship':

Without people there cannot be value in having the university. Universities are entities that depend on people, and their own foundational base is to serve people, be it through research or what. Human interest comes first in all university undertakings (Policymaker 1).

Policymakers' views were suggestive of the fact that universities demonstrate shared values by upholding human development values, aspirations, and desires for their populations. Policymakers talked about 'learning to feel for others through university education'. Consequently, this could result in aspirations for rural social change:

We expect graduates to be able to apply what they have learned in the university in addressing problems within their context. University education must make students learn about realities around them, learn to feel such realities, think about them critically, and engage in responding to societal development problems (Policymaker 1)

[The] contextual relevance of our universities would entail the adoption of university programs that are in keeping with the national development realities, organizing the delivery of university programs around preparing students to solve problems that are affecting their societies (Policymaker 4).

The excerpts above show that there is a correlation between the concepts of shared common humanity, with contextualised value-based university education. From the policymakers' perspectives, the value of university education is acknowledged when it shares through its functionalities a concern for the well-being of the people. My thinking about universities' in relation to shared common humanity, departs from higher education conceptions as 'ivory tower universities' or elite institutions divorced from the people. This is partly influenced by the fact that the interviewed policymakers speak of a university that 'responds to its societal problems', not distancing itself from its people. Therefore, policymakers' views would seem to advance universities' connection with the practical realities of their world. The perceptions, through this concept of 'shared common humanity', seem to challenge alienation and privileged seclusion which characterise the ivory tower mentality of universities. This deviation may indicate a break-away from 'western' ideals of what a university should be. This re-affirms ideas about the developmental and contextually relevant university as the basis for national development. Nkrumah (1957) quoted in Oppong (2013) argues that we must seek an African view of the problems of Africa, not that western techniques and methods do not apply to Africa, but we must look at every problem from the African point of view. Thus, the ideas of shared common humanity link to the utilisation and importance of indigenous knowledge.

6.4.4 Fostering social/public good capacities

During interviews with policymakers, perceptions of university education as a ‘social reform’ (Walker & McLean, 2013) emerged. Amongst the policymakers’ responses, there was considerable positioning of the social-transformative roles of university education. Much weight in the policymakers’ responses was placed on how university education prepares graduates who should be serving their societies in line with local citizenship capacities. This view is considered within the conceptual understanding of the public good values of higher education. This implies that higher education is of service to the nation, not only beneficial to the individual graduate, but through the use of his or her knowledge to the larger public. While these views of ‘the public good role of universities’ were crosscutting and recurred in most of the interviews, an excerpt below from one policymaker forms a good starting point for the discussion:

Being a graduate from the public universities, it is as if you were given service, and by the end of the day, after graduating you need to give back your services to the community, who through taxes contributed to your education. Yeah, to me public university is a service, you were given that opportunity to go to the university, so when you graduate you are also supposed to give back to the community by being of service in contributing to solving the development problems of your society (Policymaker 2).

Policymakers’ views on universities’ role as a public good should be interpreted in a context where university education is appreciated for its values and relevance to society. Policymakers seemed to hold the view that knowledge, which graduates acquire in universities, is for the public good, much as it empowers the individual graduate. Policymakers seemed to hold a canonical conviction that graduates ought to use their university knowledge for the good of society. They justified their position, arguing that

graduates contribute to solving societal development problems in their different undertakings, directly and/or indirectly. Thus, university education is perceived as a social good. However, views of universities as a public good are not new in higher education discourse. For instance, it has earlier been discussed by other scholars such as Adriana et al. (2005), Nixon (2011), and Walker and Boni (2016), among others. This indicates that there is a growing and recurring agreement among stakeholders that universities are public good institutions. However, in this study, the perception is founded on universities' roles as drivers of economic growth and human development, with particular attention to rural human development.

Contributing to the discussion, employers also seemed to construe graduates as active agents of development. Their argument was backed by the understanding of universities' role of producing a highly skilled and competent labour force and new development knowledge (Cloete, Bunting & Van Schalkwyk, 2015). This position is well summed up by Nixon (2011:59) in the quote below:

Higher education is a public good because it provides the human goods of capability, reason, and purposefulness. These collective goods sustain and enhance the public good, but by means that cannot always be pre-determined and with outcomes that can be very rarely pre-specified.

From the literature and empirical data, there seems to be an emphasis that contextually relevant higher education has the potential of being a catalyst for rural societal changes. Universities, as public good entities, contribute to “the production and consolidation of values – ethical, personal values – and the formation of flexible personalities” (Castells

1994:4). For instance, from the interview responses, leadership was conceived as a public good. An example of such views is provided in the excerpt below:

Our universities shape the leaders we have. Most of the people holding high offices in the country are products of the University of Malawi. Universities do not only prepare people with technical competences but also leadership skills in various areas (Policymaker 3).

It would seem obvious from the interviewee that university education is considered a public good. However, the question to ask is ‘why should we bother about graduate agency and aspirations, if the university is already considered a public good?’ The question itself suggests that there is still more we need to unearth in what it means to conceptualise university education as a public good. In this study, it would seem that both employers and policymakers’ understanding of the public refers to the local citizen, the majority of whom live in rural areas, meaning that the public good has to encompass well-being opportunities for the rural local citizens, who are often constrained by various deprivations. However, producing such graduates would require a different kind of education, given that there are evidences of graduates' lack of interest in working in rural areas.

Therefore, as Barnett (1994:8) argues, the values of university education are measured by “its capacity to reproduce its host society, both economically and culturally”. In thinking about fostering graduates’ agency and aspiration for rural development, from this public or social good perspective, the call is for universities to produce agentic and civic-minded graduates. In the words of Nixon (2011:26), it is about universities producing graduates “who are not only efficient and effective in their use of acquired knowledge, but who can use that knowledge to make complex choices regarding the right uses and application of that knowledge”. The study is pushing universities to consider producing graduates who

can use their knowledge not only for themselves but for the rural good of the rural people and societies, in what I describe as being civically educated.

6.5 Graduates' inclinations to white-collar jobs

This section examines the theme of graduates' inclination to white-collar jobs as it emerged from analysing employers' and policymakers' understanding of universities' role in rural development. This section essentially discusses factors that impede the effectiveness of the roles of university in rural development or limitations of the universities to achieve these roles in rural development. Six conceptual sub-themes were identified as supporting the broader perception of graduates' inclinations to white-collar jobs. The conceptual sub-themes, which I discuss below with empirical evidence from interviews are: 'graduate elitism', 'postcolonial reminiscences', 'limited supply of desirable graduates', 'graduate background' and 'attitudinal values'.

6.5.1 Graduate elitism

Drawing from employers' and policymakers' perceptions, graduate elitism in this context implies how graduates elevate themselves or are elevated above everyone else as "*untouchables*" and "*superbly distinct learned individuals*". Interviewees reported that few people who make it to the public universities in Malawi consider themselves as '*untouchables*' and the '*crème de la crème of the society*', reserved for higher echelon administrative positions in government offices. Thus, employers argued that graduates are less motivated to work in rural areas because they feel they do not deserve working in such 'low-status environments'. As such, "*they are inclined to white-collar jobs in offices, which they [graduates] feel befit their academic qualifications*" (Employer 3).

Policymakers also seemed aware that some graduates are divorced from rural societies, and have no inclinations to working there. It would seem that motivation for working in rural areas is constrained by lack of and/or limited aspirations and agency toward social and rural development. From the policymakers' and employers' views, university education seems to establish among graduates “codes of distinction between them and the rest of the society” (Castells, 2001:207). Thus, it can be argued that elitism diminishes among graduates in what Walker and McLean (2013) call ‘capability of collective struggle’. With their sense of elitism, graduates are not charged or inspired as part of the society to which they ought to contribute in enhancing its well-being. In a sense, elitism breeds individualism and upholding of the capitalist views of higher education which solely value its private good to the individual graduate. There were sentiments from employers that most graduates valued their employment for the sake of the income it brings them, with examples of less passionate graduates in their work.

Against the background of lack of capability for collective struggle, graduates fail to remain in the rural areas. Often, graduates’ choices of work are urban centres’²⁶, not remote rural areas, where they can access services that satisfy their lifestyles. Universities seem to bestow elite status among graduates. Elite status is here not understood in Castells’ (2001) terms of universities as important for ‘elite formation’. In the newly independent African

²⁶ It is important to acknowledge that rural areas may also present a challenge of having fewer formal job opportunities, so that even if there are graduates who would like to work in rural areas, the job market in rural areas may not offer favourable opportunities for secure and decent jobs. However, the current statistics, as per Chinsinga and Kayuni (2008), National Community Development Policy (GoM, 2016b), and National Agriculture Policy (GoM, 2016a), there are high graduate vacancy rates in rural development sectors. While universities may seem to not be producing sufficient graduates prepared for these sectors, the study findings highlight graduates’ disinterest in working in rural areas.

nations, the notion of elite formation was an ideological function for universities. Universities were considered important for elite formation through training of a labour force that would take over national administrative functions from colonial masters. These elites had a public good function in mind, but what is being lamented here is the lack of this public good value attached to one's university education.

This study pushes universities towards graduate consciousness to rural development demands, as they become prepared. The aspiration is that universities cultivate collective agency among graduates who would, in turn, enhance the well-being of rural communities. Voices from one of the policymakers captured in the excerpt below provide the context of the challenges associated with graduates' elitism and inclination towards white-collar jobs:

Often students in Malawi think of white-collar jobs when they graduate rather than being innovative and entrepreneurial-minded. Again, it seems no one wants to work in rural areas, almost everyone dreams of working in Blantyre, Lilongwe, or Mzuzu when they graduate. You will notice that even when graduates are employed to work in rural areas, they take up the job just because they do not want to remain unemployed, but they keep searching until they find an opportunity to leave the rural areas. It is as if during their university time they are not prepared and motivated to work in rural areas (Policymaker 1).

By implication, graduates' elitism seems to counter universities' potential in contributing to rural poverty reduction. It would seem that universities' graduates are not motivated to work in rural areas where, through their university knowledge and skills, they would potentially contribute to rural social change through enhancing well-being opportunities for the rural people.

6.5.2 *Postcolonial reminiscences*

The sub-theme of ‘postcolonial reminiscences’ is drawn from the policymakers’ perceptions that graduates’ inclination to white-collar jobs has historical antecedents. For instance, almost all the interviewed policymakers shared the view that:

The first graduates of the University of Malawi were prepared for administrative and government office duties, a function of the university that has presumably remained to date, and affects graduates’ mentality and attitude towards the kind of work they aspire to do” (Policymaker 1).

A conclusion that could be drawn from policymakers’ perceptions would suggest that the university education system in Malawi still suffers from its initial postcolonial ideologies that formed its foundational mission. However, this problem is not only with Malawi’s higher education, as Castells. (2001) argues that higher education in Africa is still an elite system. Within this idea of ‘postcolonial reminiscences’, graduates’ preparation would be perceived as “recruitment of social elites” (Castells, 2001:213). An excerpt below represents the general policymakers’ views on the impact of postcolonialism on graduates’ negativities towards working in rural areas:

The notion of university graduates being prepared for white-collar jobs dates back from the history of university education in Malawi. The first graduates in the 1960s were prepared for administrative and office work, taking over from the white colonizers. This function of the university has remained in the psyche of Malawians; those who go to university always think they would be employed in some white-collar jobs at Capital Hill or heading some organizations or institutions. It is unimaginable for most students for a graduate to work in rural areas, hence even those who do extension programs still aspire to work in offices instead of being on the ground (Policymaker 1).

It should be observed that postcolonial reminiscences would have ideally applied to graduates of UNIMA only. The other three universities, MZUNI, LUANAR, and MUST, were established long after independence. However, the seeming generalisation of this

view by policymakers would suggest some ‘cultured social perception of university education’ in Malawi. Graduate elitism (discussed above) would be one of the ‘cultured social perceptions of university education’ in Malawi. By ‘cultured social perception’ I mean the way in which society has come to see universities and its graduates over time in relation to the society itself. Therefore, such perceptions, as argued, would be influenced by postcolonial legacies.

6.5.3 Limited supply of desirable and relevant graduates

Policymakers were of the view that graduates’ inclinations to white-collar jobs are influenced by the limited number of graduates produced in the country. Thus, another contributing factor to elitist or graduate desires for white-collar jobs relates to limited access to university education. Due to limited access to university education, policymakers claimed that ‘public universities’ graduates’ are always in demand. Particular emphasis was placed on public universities’ graduates, not graduates in general.

The emphasis placed on public universities’ graduates was based on assumptions that they are better prepared than those from private universities. This view was shared by both employers and policymakers. This discussion merits a separate study that would look at access to private university education vis-à-vis public universities, and stakeholders’ satisfaction with their graduates’ outcomes.

Access to public universities in Malawi is limited by many factors, chief among them being limited learning spaces (Chimombo, 2003). Nevertheless, limited access to university education is a regional problem, as Castells (2001: 6) argues that the “higher education participation rate in sub-Saharan Africa is still much lower than in the rest of the world,

currently averaging from 5 – 10 percent”. For instance, in Malawi, according to the latest World Bank study on higher education, less than one per cent enroll in tertiary education [80 students per 100,000 inhabitants] (Mambo et al., 2016). The figures are much lower for university access, as higher education in the study encompassed all postsecondary education.

Malawi compares unfavourably with other countries in the region in terms of university access. *“At a point, we had one university in the country, and that meant limited intake against the high graduate demands with the growing economy”* (Policymaker 4). Therefore, from the private good perspective, it can be argued that limited access increases graduates’ demand. It created more opportunities for them. In a way, it enhanced their window of choice on what they want to be. The expectation from the interviewees is that graduates are prepared to make choices that are not only good to them as individuals but also to the society of which they form part. This view pushes graduates’ roles as public or social good agents while acknowledging that as individuals they also have the right to value being and doing.

6.5.4 Graduate background

Employers and policymakers also identified graduates’ background as a factor to their inclinations to white-collar jobs. In terms of graduate background, district of origin and family background were identified as perfect predictors of university access in Malawi. For instance, one policymaker pointed out one scenario worthy of consideration. He narrated that the Northern region of Malawi, which is highly ruralised with a small population, has historically produced more graduates. These graduates have now settled in urban centres

or cities, almost abandoning the northern region which is their original home. Children of these graduates have better opportunities for university education as they are able to access good pre-university education. This is mentioned in view of the fact that “Urban districts account for a higher share of enrollment compared to rural districts, in part due to the concentration of poverty in rural Malawi” (Mambo et al., 2016:26). When these graduates with urban backgrounds and no rural connection get to university, they hardly aspire to work in rural areas. It would be argued that they have no connection or affiliation to the rural areas. From this case, it would be seen that graduates’ background influences their inclination towards the work they aspire to do. This is one reason this study pushes for a kind of graduate preparation that is designed to cultivate among students capabilities that enhance their aspirations and agency for rural development, as in motivation and drive towards rural social change.

An extract from the conversation with one policymaker on the roles of universities in rural development gives a general glimpse of graduates’ inclination to white-collar jobs:

For some reason, which is not clear, students think that when they obtain their degrees, they have to work in offices. Are you not surprised to see many of the graduates who have done courses related to technical work or rural development, pushing their way in office work, even if their studies demand that they work in rural areas? University education in Malawi sets you apart from the rest of the people and going back in the rural areas as a graduate is seen as demonstrating that you have not gotten the much sought after higher education, which opens many prosperous doors for you. Some of us who have access to higher education feel we are above everyone in society who has not attained university education, but we are not (Policymaker 2).

From the excerpt above, the inclination to white-collar jobs is seen as something that does not only apply to those with an urban background. It would appear that even those from

the rural background do not want ‘to go back to the rural areas’ after attaining a university education. This further justifies why universities would need to reflect on cultivating graduates’ agency and aspirations for rural development so that the rural people also benefit from the graduate services. This discussion takes graduates’ services to communities as a social justice issue, given that poverty is associated with social inequalities.

6.5.5 Attitudinal values

Analysis of both policymakers and employers’ perspectives seems to indicate that attitude affects one’s inclination or otherwise, to rural development work. Linking to the issue of graduates’ background, it appears that when students enter the university they already have set attitudes about what they will do, what they cannot do, and what they will become. While this is not bad, that students have a pre-selected set of choices on what they want to be upon graduation, it is expected that university education as an agent of capability space formation should help these students to widen their choices to include working towards rural social change. The question is: how can universities train graduates to aspire and act in relation to rural development? Employers’ views were that graduates’ lack of motivation to work in rural areas also arise from negativities in describing rural areas, which affects graduates’ attitudes towards rural areas. That is to say the conception of rural development, which society has formed, influences graduates’ attitudes towards wanting to work in rural areas. The two excerpts below give an idea of what went into interviewees’ thinking when they seemed to indicate that attitude affects one’s inclination, motivation, and willingness to work in rural areas, among others:

It is unfortunate that ‘rural’ is associated with so many negativities. There seems to be almost nothing positive said when we describe rural areas, which is wrong.

Of course, some conditions in rural areas are deplorable, but as development front liners we should always realize that people live there and they are human as we are (Employer 2).

Most of the EPAs have no graduate extension workers. Of course, there are two reasons for this; firstly, we have few graduates trained in extension service delivery, and secondly, those few, most of them are not willing to work in rural areas because of the conditions there, or they are either working with NGOs where they are better paid than in the government (Employer 5).

Graduates' negative attitude towards rural areas has resulted in vacancy rates in the rural development sectors (Chinsinga & Kayuni, 2008). It would seem the idea of collective agency is not cultivated among many graduates, as they prioritise their well-being. Negative attitude towards rural areas demotivates and divorces graduates from aspiring to work in rural areas. Without necessarily using the word 'attitude', one can read how the concept of attitudinal values is expressed by the policymaker in the excerpt below:

We [graduates] are removed from our own rural people when we get a university education. Normally, we do not fit in rural settings again after our university education. For instance, when you go to the village as a graduate they even choose for you what kind of food you should eat and they choose where you should sit. It is as if university education makes you different from them yet you are one of them. Those who accept this kind of treatment are often the ones who have problems in working with the rural poor, for they feel they belong to the elite class by virtue of obtaining a university education (Policymaker 4).

This problem of graduate attitude, as seen from the excerpt above, is twofold: Firstly, it has to do with the ways graduates are trained and the broader trends that set them apart from the rest of the society. Secondly, the rural people themselves feel inferior to graduates, thus enhancing inequalities. It has been argued by others that university education perpetuates inequalities and social stratification through elite formation (Castells, 2001). Thus, fostering graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development, which this study

advances, would be seen as creating conditions of valued possibilities for graduates as facilitators of rural social change. Universities are called upon to instill among graduates values of friendships, understanding and respect, narrative imagination, social responsibility, and positive attitudes towards others (Mtawa, 2019). These values are instrumental in preparing graduates for rural development, because they have the potential to enhance respect for the rural poor.

6.6 Universities' mis/alignment to other sectors

Two main concerns emerged from the data analysis on the university's mis/alignment to other sectors. The first issue is centred around weak ties between university education and national development policies/strategies. The second issue concerns the weak engagements between universities and development stakeholders. The overall employers' impression seemed to suggest that universities are not well aligned to other sectors, through which their values would be assessed. University-stakeholders' alignment is here understood as "enabling interaction between key stakeholders and policy spheres" (Mouton et al., 2015:184). Therefore, conversely, where such interaction does not occur, it is a misalignment.

6.6.1 Weak ties between universities and national development strategies/policies

Empirical evidence from interviewees indicates weak ties between universities and other national development sectors. Employers were of the view that universities exist in their own world; they are '*disconnected from the real world*'. Interrogated about what this disconnection meant, responses leaned on how most of the programmes do not fit into the

country's development frameworks. For instance, employers were emphatic that *"university programs do not reflect the development needs of the country"*. For instance, it was argued that while the country is moving towards building a resilient nation after different livelihood shocks, public universities are yet to start preparing graduates for this shift in thinking. In particular, employers singled out that public universities are not yet offering specialised degree programmes in key areas such as climate change and disaster risk management²⁷. It was argued that such programmes hold the key to the development of the rural areas, the majority of its people being smallholder farmers who depend on agriculture, a prime victim of the negative impacts of climate change.

Employers' concerns herein re-echo Mambo et al. (2016), GoM (2016), and Mkandawire et al.'s (2018) observations that most of the universities' programmes in Malawi are not relevant and responsive to addressing the country's contextual needs. Although these studies do not delve into elaborating what these 'contextual needs' are, it was earlier established that rural poverty reduction tops the country's development agenda. This is what Mambo et al. (2016: xxv) said in their World Bank report on higher education:

The Malawian higher education system's inability to supply sufficient numbers of well-qualified graduates in alignment with the needs of the economy is a major constraint inhibiting the development prospects of the country (Mambo et al., 2016: xxv).

²⁷ However, when this information was crosschecked among the four public universities, it transpired that MUST has a programme in climate change and disaster risk management and that they are yet to graduate the first students on the programme. The only observation which remained was that the programme is covered from a more scientific perspective, leaving the social science dimension.

Employers' responses seemed to indicate that universities are moving in a different direction from that of the country's development agenda. Ironically, policy frameworks do acknowledge the central role of universities in the development of the country (GoM, 2001, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2018)²⁸. However, policy recognition is one thing, and putting into practice, or enacting these policies is another thing. As discussed earlier, policymakers failed to articulate the policy visions into actions, and their views emerged like those of commentators and not enactors of the policies.

6.6.2 Weak and limited engagement between universities and diverse stakeholders

Employers argued that there is less engagement between universities and other stakeholders. The most frequently cited examples of this presumed weak engagement of universities and stakeholders constituted curriculum reviews/formulation. Employers, almost all, indicated that they are not consulted by universities as they formulate or review their curricula. The few who reported having been consulted, dismissed the consultation as *"mere lip service to fulfill their [universities'] certain criteria set obligations"* (Employer 4). The general perceptions among employers are expressed in the excerpts below:

They [universities] only consult us to tick the box as our input does not feed into their programs as evidenced by what I observed through the interns they send to our institution. I had made some recommendations which were not taken on board although very useful. We cannot continually keep on receiving graduates who cannot communicate, communication skills remain taught to students in the first year, and they lose it over the years. We recommended that it should be part of the entire degree program (Employer 2).

²⁸ The strategies in question are Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I, II and III and Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy. And the policies are Malawi Education Policy and the National Education Sector Plan.

There is a complete big mismatch between the universities and the industry. We are supposed to be resource persons, but universities do not consult us in their programming. The essence of the curriculum review leaves a lot to be desired (Employer 4).

What are the implications of universities' misalignment or weak links with national development strategies/policies and stakeholders? One of the employers argued that *Malawi cannot develop if rural development is ignored*. He further stated that

We are ignoring rural development because most of the people working in rural development are not the right people. Most of them are not adequately and rightfully trained in rural development practice (Employer 3).

Earlier Chinsinga and Kayuni (2008) had found that most of the extension workers in rural community development are not trained to the degree level. Even in cases where graduates are employed in rural development sectors, employers complain that they are not well-prepared for the work. These revelations justify deep reflections on how universities prepare graduates, and in particular for rural development given the context in Malawi. Globally, employers' dissatisfaction or satisfaction with university graduates has become an issue of great concern in higher education discourse (see McCowan, 2015; Cai, 2012, Tomlinson, 2007, 2012) among others. Therefore, if universities are to play their expected roles of fostering human development (Walker & Boni, 2016), there ought to be a way they prepare graduates, which is sensitive to various development sectors' needs and employers' expectations. However, this would involve not only producing employable graduates but cultivating in them agency and aspirations as local citizens, committed to the social and collective struggles towards poverty reduction and transformation of rural communities.

6.7 Conclusion

The main focus of the chapter was to present perspectives on the roles of universities in rural development. From the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that there are multiple perspectives of looking at universities' role in rural development. Policymakers and employers' views pointed to the instrumental, functional, and value-based conceptualisation of universities' roles among others. However, in all the discussions, there was an underlying theme that universities could make an important contribution to building stronger rural societies, ending extreme poverty, and boosting shared prosperity. It is apparent from the discussion that universities could do this by producing graduates with aspirations and agentic values for rural social change. Producing graduates who identify as local citizens who are civic-minded, democratic, and adhere to public good values. How universities can go about producing such graduates is a discussion I take further in Chapter eight.

However, from the data analysis, I did not find a consistent correlation between the roles of universities as 'imagined' by the policymakers and what it is in practice. Policymakers' non-emphatic voices on policy enactments implicate them as divorced from what universities *are* doing vis-à-vis what they *should* be doing. Their views were often normatively too theoretical, not providing concrete evidence of policy enactments and practice.

Consequently, I could see an obvious lack of policymakers' roles as overseers of higher education. By implication, this would mean public universities are more autonomous in deciding what kind of programmes or graduates they can produce, hence the concerns

about misalignment and universities not producing the caliber of graduates that stakeholders want. However, public universities' dependency on public coffers makes them only quasi-autonomous, in that there is great expectation from the public. It is this quasi-autonomy which makes them public good entities accountable to society. Hence, their relevance is assessed according to the contribution they make to society. As the World Bank (2017:1) states, "higher education lies at the nexus of growth, jobs, and competitiveness, and has the potential to serve as the catalyst for social and economic transformation". This being the case, I argue that universities cannot afford to be divorced or divorce themselves from fostering rural development in contexts of rurality and its characteristic rural poverty. The importance placed on transforming rural communities, as well as inclusive and sustainable development in rural areas, is key for achieving many of the SDGs. It is against this background that I push universities towards the direction of consciously enhancing graduates' agency and aspirations for rural human development.

Chapter 7

Employers' and graduates' perspectives on attributes and capabilities for rural development

7.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses empirical findings on what employers and graduate employees in the rural development sector consider key graduate attributes, capacities, and qualities for rural development. From the analysis of their perceptions on graduate attributes and qualities, graduate capabilities for rural development are suggested. The chapter responds to the following research questions:

- i. How do employers and graduates in the rural development sector perceive graduates' preparedness for rural development?
- ii. What attributes and capabilities are required to enhance graduate preparedness for rural development?

Views in this chapter were drawn from eight employers and sixteen graduate employees from the rural development sector. Throughout the chapter, I refer to them as 'employers' and 'graduates' respectively. Interviewed employers were from the local NGOs (four), international NGOs (two), and local government and agriculture ministries (two) (see Table 7.2). The sixteen graduates comprised of eight from International NGOs, six from local NGOs, and two from the government departments. Interviewees were purposively selected from institutions that are working in rural areas in the thematic areas of agriculture, health, education, governance, and community development (see Table 7.1 for the detailed description of the respondents).

Table 14. Description of graduate interviewees

Interviewee	Gender	Field of study	Field of work	Institution
Graduate 1	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture extension	Local NGO
Graduate 2	Male	BSc. Environment and Natural Resources Management	Agriculture Health Education	International NGO
Graduate 3	Female	BA. Humanities	Community development Gender Advocacy	Local NGO
Graduate 4	Male	BSc. Nutrition and Food Sciences	Monitoring and Evaluation	International NGO
Graduate 5	Male	BSc. Economics	Health Education Agriculture	International NGO
Graduate 6	Male	BSoc. Sociology	Governance Justice and Peace	Local NGO
Graduate 7	Female	BA. Education Humanities	Community development	Local NGO
Graduate 8	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture Community Development Health	International NGO
Graduate 9	Male	BSc. Agricultural economics	Agriculture Community development	Government

Graduate 10	Female	BSc. Nursing	Health Sanitation	International NGO
Graduate 11	Male	BSc. Agribusiness	Agriculture Community Development Education	International NGO
Graduate 12	Female	BSc. Environmental Sciences	Agriculture Community Development Advocacy	Local NGO
Graduate 13	Male	BSc. Agriculture Extension	Agriculture Rural community development	International NGO
Graduate 14	Female	BA Humanities	Rural development	International NGO
Graduate 15	Female	BSoc. Sociology	Gender	Local NGO
Graduate 16	Male	BSc. Agriculture	Agriculture	Government

Table 15. Description of employers

Interviewee	Gender	Type Institution	of Areas of work
Employer 1	Male	Local NGO	Health, community development
Employer 2	Male	Local NGO	Agriculture
Employer 3	Female	Government	Rural development
Employer 4	Male	INGO	Agriculture, education, health

Employer 5	Male	Local NGO	Agriculture, health, education, community development
Employer 6	Female	Local NGO	Agriculture, health education
Employer 7	Male	INGO	Agriculture, health, education
Employer 8	Male	Government	Community Development

Data was collected through face to face semi-structured interviews that were audio-recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis (see Chapter five for a full description of analysis procedure). In terms of organisation, the chapter is divided into five sections. The first section is this introduction, which provides background information, describes interviewees, and provides the chapter roadmap. The second section looks at multiple views on an ideal graduate from the employers' and graduates' perspectives. The third section discusses attributes for an ideal graduate prepared for rural development in the context of Malawi. The fourth section lists the identified capabilities for rural development emerging from the analysis of interviewees' perspectives. The fifth section concludes the discussion.

7.2 Multiple views on an ideal graduate for rural development

7.2.1 Employers' views

Employers were asked to describe an ideal graduate for rural development. All employers seemed to emphasise that a graduate well prepared for rural development ought to have good project management skills, be quick in decision-making, be flexible, possess a great sense of humility, have excellent listening skills, and be technically competent. These perceptions emphasise the need for striking a balance between technical skills and non-

technical skills in graduates' preparation (Mathebula, 2018). The notion of including and integrating non-technical skills in graduate preparation is popular in graduate employability discourses (Cai, 2012). From the employers' perspectives, ideal graduates prepared for rural development are those ready to meet the needs of the rural labour market. However, this perception is capitalistic and reduces graduate preparation for their roles as merely productive resources. It is as if to be an ideal graduate for rural development one has to be employed in the rural development sector. However, when graduates have the inner desires, or aspirations, and the agency to do something towards rural poverty, they can contribute to rural development in spaces of both employment and unemployment.

Other dimensions that were considered by all employers in describing an ideal graduate prepared for rural development were effective communication, analytical skills, and respect for the rural people. However, overall, employers' views were suggestive of the human capital perspectives, arguing that education increases individuals' productivity and enhances job performance (Becker, 1964; Shultz, 1961). The excerpts below provide evidence on how employers described an ideal graduate for rural development in the context of Malawi:

One needs to have good project management skills because in rural development you meet complex issues that require steadfastness in decision-making. Working with rural people requires someone flexible, someone who can adapt to different environments and situations. One needs to be humble, someone who can easily associate with the rural poor. One needs to be able to listen attentively to the rural people's stories. Aside from these skills, one needs to have technical knowledge in their particular discipline of specialization (Employer 1).

One must not be judgemental, should be ready to learn, be patient, be disciplined with a better understanding of the development policies in the country, as well as international blueprints on rural development. Another important attribute is that one needs to be analytical, having an analytical mind to issues affecting the rural

poor. It is also important that apart from being technically trained, one has to have respect for rural people's culture and their way of life (Employer 5).

Good communication and engagement with the rural people are a must for graduates we engage in. They should be able to analyze rural poverty issues (Employer 3).

Employers' views suggest that university education offers opportunities to graduates to be shaped as complete human beings responsible for themselves and also to be able to relate with others civically. However, something that emerges from their description of the ideal graduates is that even the so-called generic transversal skills ought to be contextualised. This would imply that regardless of where future rural development practitioners might be educated, their training curriculum and pedagogies should offer students opportunities to reflect on questions such as: Who benefits from the problems that graduates solve? (Mathebula, 2018). Embedded in these non-technical skills are ideas of graduate skills' usefulness to the public, in what I argue as 'public good agency for rural social change'. That is to say that the acquired skills, technical and non-technical, do not only benefit graduates as individuals but they should foster their contribution to the well-being of broader society, particularly those living in various forms of deprivation, such as in rural areas.

7.2.2 Graduates' views

From the graduates' perspectives emerged what Giddens (1991) calls 'theories of self and identity'²⁹, as an ideal graduate was described in terms of how she or he would identify

²⁹ That is how individuals position themselves within the social and economic world. Giddens argues that identities have a reflexive and self-monitoring character: individuals are continually engaged in a reflexive process around issues of who they are and how they should go about managing their 'projects' of the self (Giddens, 1991).

himself or herself with the rural people. An ideal graduate for rural development was one connected to the rural poor. The argument was that connectedness to the rural poor fosters acceptance and confidence between graduates and the rural people themselves. Implied in this connectedness was the value of the rural people's participation in their own development as agents. Graduates made similar arguments like Burkey (1993:78) that ideal graduates for rural development "will need to live among the people, make friendships, share burdens as well as joys, and gradually establish that they are honest" and committed to rural social change. Graduates emphasised the call for readiness to live in what are considered hard areas, with limited access to many of the social services which define the modern world such as telecommunication, among others.

Graduates' perceptions were indicative that an ideal graduate prepared for rural development should trust and respect the rural poor and value their ability to reason. Respect for the rural people involves appreciation and recognition that they have knowledge of their needs and wants which ought to be valued. Oppong (2013) refers to this as indigenising knowledge for development, implying that what people know and value could be leveraged for human development. In the same way, employers valued communication. Almost all graduates stated that an ideal graduate for rural development ought to have *communication skills for rural development*. This indicates that it is not just a matter of learning to communicate but to communicate for rural development, which implies knowing the dynamics of the rural audience, being sensitive to their values, cultural, and belief systems. Excerpts below provide evidence on how graduates described an ideal graduate for rural development in Malawi:

A person who connects and identifies with the needs of the rural people. Someone who does not think that they are more knowledgeable than the rural people are. Someone who should not force upon the rural people what they believe to be development, for the rural people have their own understanding of development. A good rural development practitioner should be able to identify what rural people need and help them with solutions to rural poverty reduction (Graduate 6).

One needs to have good communication skills; be a good communicator with interpersonal skills for easy interaction and dealing with the rural poor. One needs to be sensitive to [the] cultural, religious, and social norms of the rural people. They should have skills to engage and facilitate the rural people in deciding for themselves what they want (Graduate 7).

An ideal graduate for rural development was described in terms of the job qualities which they possess, and which are considered important to be successful in rural development. Most graduates lamented that the skills they find valuable for their work were not given much attention in their university education. This is a call for universities to reflect on what Cabellero and Walker (2010) call graduate work readiness.

Putting together the multiple views from employers and graduates on how they describe an ideal graduate for rural development, certain common qualities/attributes were identified. The next section discusses graduate attributes for rural development which are valued by both graduates and employers.

7.3 Attributes of an ideal graduate prepared for rural development

From the analysis of employers' and graduates' views, four attributes emerged in understanding graduates' preparedness for rural development. These are: critical thinking, effective communication, flexibility and adaptability, and technical qualifications. Employers and graduates argued that these attributes could be fostered among graduates through their university education as the two excerpts below reveal:

It is the task of universities to provide these basic skills to students, and they ought to form part of the universities' curriculum, without assuming that students would acquire these on the job (Employer 2).

I wish we spent more time on these other skills such as communication, presentation, communication, policy analysis, and ethics; they would have helped us to understand the work environment better. As for me, most of these I have learned on the job (Graduate 8).

The next section discusses each attribute as articulated by the employers and graduates in relation to graduates' preparedness for rural development.

7.3.1 Critical thinking

Osborne and Kriese (2009:47) state that “when students own critical thinking habits, they are more in control of not only *when* and *what* they think but also *how* they think”. Critical thinking is understood as involving how an individual's knowledge (what one knows) fits into the broader range of what people know (Kuhn, 1999). From the perspectives of both employers and employees, critical thinking is a fundamental quality of graduates' preparedness for rural development. Interviewees seemed to view critical thinking in relation to graduates' ability to inquire into and reflect on rural poverty in a manner that instills one's aspirations and agency, i.e. motivation and desire to take action towards rural social change. Employers and graduates' views seem to indicate that critical thinking entails graduate continuous reflection and questioning of rural poverty problems and searching for solutions. Critical thinking was perceived as knowing with an action in mind, hence its relation to agency cultivation. For instance, from the interviewees' perspectives, to critically think about rural poverty reduction means to realise the circumstances, ask the right questions about the situation, and decide on what to do about it. The perceptions of critical thinking were linked to analysing situations, reflecting on it, and learning from them before deciding on a valuable course of action to take. The excerpts below provide

evidence on how employers and graduates value critical thinking in graduates' preparation for rural development:

Graduates need to have critical and analytical skills to analyze rural poverty situations on the ground and to effectively report them (Employer 3).

We would want someone keen on the analysis of the contextual issues, and also practical on the ground in addressing issues, practical in bringing about change. We need someone who can think outside the box; someone who is creative, someone who can find a solution for challenges; we need thinkers, innovators, creators and initiators, people ready to bring something new to the community (Employer 2).

Critical thinking fosters graduates' reflective and problem-solving skills, which are necessary for rural development (Graduate 9).

...we can also look at the analytical skills; one needs to be sharp in reasoning. For example, I am a middle-level employee within the organization, I interact with the rural communities, but I also report to management and partners. Therefore, I need to have good analytical and reporting skills to ably inform management and the partners on our rural development interventions (Graduate 11).

From the excerpts, it would seem that critical thinking was further valued for its potential towards innovativeness that could result in the generation of rural positive changes. The assumption deduced from these views is that critical thinking may generate new ideas and ways of doing things that could spur rural development. Elaborating on how critical thinking can potentially lead to innovative ideas about rural development, one employer aptly says:

We want a graduate who is practical; one who thinks outside the box; one who can contribute to finding sustainable solutions for rural poverty reduction; a thinker and creator of innovative ideas for rural development (Employer 4).

Osborne and Kriese (2009:49) posit that “critical thinking is not just a skill that one holds individually; [it] can be fostered collaboratively”. The results of critical thinking from the data are graduates' rational and analytical respect for the rural poor, in terms of their viewpoints, values, and beliefs. Critical thinkers are potentially analytical, with abilities to

make decisions and choices on what they want to be and what they have reason to value in relation to their roles in rural development. Thus, within the capabilities approach, critical thinking sits at the edge of agency, creating and aspiration enhancement.

7.3.2 *Effective communication*

Views on effective communication for rural development were “based on the premise that successful rural development calls for the conscious and active participation of the intended beneficiaries at every stage of the development process” (FAO & GTZ, 2006:4). Effective communication, as a graduate attribute for rural development, featured in the majority of the interviewees’ responses. It was emphatically stated that communication is essential and fundamental in graduates’ preparation for rural development. Employers, in particular, indicated that they looked for graduates who would ably communicate with the rural people when recruiting them. Similarly, graduates also valued effective communication as a skill one would greatly need to be considered well prepared for rural development. Graduates indicated that rural communication is not like any other communication, for it is subject to ones’ understanding of rural dynamics which are not homogeneous, but multidimensional, and often regulated by the cultural and social value of the rural people:

Graduates need to possess presentation and facilitation skills (oral and written) and be able to talk to rural people and ably present development materials and information in different rural settings. Experiences with the rural people are contextual; even within the same community different groups have to be communicated differently, and one needs to have knowledge of participatory development approaches (Graduate 3).

Graduates should have the ability to communicate complex ideas in a language of the rural people themselves, or the language they [rural people] would easily understand (Employer 4).

Graduates ought to have the ability to relate and relay information to the rural people in a concise and yet comprehensive manner (Graduate 6).

Effective communication was valued by interviewees for its relational and interactional effects. They argued that communication plays a bonding role between graduates and the rural people. Rasila and Mudau (2012) contend that effective communication is a strategic tool and a pillar for rural development. However, employers further pointed out that effective communication for rural development would demand graduates' facilitation and analytical skills for different contexts and audiences. Interviewees described effective communication as key for community participation. Effective communication makes rural people become part of the solutions to their problems. Interviewees further indicated that effective communication is much more than dialogical interaction between graduates and the rural people. It encompasses elements of critical thinking and analysis of rural poverty situations and contexts. Thus, effective communication is fostered and also fosters other attributes, such as critical thinking. For instance, critical thinkers have the potential to communicate well among the rural poor, and sometimes good communication reflects critical thinking. However, one can be a critical thinker without being a competent communicator. This is a critique often leveled against professional groups, like engineers, who are often analytical in their thinking, because of the training they receive, but poor at interpersonal and communication skills (Mathebula, 2018).

Within the capability approach, effective communication would be described as an enabler for one's agency and aspirations towards rural social change. The excerpts below provide a synopsis of how employers and graduates spoke about effective communication:

A rural development practitioner needs to be one who has good communication skills, someone who can communicate with people at different levels. Able to translate high-level knowledge into digestible pieces for the rural people to understand. One needs to be a facilitator, not a teacher; you cannot teach the rural old people, but you can facilitate their development since they already know things and they have their own way of doing things, which you need to recognize and build on (Employer 7).

To get along with the rural people, they have to understand you and you have to understand them. This calls for simplicity in how you present and communicate with them. One needs to bring himself or herself to their standard, for instance, communicating in a manner and language they would understand (Graduate 8).

The ideal development worker should be approachable with good communication abilities in the sense that the rural people should take you as one of them, not just a visitor among them, who just comes and goes. You need to make yourself part and parcel of the community, understanding their problems, and engaging in solving them (Graduate 11).

Deducing from the interviewees' responses, effective communication creates opportunities for graduates to engage with the rural people in enhancing their development. It was further indicated that effective communication involves good interpersonal skills, sensitivity to the rural poor's needs, and respect for diversity. Graduates with abilities to communicate effectively with the rural people are more likely to be able to understand rural poor deprivations, attempt solutions, get affiliated, and maintain relationships with them.

7.3.3 Flexibility and adaptability

Flexibility and adaptability emerged from the interviewees' responses to imply graduates' willingness to accommodate changes, compromise, and cope with alterations or changes to a given situation. Interviewees' understanding of flexibility and adaptability encompassed graduates' ability to fit into different conditions and environments, and it was considered essential for graduates' preparedness for rural development. The concepts of flexibility and adaptability are often used in disaster response discourses in reference to

measures undertaken to continue surviving despite hard environments or situations (Yilmaz, 2014). However, from the interviewees' perspective, flexibility and adaptability implied graduates' capacities and abilities to persevere through hard situations and conditions associated with working in rural areas. This comes against the background that most graduates resist working in rural areas, as they are considered hard to live areas. The excerpts below give interviewees' description of graduate flexibility and adaptability to rural situations:

Ability to fit in and adapt to rural contexts or environments even when the graduate has an urban background (Employer 4).

Perseverance in changing circumstances associated with rurality, where most of the basic services are either absent or limited (Graduate 8).

Flexibility is about open-mindedness, as you cannot take one solution in rural development to fit it everywhere; one needs to be flexible and accommodating of different ideas. It is the ability to adjust plans or programs according to the situations on the ground; for instance, you cannot hold a planned meeting when the rural people are mourning; and sometimes meetings coincide with traditional activities which rural people value most, join them and learn from them (Graduate 9).

Willingness to learn new things and take new ways of doing things, able to adjust life to suit the rural contexts, and bringing oneself to the level of the rural people for you to connect with them (Graduate 5).

Even some of us who have grown up in rural areas, when we go back home, our own people think we have changed because of education. Of course, our reasoning with them is different, but education does not bring any metaphysical changes in us, we remain who we are. But of course, I am always conscious that education has changed my status in society (Graduate 13).

From the excerpts above flexibility and adaptability entail graduates' values of acceptance, perseverance, tolerance, confidence, willingness, and open-mindedness towards rural development. Graduates and employers seem to suggest that flexibility and adaptability foster graduates' propensity to adjust and adapt to even seemingly unfamiliar or familiar

situations and circumstances in rural areas. It would also result in graduates' connectedness and cultivating an easy working relationship with the rural people. Flexibility and adaptability also apply to graduates with a rural background as education alienates them from their contexts. Burkey (1993:78) asserts

[Even when] graduates are returning to their home communities to work with their people, although natives, they will need to re-establish their acceptance among their people. Their experiences outside as well as their physical absence may have led to alienation. They will need to be very careful to avoid talking down to their people.

Not only graduates with an urban background would require adaptability and flexibility attributes, but even those with a rural background also do. It is argued that university education itself alienates them from their rural societies. Emphasis on flexibility and adaptability as a graduate attribute for rural development was made based on observations of most graduates' unwillingness to work in rural areas. Evidence would be drawn from high graduate vacancy rates, and graduate employment turnover in rural development sectors. Two excerpts below provide examples of employers' voices on the same:

It is difficult to retain most graduates in rural areas; they do not want to stay. They work for a few months, and once they get an opportunity in the cities they leave, others do not even want to come and work in rural areas (Employer 2).

We have challenges in retaining graduates in rural areas; they seem not prepared for this kind of work [rural development] (Employer 8).

Flexibility and adaptability were considered central to graduate preparedness for rural development. However, the question remains how universities would prepare graduates to be flexible and adaptable to rural development.

7.3.4 *Technically qualified graduates*

Employers understood technical qualification as graduates' acquisition of universities' training that is relevant to rural development. Technical qualifications were viewed as specific learned abilities that apply to specific tasks in rural development. Interestingly and queerly, graduates hardly mentioned their need to be technically qualified for rural development; suggesting that by default they believed their university education deservedly prepared them for work. However, for employers, upon acknowledging many of the soft skills graduates need for rural development, they were of the view that *a graduate needs to be technically competent with both theoretical and practical knowledge about rural development, such that they should be able to link classroom theory to what is expected of them on the ground* (Employer 7). Employers were resolute that academic and professional capacities are needed if the graduates are to effectively deliver rural development:

You know! First, a rural development practitioner should be skilled and technically qualified. Should have attained the academic skills and qualifications to do the work or carry out rural development business. Secondly, must be disciplined; by disciplined, I mean someone who adheres to the rules and procedures of engaging with the rural people... if I am educated and working with and in rural communities and I do not follow the procedures and protocols for rural development my education is nothing (Employer 4).

Employers' postulations seem to advance an assertion about the importance of professional or discipline-specific knowledge about rural development. For instance, if one is involved in public health services, they must have the professional qualifications for the job, in its practical and theoretical orientation:

The ideal rural development practitioner needs to be a technical expert in his or her field of work; someone who knows his or her field very well, and someone

disciplined enough to learn along or learn from his or her professional practice; learning is a continuous process; you learn in and outside the classroom setting (Employer 3).

Despite calls for technically qualified graduates for rural development, employers seemed to blame universities for failing to prepare graduates who have the inner zeal and desire and are motivated to contribute to the well-being of the rural people. Generally, as Ssebuwufu, Ludwick and Beland (2012) argue, employers expect universities to produce graduates with the required knowledge and skills for their needed workforce. However, there has been employers' dissatisfaction with the universities and the graduates they produce. For instance, Ssebuwufu et al. (2012:17) argue that,

African universities have been criticized as ivory towers that churn out graduates and research that are irrelevant to the needs of employers and the social, economic, and technical challenges facing African economies. There is a growing perception that the knowledge and skills acquired by students at African universities do not meet the requirements of industry and the wider economy. This mismatch, coupled with under-training in the critical skills of problem-solving, analytical thinking, and communication is blamed, at least in part, for the emerging high graduate unemployment and under-employment in many parts of Africa.

There were perceptions that most graduates are undertrained, and this makes them less competent for the work in rural development. Actually, some employers, while valuing high qualifications, preferred less academically qualified individuals from vocational schools and community development colleges to take up development facilitation roles in rural development. Employers' preference for lower academic qualifications contradicts the need for highly qualified staff in the rural development sectors as highlighted in national development policies (GoM, 2016). These contradictions may seem to suggest that a university degree is advantageous in rural development, but it is not enough; one

needs to have other soft skills, passion, and discipline for the work. Again, reported cases of graduate unemployment (GoM, 2013), and the high demand for graduates in rural development sectors (GoM, 2016), highlight what Pauw, Oosthuizen and Van Der Westhuizen (2006) describe as a paradox of the labour market with graduate unemployment in the face of skills shortages. There is more that universities ought to learn from this scenario in terms of their graduate preparation and the programmes offered. Sometimes it would be that the unemployed graduates possess lower skills than what is needed and/or required in the marketplace (Pauw et al., 2006). The excerpts below provide glimpses into how employers felt about graduates' preparation for rural development in the context of Malawi:

I do not see that our universities have or are offering education that enables graduates to work with rural communities. I do not think so! If I were to choose who I want to work with, I would recruit those from Magomero Community Development College. Those guys are well trained, only that they are trained for a short period. Their training has the rural community development touch we need. They are taught well, but it is just in short modules. When you place them in the field, they are very good at community engagement, their only problem is that their qualifications are very low, some of them have certificates or maybe others diplomas. But these people [graduates] that are coming from Chancellor College [UNIMA], Bunda [LUANAR], Mzuzu University, or Polytechnic [UNIMA] are not necessarily trained to work in rural areas; they struggle a lot; most of them are not capable of the work (Employer 2).

Have you ever wondered why most of us would prefer to recruit people with certificates or diplomas from Natural Resources College or Magomero College? It is because; the rural development landscape needs skills and employees' qualities, which our universities fail to foster in students. It seems our universities are busy preparing globally relevant graduates. In Malawi, we need graduates with participatory rural appraisal skills, graduates who can ably interact with the rural communities and work towards contributing to rural poverty reduction (Employer 5).

Deducing from these perceptions we see the resurgence of the question of contextualisation in graduate preparation. Globally, scholarly researches are also replete with issues of

graduate unpreparedness with the main message being that they are not well prepared for the industries (Mambo et al., 2016; Tomlinson, 2007; Hall & Thomas, 2005; Pauw et al., 2006; Ssebuwufu et al., 2012). This suggests that universities need urgent attention to identifying contextual needs. Awareness of contextual needs would help universities prepare graduates able to respond to these needs, for instance in Malawi, rurality, and its associated rural poverty.

7.4 Graduate capabilities for rural development

Capabilities are opportunities, choices, and freedoms, which would potentially enhance graduates' agency and aspiration for rural development. Walker (2006:12) argues that "if we are to be committed to higher education as a public good and to public values we need to pay attention to the framing of our educational purposes and their pedagogical realization". The notion of graduate preparation for rural development, from the interviewees' responses, would be construed within what Birdwell, Scott and Horley (2013) call graduates' increased civic duty, intra-societal empathy, affiliation, and understanding that is grounded on building capabilities.

This section discusses four capabilities considered key for graduates' preparation for rural development. The four capabilities emerged from the analysis of the data, that is from my reading and interpretation of the responses, which were linked to the theoretical discussion on capabilities in chapter 4. The question of capabilities selection is not a new phenomenon in higher education studies. Walker (2006), Nussbaum (2000, 2006), Wolff and De-Shalit (2007), Walker and McLean (2013) and Wilson-Strydom (2016), among others, have developed capabilities lists related to higher education. The common capabilities have been

practical reasoning, educational resilience, knowledge and imagination, learning disposition, social relations and social networks, respect, dignity and recognition, emotional integrity, bodily integrity, affiliation, doing good to others, language and competence. In this study, from the analysis of employers' and graduates' perceptions, the following capabilities emerged as central to graduates' preparedness for rural development in Malawi: affiliation and connectedness, practical reasoning, respect and dignity, and integrity and moral consciousness in relation to rural development. While the discussed capabilities relate to the earlier identified capabilities in the theoretical section of the thesis, the uniqueness herein is seen in how they are contextually discussed with practical illustrations which support their relation to graduate preparation for rural human development. The below-discussed capabilities are products of critical analysis of various employers and graduates' responses on how they perceive graduate preparedness for rural development.

7.4.1 The capability for affiliation and connectedness

Affiliation, according to Nussbaum (2000:79), is “being able to live with and towards others ... having the social bases for self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.” From the interviews, employers seemed to suggest that graduates' preparedness for rural development would entail their affiliation, which encompasses empathy and connectedness towards the rural people's being and their development. Employers' views seem suggestive that graduate capability of affiliation would involve graduates' self-driven, self-determined, and self-directed obligation towards the rural people, motivated by their sense of agency for rural social change.

Emerging from the empirical findings, affiliation would be exhibited through caring, respect, responsibility, and reverence for the rural poor. Employers seemed to understand affiliation as a humanistic value (Nussbaum, 2010) that puts the rural people at the centre of their own development, connected with them in action while acknowledging the multiplicity and diversity of their vulnerabilities. Employers argued that graduates who are well prepared for rural development ought to have a great sense of humanness and be connected and engaged with the rural people. In this sense, the capability of affiliation entails graduates living not only for themselves but also with the concern for the rural underprivileged and often deprived rural poor. Nussbaum (2000) calls this ‘world citizenship’, Walker and McLean (2013) refer to the same as ‘public good professionalism’, and Mtawa (2019) calls it ‘engaged citizenship’. All these concepts indicate one’s connectedness, affiliation, and realisation of the value of those around you. Both employers and graduates seemed to agree that given the magnitude of the country’s rural poverty, universities would need to consider cultivating among students civic-minded dispositions, making them empathetic to rural development, and cultured to be ready to stand up for rural social changes. However, there was also the recognition that the capability of affiliation for rural development does not exist in isolation from other capabilities. For instance, practical reasoning (discussed in detail below), with its associated attributes of critical thinking and narrative imagination, has the potential to foster affiliation for rural development. It is through one’s imaginative and reflective action that choices are made to affiliate oneself with the rural poor or not.

Excerpts below provide evidence on how interviewees would be interpreted as alluding to affiliation in how they described graduates’ preparedness for rural development:

What we look for in graduates is a sense of respect for diversity, a recognition that rural people are different, although they may all be poor. We expect them to treat the rural poor with respect. We are interested in graduates who have the capacity to connect and work with different groups of the rural poor (Employer 7).

We want graduates who feel they belong to the rural communities and have the desire and heart to contribute to the rural social changes. Graduates who can easily integrate with the rural people, and feel they are part of them (Employer 3).

...if I am a graduate working with rural communities and I do not love, care and have personal concern for the rural poor, my education is nothing. A graduate prepared for rural development must have integrity, care, discipline, values, and love for the rural poor. Should be ready and willing to work for the rural people in one's local community and country (Graduate 2).

From the excerpts above the capability of affiliation would involve finding value and meaning in being a citizen of your country and being motivated to contribute to its rural poverty reduction agenda. It is in such reasoning that affiliation is considered to have the potential to foster graduates' agency and aspirations for rural development. The capability of affiliation entails understanding the world from a perspectives other than one's own (Nussbaum, 2000), which is essential for citizen judgment (Gough & Scott, 2007), and making informed choices. Thus, it would appear affiliation has the potential of cultivating graduates' agency, manifested through the desire and urge to facilitate rural social change. Facilitating rural social change would potentially be possible in situations where graduates are connected to the rural poor, where they would imagine, and reflectively understand the rural people's lives. Thus, according to the interviewees, it would seem affiliation and connectedness to the rural poor shape graduates' attitude towards them, creating what Mtawa (2019:169) calls '*humanizing spaces*, in which the voices and agency of the marginalised groups are amplified and heard". Once affiliated to the rural poor, a graduate can more easily work with them; enhance their agency, freedoms, and opportunities for well-being, which are often constrained by their deprivations.

From the interviewees' perspectives, connectedness, positive and empathetic attitudes towards the rural poor are fertile spaces for graduates' affiliation. The excerpts below provide examples of how nuances of affiliation emerge from the interviewees' responses:

A rural development practitioner should be able to identify the needs of the rural people and come up with practical solutions on how to assist them in meeting those needs. This process demands that one should be connected to the rural people, reason with them and imagine their situations, and do something together with them (Graduate 9).

Graduates should have the right attitude towards rural development. Sometimes we do not really need an expert trained in a discipline related to rural development, but someone who has the right attitude towards rural development (Employer 8).

I would say effectiveness in rural development depends on the right attitude of the officers. It is about a positive attitude, when working with the rural communities you must be ready to be part of their struggle (Graduate 11).

Graduates that are able to do rural development work well it is because they have the right attitude, they feel connected to the rural poor, and they are passionate about their work (Employer 2).

The relevance of connectedness as instrumental for affiliation is that it has the potential for creating social trustworthiness, social networks, harnessing participatory bonding, fostering confidence between graduates, and the rural poor. Both graduates and employers valued connectedness in their description of graduate preparedness for rural development. Interviewees' also pointed out that graduates who are not connected, and/or affiliated with the rural poor are often unaware of the intrinsic well-being capabilities the rural poor possess. Consequently, they have distorted views about rural development. Interviewees argued that sometimes such graduates tend to think that the rural poor are stupid, ignorant, and lazy. However, it is in socialising and being connected or affiliated to the rural poor people that graduates would understand them better, as Chambers (1983:104) argues:

Poor people are rarely met; when they are met, they do not speak; when they do speak, they are often cautious and deferential; and what they say is often either not listened to or brushed aside, or interpreted in a bad light. Any attempt to understand the poor has to begin with introspection by the outsiders themselves. We have first to examine ourselves and identify and offset our preconceptions, prejudices, and rationalization.

The excerpts below provide further evidence to the views that connectedness fosters affiliation, as affiliation fosters connectedness, which is potentially a capability required for rural development:

The ability to connect and socialize with the rural people is key in rural development. For instance, communicating in their own language, understanding their social interactions connects you to them. In rural areas, even non-verbal language is very important. How you dress, how you address the rural people, and how you behave among them can integrate or detach you from them. Our [graduates] actions in rural areas send different messages to rural people (Graduate 16).

It is pathetic; most graduates are not connected to the rural people. We know this and we are not happy with the 'tourists approach to rural development'³⁰, where graduates live in the cities and only go in the rural areas to work. No! We want people who can interact with the rural and be part of them. We want graduates who can listen to rural people, who can feel the problems rural people are facing (Employer 2).

Most graduates are not connected to the rural people and hardly feel about the well-being of the rural poor. Some of these have grown up in cities and hardly know what rural poverty is. Such graduates have no connectivity to rural life; they have no sense of responsibility towards the rural poor, and they do not feel obliged to do anything for rural poverty reduction. Often, they are disinterested in rural development work (Employer 4).

From the foregoing discussion, it would seem that connectedness causes graduates to have an encounter or affiliation with the rural poor and develop emotional attachments to their welfare. However, employers argue that most graduates, due to lack of connectedness with

³⁰ The concept of 'rural development tourists' as coined by Robert Chambers (1983) connotes a situation where rural development practitioners fail to connect with the rural people.

the rural people, fail to form the conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about rural poverty reduction. The views from employers and graduates discussed herein underscore the value of graduates' exposure and connectedness to rural people, and rural areas as quintessential for their preparedness for rural development. They are the foundational premises for what Walker (2010) calls critical pedagogy, and Mtawa (2019) calls 'humanizing pedagogy' in graduates' preparation. At a theoretical level, the notion of connectedness and affiliation takes the discussion on graduate preparation to what graduates can know, can learn, can choose to be and to do in relation to rural development. In other words, affiliation and connectedness would foster what Walker (2010) describes as a focus on change, action, and practices. Interviewees seemed resolute that graduates who are far removed from the rural people do not understand the intricacies and complexities of rural poverty, and consequently are not very well prepared for rural development. The views were that *graduates can essentially walk with the rural poor in their development process if they are connected with them and make themselves part of the rural people* (Employer 6). And that *it takes one to know, understand, and value the rural people for successful engagement with them in their development process* (Graduate 13). Thus, according to Nussbaum (2000), affiliation and practical reason are two architectonic capabilities that permeate all others, in the same way as Mtawa (2019) describes affiliation as an architectonic capability in community engagement and service-learning. The interview excerpts presented here, are part of the evidence base that affiliation is also a central capability in graduates' preparedness for rural development.

7.4.2 The capability for practical reasoning

Practical reasoning is central to the framing ideas of the capability approach. It hinges on the foundational stances of people's freedom and/or choices to live 'the kind of lives they value and have reason to value' (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). Practical reasoning is integral to the development of an individual's conception of value (Austin, 2018). Nussbaum (2000) calls practical reason an organising principle. From the analysis of the data, it appears all interviewees subscribed to the value of practical reasoning as a strong component of graduates' preparedness for rural development. Although both graduates and employers valued practical reasoning as a capability for rural development, the later positioned it as a quintessential prerequisite for rural development. Practical reasoning was understood as graduates' capacity for resolving, through critical reflections, questions of what one has to do and to be in order to contribute to rural poverty reduction.

There were nuances from the responses suggesting that "practical reasoning is deliberation on what it would be best to do, both in particular situations, and with reference to ones' life as a whole" (Austin, 2018:2). Practical reasoning is viewed as central to the conception of what the good life is, and it provides spaces for basic reasons for action, thus fostering one's agency. As Nussbaum (2000:79) aptly puts it, the capability of practical reasoning is "being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life". Employers valued practical reasoning as something they would want from graduates engaged in rural development. Interviewees argued that they would want graduates who can make reasonable judgments and be analytical. The capability for practical reasoning was identified within the discussion with respondents on an ideal graduate prepared for rural development, and the often mentioned phrases were 'graduates

who can reason practically’, ‘graduates with a practical mind’, and ‘graduates who can critically reason about things’. In my analysis, all these perceptions were categorised under the capability for practical reasoning. The following three excerpts provide examples of how employers highly valued graduates’ ability to reason practically, critically, and analytically as measures and indicators of their preparedness for rural development.

Reasoning practically is about making reasonable judgments about your life and the well-being of the rural poor. It is the ability to use one’s reasoning to find strategies for rural poverty reduction, having analytical skills for different situations on rural poverty reduction (Employer 4).

The ability to go beyond the surface reasoning and being able to come up with solutions to problems facing rural areas or coming up with solutions that can address rural poverty (Employer 6).

We would want a graduate who is keen on the analysis of rural contextual issues, and who is practical in addressing rural poverty issues. We need a graduate who can think outside the box, someone who is creative. Someone who can easily find solutions for challenges faced by the rural poor. We need graduates who are critical thinkers, innovators, creators, and initiators, graduates who are ready to bring something new into rural development. Graduates who can manage the project, with good project management skills. We need someone who has good knowledge about his or her subject matter specialization, but more importantly who also has skills to present things to the rural poor in a manner that they would easily understand (Employer 7).

From the excerpts above, it is clear that practical reasoning is valued by employers because it “is a formative part of the life trajectory of a person, since it involves deliberation about long term goals and life plans” (Austin, 2018:3). For instance, views from the employers above provide evidence that graduate practical reasoning for rural development would generally mean graduates’ ability to creatively, critically, and innovatively reason in relation to rural poverty reduction solutions. Therefore, practical reasoning would connote graduates’ application of their skills and knowledge in creating well-being opportunities

for the rural poor. Practical reasoning is central to both opportunity and process aspects of freedom (Sen, 2004), as Austin (2018:5) puts it,

The *opportunity* aspect relates to people's freedom to achieve that which they value and have reason to value. The *process* aspect of freedom concerns people's ability to freely exercise their practical reasoning and make choices about their way of living.

Employers' perceptions seem to further suggest that practical reasoning, as a capability, goes beyond its capacities to foster graduates' engagement with the rural people. It is an archetypal element of other capabilities, and/or an architectonic capability (Mtawa, 2019). Practical reasoning, according to the interviewees' perceptions, pervades other graduate capabilities and attributes for rural development, such as community mobilisation, leadership, creativity, facilitation, and innovations for rural development. It has the potential to foster graduates' intellectual capabilities to understand and appreciate rural development multidimensionally. And, as Mtawa (2019) argues, the capability of practical reasoning could be considered an 'organizer' of other capabilities.

The excerpts below provide a synopsis of the responses which denoted practical reasoning as being a central capability for graduate preparedness for rural development:

A graduate should be prepared to fuse their knowledge with that of the rural communities to come up with something better. Rural development requires someone who can motivate rural people, a community mobilizer. Someone who can help the rural people to see things, which they cannot see on their own. Someone with a creative mind, flexible and with leadership skills, and a good facilitator. Someone who can engage with the rural poor at their low level. Someone with high integrity and someone who can solve conflicts and a team player. Someone analytical and able to link different ideas into what can improve rural people's life (Employer 4).

Rural development requires someone who has some higher level of interpretation or analysis to find the underlying causes of rural poverty at the same time appreciating available resources and capacities in the rural areas and among the rural people that can be used for rural poverty reduction (Graduate 15).

We want graduates who do not only know their subject matter well but those who are capable of engaging with rural development issues; those who understand why they should be involved in rural development, not only as a paid job but those who take interest in rural development as something they aspire to do (Employer 2).

From the excerpts above and the foregoing discussions, it appears that practical reasoning can enhance or prevent individuals from taking up some opportunities. But herein, it is discussed as a central cultivator of other graduate capabilities and attributes for rural development.

7.4.3 Capability for respect and dignity

According to Nussbaum (2006), individuals enjoy the status of dignity by virtue of their humanity. That is “by virtue of their membership of, first, the human species and, second, the human community” (Formosa & Mackenzie, 2014:878). From the capabilities approach, poverty constrains people’s agency and compromises their values, dignity, and respect as worthy human beings (Nussbaum, 2011). Employers were unyielding in their responses that a graduate prepared for rural development ought to treat the rural poor with dignity and respect. As such, dignity and respect were identified as some of the core dimensions of graduates’ preparedness for rural development.

Interviewees argued for the triad dimension of respect, first, respecting oneself; second, being able to respect the rural people; and third, being respected by the rural people themselves. From these views, to respect and to be respected is a dialogical and interactive process; entailing the valuation of each other’s dignity. Employers perceive respect as

graduates' capacity for good conduct, the propensity to behaving virtuously within the social norms of the rural society. Additionally, graduates' views are suggestive that respect for oneself and for the rural people, would evoke the notion of social connectedness, what has been discussed as affiliation, as being paramount to graduates' preparedness for rural development.

As Formosa and Mackenzie (2014:879) argue, "To be a human being is to be a being whose existence and flourishing are dependent upon social relations with others, including relations of care and dependency, and whose rational capacities develop and change over the course of a human life". Thus, it could be argued that respect and dignity are valued as central to graduate preparedness for rural development because all human beings, rural or urban, deserve equal respect by virtue of their humanity. Interviewees' perceptions of respect and dignity seem to indicate that rurality does not reduce humanity, that inner human worthiness, and/or unconditional, incomparable human worthiness is more valuable.

Interviewees seemed to posit that graduate respect for the rural people builds credibility and connectedness, creating spaces for the rural poor to share stories of their lives. Relating the idea of respect to dignity, Nussbaum argues "all human beings ought to acknowledge and respect the entitlement of others to live lives commensurate with human dignity" (Nussbaum 2006:53). Thus, dignity is related to respect and vice versa; beings with dignity demand respect from others (Claassen, 2014). The views from interviewees appear to cement the fact that rural people are 'dignity-bearing creatures' (Claassen, 2014:244), and thus deserve all respect. A well-prepared graduate would need to possess values of respect

and dignity towards the rural people. In the excerpts below interviewees illustrate how they value respect and dignity in graduates' preparedness for rural development:

Apart from knowing one's subject matter, a graduate prepared for rural development is supposed to learn about respect for the rural people. Education ought to make students aware that poverty does not make the rural poor less human, they need to be treated with respect and dignity (Employers 5).

How learned you are, you cannot know who the rural poor are, what they want and value, if you do not interact with them in a respectful manner. You need to have good conduct, thus they will respect and welcome you in their lives (Graduate 13).

Working with rural people requires one to know how to engage, relate, and socialize with them. Often they are closed up to themselves because of their poverty. It requires one to connect with them through respect towards them. One cannot succeed in rural development if they do not respect and make themselves part of the rural people by socializing and interacting with them (Graduate 10).

When you are dealing with issues of poverty, sometimes the rural poor may not tell you the truth about their lives, they fear that sometimes people [often researchers] just come to humiliate and expose their problems. But the moment they feel that you respect them, that you are there for them, and that you are treating them with the dignity they build trust around you (Graduate 8).

From the excerpts above, the idea of respect has broad cross-cultural resonance, with value attachments to the being of others. It is this sense of respect and value for dignity that would foster graduates' agency and aspirations for rural social change, dictated by the sense of valuing people even in conditions of poverty. Respect has the potential to create spaces for rural people to participate in their own development. One graduate ably articulated this respect arguing that *the rural poor themselves know better as to what they want, what they value, and what is needed of them for their lives to be transformed*. The capability of respect for rural development would seem to challenge the 'paternalistic top-down approach to development' (Davids, 2014), where graduates would assume a monopoly of knowledge. Respectful graduates would realise and acknowledge that rural people have their own worldviews and ways of living that must always be respected. Interviewees seemed to

indicate that respect for diversity, cultural values, traditional knowledge, and observance of human dignity and community protocols are key in graduates' preparedness for rural development.

7.4.4 The capability for integrity and moral consciousness

Integrity, moral and ethical consciousness are central to professionals if they are to act ethically, be responsible, and accountable (Walker & McLean, 2013). According to Huberts (2018:2), integrity is about “professional wholeness or responsibility, and coherence of principles and values...means that a professional exercises his tasks adequately, carefully, responsibly, taking into account all relevant interests”. Employees and graduates understood integrity and moral consciousness for rural development as graduates being responsible, respectful, passionate, and civic-minded about rural poverty reduction.

Deducing from the interviewees' perspectives, integrity was viewed as a moral quality, as graduates' ability to act in accordance or harmony with the moral values, norms, and rules guiding rural development. The understanding of integrity and moral consciousness from the interviewees' perspectives denotes concerns about right and wrong, in what others call normative judgment (Huberts, 2018). It is thus conceptualised as ‘cultivating humanity’ (Nussbaum, 1997). As morality and ethics refer to what is right or wrong, good or bad, the capability of integrity and moral consciousness as construed from the responses embodies concepts such as respect, discipline, ethical values, dignity, and civic responsibility, among others. These were some of the core values interviewees expect an ideal graduate prepared

for rural development to possess, whose work would entail moral consciousness and integrity.

From the interviewees' perspectives, it would seem that ideas of integrity were linked to graduates' love for their country (patriotism), as dictated by the values of social justice and equity. Evidence of what Walker and McLean (2013) call public good professionalism emerged from the responses when interviewees expected graduates to behave and act within societal and public moral values and norms, conscious of the rural aspects. For instance, there were expectations that graduates should demonstrate integrity by being accountable, and desist from immoral acts such as corrupt practices which further deprive the rural people of their life-giving opportunities. It was often stated that graduates are expected to *exercises high levels of integrity, high levels of accountability, and transparency with the rural communities and with themselves.*

Although integrity and moral consciousness prominently featured in understanding graduates' capabilities for rural development, it emerged that these did not form the subject matter for graduate preparation in many universities. Both graduates and employers wished that universities offered courses in ethics and morality. Concepts that embodied integrity and moral consciousness as a capability for rural development are passion for the rural people, respect, and responsibility, adherence to moral and ethical values, discipline, and accountability. The following excerpts provide evidence in terms of how interviewees would be interpreted as alluding to integrity and moral consciousness as a capability for rural development:

A graduate should have a sense of integrity. Passion for the rural people, loving working with the rural people not for the sake of one's employment but out of

personal touch to help. This integrity is about learning to respect what is not yours, which comes with a sense of civic responsibility, and respect towards public resources (Employer 6).

Graduates should have moral and ethical values, for instance, knowledge on the evils of corruption and other acts that derail rural development. Unfortunately most of those involved in corrupt practices, and misusing government resources meant for the rural poor are our fellow graduates (Graduate 3).

Cultivation of moral and ethical values for rural development that respect the dignity of the rural human person. This would involve being disciplined and able to adhere to the rules and procedures of working with the rural people in their poverty reduction drive (Employer 2).

An ideal graduate prepared for rural development should be someone with integrity, able to value his or her own home, community, and country. This is what we call patriotism; we should be able to value everyone, rich or poor. An “educated” graduate and prepared for rural development should be able to think critically about things in his/her society and make well-informed decisions, you see! That is an “educated” person. So apart from the professional skills and knowledge you get in the university, one needs all these attributes of integrity and discipline with a moral conscience to know what is wrong and right as they interact with the rural poor (Employer 8).

From the above excerpts, integrity, morality, and ethical values are mentioned as core values that ought to guide graduates’ preparation for rural development. Interviewees seemed to indicate that integrity is central to graduates’ preparedness for rural development.

7.5 Conclusion

Multiple perspectives of an ideal graduate have been discussed, with recognition for both technical and non-technical aspects of graduate preparation for rural development valued differently. This chapter has revealed critical thinking, effective communication, flexibility, adaptability, and technical qualifications as key attributes for graduates’ preparedness for rural development. While these attributes may seem regular in terms of their ordinary terminological definitions, it is plausible to appreciate that interviewees provide shreds of contextual evidence that uniquely define their relevance for graduate

preparedness for working in rural development. The practical question that follows is how universities would address pedagogical and curricula practices to develop and achieve these graduate attributes which are responsive to ruralised contexts. Transcending the analysis of graduate attributes for rural development, the study identified affiliation and connectedness, practical reasoning, respect and dignity, integrity, and moral consciousness as fundamental graduate capabilities for rural development preparedness. After discussing how these attributes and capabilities would be cultivated in and through university education (Chapter eight), I will then theorise how these would foster agency and aspirations for rural human development (Chapter nine). Agency and aspirations are key in conceptualising graduates' preparedness for rural human development as they entail graduates' inner willingness and volition to contribute towards rural social change.

Chapter 8

University stakeholders' perceptions of graduate preparation for rural development

8.1 Introduction

The form and content of knowledge, skills, competences, attributes, and capabilities, which universities enhance and harness in graduates, are critical in examining their roles in rural development. This chapter contributes to answering the question of how universities can contribute to rural development through fostering graduates' capabilities. Thus, this explores how universities can cultivate graduate capabilities which can enhance and harness their agency and aspirations for rural development. The study moves beyond discussing graduate professional development to consider their preparation to contribute to rural development. The central question guiding discussion in the chapter is:

How can public universities prepare graduates for rural development, given the country's rurality and its associated rural poverty?

Discussion in this chapter is based on university stakeholders' (deans, lecturers, students, and graduates) perceptions of how universities can prepare graduates for rural development. However, in some cases, empirical evidence is strengthened by secondary literature. Two key thematic issues emerged from the data analysis. These are 1) multi-layered perceptions of graduate preparation, and 2) imaginations on future possibilities for graduate preparation. The theme of imaginations on future possibilities for graduate

preparation is centred on two conceptual underpinnings: first, ‘curriculum relevance’³¹, and second, ‘rural sensitive pedagogies’. In my analysis, the two emerging themes respond to two critical considerations in graduates’ preparations, which are *content* and *process*. *Content* deals with the ‘what’ questions of graduates’ preparation, whereas the *process* attends to the ‘how’ question.

In terms of chapter organisation, the first part is an introduction and also describes the interviewees. The second part provides a detailed discussion of the multi-layered perceptions of graduates’ preparation for rural development. The third section discusses the proposed future possibilities for fostering graduate capabilities, agency, and aspirations for rural development. I conclude the chapter with a summation of the main arguments and their implications for graduate preparation for rural development.

8.1.1 Description of the interviewees

Empirical data was obtained through face-to-face semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) (see Chapter five for a detailed description). Perceptions discussed herein are drawn from forty-nine participants: three deans, eight lecturers, four heads of departments (HoD), six graduates³², and twenty-eight students. The twenty-eight

³¹ ‘Curriculum relevance’ is the word to describe “applicability and appropriateness of a curriculum to the needs, interests, aspirations and expectations of learners and society in general” (UNESCO, 2013:21).

³² I interviewed 22 graduates, and in this chapter I am only drawing views from six graduates of the 22. Only 6 graduates’ data was used herein because it was intended to supplement the university stakeholders’ views, who are the main group of respondents discussed in this chapter. The numbering of graduates has been maintained as in the other chapters (five and seven) for the sake of consistency.

students participated in the four FGDs comprising of seven students in each university.

Table 8.1 provides a summary of the respondents.

Table 16. Description of respondents

Respondent	Institution	Faculty	Department
Dean 1	University 1	Development Studies	Development
Dean 2	University 2	Environmental Studies	Agri-sciences
Dean 3	University 3	Built Environment	Land Surveying and Physical Planning
HoD 1	University 3	Social Sciences	Sociology
HoD 2	University 3	Education and Media Studies	Journalism and Media Studies
HoD 3	University 4	Academy of Medical Sciences	Biological Sciences
HoD 4	University 2	Environmental Studies	Agri-business
Lecturer 1	University 1	Development Studies	Extension and rural development
Lecturer 2	University 1	Development Studies	Agribusiness management
Lecturer 3	University 2	Environmental Sciences	Agri-sciences
Lecturer 4	University 2	Education	Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum
Lecturer 5	University 2	Humanities and Social Sciences	Theology and Religious studies
Lecturer 6	University 3	Social Sciences	Political Science
Lecturer 7	University 3	Education and Media Studies	Technical Education
Lecturer 8	University 3	Built Environment	Land Surveying and Physical Planning

The numbering of graduates corresponds to the same way they are identified in other chapters			
Graduate 15	University 3	Social Sciences (BSoc. Sociology)	Sociology
Graduate 13	University 1	Development Studies (BSc. Agribusiness)	Agribusiness
Graduate 12	University 1	Environmental Sciences (BSc. Environment Sciences)	Environmental Sciences
Graduate 10	University 3	Nursing (BSc. Nursing)	Nursing
Graduate 6	University 3	Social Sciences (BSoc. Sociology)	Sociology
Graduate 1	University 1	Development Studies (BSc. Agribusiness)	Agribusiness

Table 17. Description of students who participated in FGDs

FGD Name	Institution	Faculty	Number of participants
FGD 1	University 1	Development Studies	Seven
FGD 2	University 2	Environmental Sciences	Seven
FGD 3	University 3	Social Sciences	Seven
FGD 4	University 4	Academy of medical sciences	Seven

8.2 Multi-layered perceptions of graduate preparation

Graduate preparation is defined as the comprehensive training of students in different fields so that they can successfully navigate and contribute to the development of various sectors (Archer & Davison, 2008). Graduate degree holders occupy critical positions in the workforce and the development of societies (Ezzo, 2013). The study's findings indicate multilayered perceptions of graduate preparation from deans, lecturers, students, and graduates. Although differently presented, all the views are centred on graduates' 'readiness', 'non-readiness', 'preparedness' and 'non-preparedness' for rural development. Readiness and preparedness are not only conceived in terms of graduates' technical or professional qualifications in their various disciplines of study but their capabilities to foster their aspirations and agency for social change in rural communities. In exploring perspectives on graduates' preparation for rural development, the study engages with the broader understandings of how university education interacts with the rural social contexts. In this study, universities are conceptualised as being central to the enlargement of graduate capabilities for rural development.

8.2.1 Deans' perspectives

As a matter of background, deans described their roles as promotion of quality education programmes, research, university-community engagement, and the economic development activities of their respective faculties. They defined themselves as key stakeholders within the universities. They anchor departmental roles in contributing to the implementation of the universities' strategic plans, curriculum, and research activities. The study findings indicate that deans' perceptions of graduates' preparation for rural development revolved around the two constructs of 'quality' and 'relevance' of their graduates.

8.2.1.1 Quality as preparedness

In their responses, deans put much weight on the issue of quality in graduates' preparation. Deans' perceptions seemed to indicate that their views of graduates' preparation revolved around the notions of 'quality of students' learning'. The persistent views were that universities prepare graduates with quality attributes and skills, which make them ready and competent for the world of work and the labour market. Their understanding of 'quality of students' learning' seemed to involve the development of graduate employability attributes, and less of capabilities. Perceptions focused on what kind of graduates they produce for the labour market. The concept of quality is not new in higher education discourses on graduates' preparation. It has been grounded as part of academics' responsibilities (Morley, 2003; Harvey & Askling, 2003). While almost all the deans' responses were suggestive of their roles of quality enhancement and assurance, there was no practical evidence on how these roles could be applied in ensuring graduates' preparedness for rural development. It appeared hard for the deans to point out what exactly their universities are doing in ensuring that they produce quality graduates that are well prepared for rural development.

From the deans' responses, quality assurance was tied to 'continuous assessment', 'program evaluations', and 'adherence to quality checks set by the National Council for Higher Education' (NCHE). Probes into the quality checks by NCHE did not point to anything on ensuring graduates' preparedness for contextual needs, among which rural development would be included by default. There was hardly any articulation of quality as 'fitness for purpose' (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003), not even in relation to rural development. The deans' views on quality preparation of graduates did not succeed in

providing concrete evidence on how universities foster graduates' capabilities and harness their agency and freedoms to be drivers of rural social change.

Deans failed to support their claims of producing quality graduates. For instance, there was no evidence that universities carry out regular graduate tracer studies, and/or evaluation of their programmes, arguing that it was too expensive to undertake these initiatives. Lack of graduate tracer studies has implications for perceptions of graduates' preparation. For instance, universities could continue preparing graduates in a manner that makes them less prepared to meet societal or public needs and demands. Feedback through tracer studies and/or evaluations would contribute to an informed basis of reformulating or reshaping universities' curricula and pedagogies towards society's expectations or needs. Lack of understanding of what constitutes quality in higher education, as Westerheijden, Stensaker and Rosa (2007) argue, results in universities implementing what *they* deem to be quality assurance without understanding its purpose and impact. Quality ought to be understood contextually. For instance, Mukwambo (2019) argues for an alternative view of quality as human development in the Zimbabwean higher education space. Thus, in the context of Malawi, quality could be understood in terms of how graduates are prepared to contribute to rural human development.

Deans' perceptions of graduate preparation were elusive. Often, in their responses, they seemed to defeat what they ought to be affirming. The views from one dean below epitomises how their responses would be interpreted as a 'stab in their own back'³³:

³³ By a stab in their own back I mean the response was shooting down their very own argument of producing quality graduates as read in the quotation from dean 1.

Looking at how poorer we are becoming as a country despite all the efforts in the higher education institutions; it is an indication that something is not being addressed in the universities as we prepare graduates. We are producing more graduates yet the rural development sector still faces multiple challenges to come out of poverty. One wonders what is it that our graduates are doing if at all they are doing anything towards rural poverty reduction (Dean 1).

Deducing from the excerpt above, it would seem the deans' views of quality in relation to graduates' preparation were 'caged' in numbers. For instance, Deans seemed to assume that producing more graduates would have a ripple effect on rural poverty reduction. Deans made a lot of *non sequitur* statements in their responses, i.e. drawing conclusions that are not logically premised, and lacking practical and empirical evidence. For instance, in most of their responses, there were no reflections on what kind of graduates their universities are producing. Deans' perceptions failed to give a picture of whether universities are producing graduates who possess the requisite attributes and capabilities to contribute to rural development in Malawi. There was less consideration of the context in which graduates would work upon graduation, i.e. rurality in the case of Malawi.

8.2.1.2 Relevance as preparedness

Deans theoretically articulated preparedness as relevance. It could be argued that this is in view of the fact that "universities are increasingly being called upon to contribute more meaningfully towards combating poverty and promoting development in rural areas" (Kilonzo & Nyamukondiwa, 2016:1). Deans argued that they are contributing to the relevance of graduates' preparation through their different programmes. They argued that they produce graduates who are prepared to engage with society in matters of national development, which implicitly includes rural development. However, as was the case with the question of quality, no practical evidence was provided to support their claims. It was

only in one university that the dean referred to the department of extension and rural development as being instrumental in spearheading graduates' preparation for rural development. Apart from this one department, the deans' views seemed to indicate that attention to rural needs was not the focus of graduate preparation despite these universities existing in a ruralised context.

From their responses, deans' perceptions of relevance in graduates' preparation were framed within the conception of the 'university-community engagement' perspective (Mtawa, Fongwa & Wangenge-Ouma, 2016). They seemed to argue that universities are fostering graduates' preparation as 'front liners of rural development', with 'front liners for rural development' interpreted as graduates with public good dispositions (Walker & McLean, 2013) for rural development. In what I would describe as an imaginary view³⁴, Deans seemed to push universities towards the direction of delivering contextually relevant education in a ruralised Malawi, and yet no practical evidence was provided. According to Kilonzo and Nyamukondiwa (2016), graduate relevance in rural development would mean universities taking a lead in building more just and progressive rural societies. However, apart from the department of extension and rural development, there was no evidence from other faculties that universities have a particular focus on rural development in their graduate preparation. Relevant graduate preparation would require universities' adaptation of their programmes to the local environment for its immediate use and benefits (Assié-Lumumba, 2006). Therefore, while deans made clear links between universities' roles in

³⁴ I prefer to use the word imaginary to denote that the responses seemed to indicate that what was shared existed in their mind only; not as hallucinations, but there was no evidence presented either in practice or on paper of what they said.

national development, evidence was lacking in how exactly they prepare graduates for rural development. The excerpt below represents views on how deans spoke about relevance in relation to graduate preparation:

As universities, we have all that it takes to contribute to the development of this country, despite its massive rural poverty. What matters is our approach and the manner in which we deliver our education to the students. If we give our students contextually relevant knowledge that is responsive to the rapidly changing context and needs, our contribution to rural development will be easily acknowledged (Dean 1).

The deans' understanding of relevance links to what Altbach (1999) calls 'university-industry relationships', where 'vocationalization' dominates the thinking. In explaining 'vocationalization', which I use to interpret deans' perceptions, Altbach (1999:304-305) states:

Throughout the world, the conviction has grown that the university curriculum should provide relevant training for a variety of increasingly complex jobs. The traditional concept of higher education as liberal non-vocational studies for elites, or a broad but unfocused curriculum, has been widely criticized for lacking "relevance" to the needs of contemporary students.

Deans' perceptions of graduate preparation seem to centre on their readiness as employable graduates. However, given rural contexts in Malawi, graduates' preparation would need to go beyond their possessing professional academic qualifications. Universities would need to foster capabilities for rural development and cultivate among graduates a sense of collective agency, which would inspire them to contribute towards the well-being of the rural people, as engaged citizens.

8.2.2 *Lecturers' perspectives*

The lecturers' perspectives discussed in this section include those of various Heads of Departments (HoDs, as they were essentially practicing lecturers, only with extra academic leadership and management responsibilities for their departments). Their general perception is that graduate preparation for rural development should entail students' acquisition of knowledge and capabilities to deal successfully with various rural problems in their local contexts. Lecturers held the view that graduate preparation entails enhancing their skills as agents of development. Thus, it would seem that lecturers were of the view that graduates' preparation would "legitimize [universities'] existence, increase their relevance, boost their links to society and the economy and leverage development" (Ssebuwufu et al., 2012:8).

Lecturers' perceptions alluded to the view that preparing graduates is to equip them for service to society. They viewed university education as a passage, transitioning to the world of work. There were explicit statements from lecturers of perceiving graduates' formation as preparing them for the service to the public, explained through what they called 'university-society engagement'. Lecturers felt they were responsible for producing graduates who would contribute to the economic, social, and political development of the country. In a way, these views would be aligned to Schuetze (2012), Cuthill (2012), and Mtawa et al. (2016) on the idea of engagement and/or service as one of the primary functions of universities.

Although lecturers' views appeared to confirm the 'university-society engagement' through graduates' preparation, their articulations were oblivious to the context of rurality.

They skirted around the question of how they are preparing graduates for rural development. While acknowledging higher education as a force for societal change (Gourley, 2012), lecturers' perceptions were void and unclear about how they prepare graduates for rural social change. Lecturers made presumptuous conclusions that the training they provided to students would enable them to work in any contextual setting. This view is problematic as it disregards pertinent contextual factors that may foster or constrain graduates' capabilities for rural development. It could be deduced that this assumption that graduates can work in any context has been a recipe for graduates unpreparedness to work in rural areas.

While universities in their various roles are considered as key institutions in the processes of social change and development (Sharma, 2014), understanding contextual realities in graduate preparation is central. For instance, in the context of rurality, graduate preparation would entail what one dean called 'building a different culture of development'. A culture of development should involve training and socialising students to have agency and aspirations to contribute to rural transformation. Nevertheless, what seems to generally emerge from the lecturers' views were elements of 'forgetfulness of their roles', in what I would describe as 'academic amnesia' in graduates' preparation for rural development. Lecturers' views appeared to 'disregard', or 'forget' the rural context in their graduate preparation. Gumbo (2018) has also argued on the impact of contextual factors in higher education, as a dimension central to students' preparation.

The excerpts below represent lecturers' responses to the question of graduates' preparedness for rural development. The theme of relevance, though presented differently,

seems to run through these voices, but relevance which is not contextualised within the notion of rurality:

In this country, everybody talks about the rural people; it is the rural people who send MPs [members of parliament] to parliament. The rural people who send the president into power. And most of the things the government does are said to be pro-poor. Meaning they target the poor rural masses. However, the question we should be asking is on the authenticity of these statements... Possibly, because we think everything is rural in Malawi, ironically in our universities we have ended up forgetting the rural dimension in how we prepare graduates (Lecturer 6).

As universities, our job is to produce graduates who can fit into society, who can contribute something to society after their university education. And in Malawi, that society is mainly rural. So it goes without saying, Malawi needs graduates that are relevant to the rural context. We need to give them the knowledge that would make them instruments of change in this country. Sometimes we are caught in the global demands on thinking about quality, at the expense of contextual relevance. For instance, we deliver some units so that our graduates can meet requirements for international masters' degrees elsewhere in the world (Lecturer 1).

The relevance of our university education is dependent on the contribution we make to society, be it through our service engagement with communities or through the type or caliber of graduates we produce for the society (Lecturer 2).

We cannot pride ourselves by producing graduates who cannot contribute to changing our country. We cannot be proud of producing graduates who are not committed to the services of their country. This contribution to the country includes contributing to rural poverty reduction (HoD 3).

From the analysis of lecturers' responses, I wondered how universities in Malawi are close to society, given their lack of context-connectedness. Given that universities are fundamental institutions of modern society (Ahmadabadi, 2016), and that society in Malawi is largely rural, one would expect some level of deliberate and intentional connectedness with rurality, particularly for the purposes of rural transformation. Connectedness is therefore instrumental in ensuring that graduates develop social problem-

solving skills (Lauwerier, 2015), that have relevance to their particular contexts, in this case, rural poverty.

8.2.3 *Students' perspectives*

Overall, students valued their preparation for the opportunities university education would open up for them upon graduation. Students' responses focused on how they felt the university prepared them for the world of work. They indicated that they were competently prepared in their various disciplines. However, they could not all articulate their competences for rural development. Only students from the faculty of development studies appeared more prepared for rural development than the rest. Students' perceptions of preparedness was centred more on their discipline-specific knowledge, and less on attributes and capabilities for work. For instance, they would describe themselves as fully qualified nurses, teachers, agribusiness experts, but could not explain how prepared they were for the rural context.

In recent years, the conventional university model of heavily inculcating discipline-specific knowledge and skills only has been called into question (Cai, 2012; Tomlinson, 2007). The general push has been for universities to produce graduates with general employability attributes that make them ready for work (Archer & Davison, 2008; Yorke, 2006). Thus, within the graduate employability discourse, graduate preparation has been a subject of graduate 'employability attribute lists', which different stakeholders value, as expected graduate outcomes (Oliver, 2013; Boden & Nedeva, 2010). For instance, in Chapter seven I discussed what emerged as graduate attributes and capabilities for rural development in the context of Malawi.

Students' perspectives on their preparation for rural development varied. Students from the faculties of development studies and environmental sciences were generally more positive about their preparedness, unlike those from the built environment and medical sciences. Students from the faculty of development studies endorsed their undergraduate studies as fit for purpose in preparing them for rural development. Whereas students from the built environment and medical sciences struggled to make links to how their university education is preparing them for rural development. The two excerpts below present contrasting views on how students perceived their preparedness for rural development:

I think for my part the program has prepared me well for rural development. Considering that in my program, agribusiness management, we deal with issues which we can strongly relate to rural development. For instance, working with smallholder farmers (FGD 1, Agribusiness student).

I am trained as a medical doctor, and a medical doctor is a medical doctor. I hope you understand. I really don't expect myself, and I am sure others like me to work in some rural health centre, no, that is [a] non-starter for me (FGD 4, medical student).

Varied student perceptions of their preparedness for rural development could be explained by the 'discipline-specific focused' graduate preparation in the pure and applied sciences. Students from the faculties of Social Sciences and Development Studies 'somehow' ably constructed linkages of their preparation to rural development. They were able to argue that the university prepared them to contribute to national development.

Different perspectives also pointed to students' varying career aspirations, and what they valued as their contribution to society as graduates. In one FGD, a student argued:

In my view, our relevance to the outside world will be measured by the contribution we make to the society, especially the rural poor farmers, as individuals or collectively as graduates who have studied extension (FGD 1).

These perceptions resonate with Barrett and Tikly (2012:3), who argue that relevant graduate preparation could be seen when “learning outcomes are meaningful for all learners, valued by their communities and consistent with national development priorities in a changing global context”. For some students it was clear they had aspirations, they made choices towards working in rural development, while others did not think of it. Representing the views of those not interested in rural development, a medical student wondered ‘*why after five years of university education one would think of working in rural areas*’. The role of universities in fostering graduates’ capabilities for rural development is more relevant to such students who have no personal interest in working in rural areas. The kind of education received would shape them into civic-minded graduates; graduates who would not only think of their degree as a weapon of personal success but a tool of knowledge with which to foster the well-being of others, including the rural people. Given that rurality would push even such students into working in rural areas, there is a need for universities to make intentional decisions in fostering students’ capabilities that harness their care, empathy, agency, and aspirations for rural social change.

In the four FGDs, almost all students believed that university education increased their employment opportunities. However, further to appreciating students’ perceptions of their preparation for employment, the study interrogates how universities would then foster their capabilities, agency, and aspirations for rural development. Fostering graduate capabilities, which enhance their agency and aspirations for rural development, is conceived as seeing how students would develop care, empathy, and a desire to contribute to rural well-being.

8.2.4 Graduates' perspectives

Perceptions of graduates' preparation for rural development were sought from graduates working in the sector. I refer to them as 'graduates' in the rest of the discussion. Graduates were asked to assess their preparedness for transitioning to the world of work, through reflecting on their university education experiences. They were asked to recall their knowledge, competences, and skills which were developed through their university education and how they think of them now that they are practicing. Diverse views emerged from graduates on their preparation for rural development. I discuss them under the following sub-themes: 1) lack of intentional focus on rural development, and 2), technical preparedness.

8.2.4.1 Lack of intentional focus on rural development

Apart from those who studied agriculture extension and sociology, the rest of the graduates indicated that their undergraduate studies had no intentional and deliberate focus on preparing them for rural development. While it is not the universities' mission to prepare graduates for rural development, rurality would necessitate such considerations. Thus, within their functions of knowledge production (Cloete et al., 2015), producing scholars, scientists, educating professionals, and the formation of enlightened citizens (Walker, 2012), universities would be stretched to consider a focus on preparing them for rural contexts. The guiding question for intentional focus would be: What kind of graduates are needed in different development sectors in rural settings? Such views would engage concepts like engineers for rural development, nursing for rural development, teachers for rural development, and ICT for rural development, among others. All professional

disciplines have a bearing on the well-being of the rural people, yet it seems graduate preparation, as study findings indicate, often falls short in making these linkages.

From the data, most graduates seemed to argue that they wished their undergraduate studies would have intentionally prepared them to understand the context of their work. Several graduates mentioned that lack of earlier exposure with the rural communities came with what they termed as *cultural shock*. The catchphrase among many students was that *the face of poverty on paper is different in reality*. What seems lacking here is the graduates' connection with their contextual realities, while they are still in the university. This is a problem which the 1993 *Human development report* points out, recommending that:

The educational and training systems of societies must be such that people can acquire relevant skills—skills that help them master their lives. This change has to come at all levels of learning—from literacy courses to university training (UNDP, 1993:38).

Graduates pointed out a lack of engagement with communities during their undergraduate studies. Arguably, this phenomenon raises questions about the sensitivity of universities' pedagogical practices and curricula arrangements with respect to contextual demands, i.e. how they 'help students master their lives', which would mean getting connected and/or affiliated to what would form their beings and doings in the context of rurality. Going through the data, the dominant narrative from graduates concerned their unpreparedness for rural development. The two excerpts below represent the graduates' views:

I do not think the university did much to prepare me to work with and for the rural people. Thus, upon graduation I had to find my own way out through experiences on the job. Because I feel to effectively prepare someone to work for the rural communities, there has to be some practical component. It cannot just be theoretical. All my courses had no element of interaction with the rural communities, but here I am working with them (Graduate 10).

My answer in terms of university prepared me for rural development work will be twofold. The university, I would say, theory wise, prepared me very well. But I would not say the same with the practical part. The very practical part that I am referring to is to do with rural communities' interaction. The only time I interacted with the rural communities while in college was when I was collecting my research data (Graduate 12).

Findings based on most graduates' voices point towards their unpreparedness for rural development. We see a lack of engagement with the rural communities, which in the end affects their preparedness for rural development. Community-engagement, as a pedagogical tool (Mtawa, 2019), has the potential of fostering graduates' capabilities, agency, and cultivating values for responsible citizenship (Leibowitz, 2012). Engagement with rural communities would foster graduates' public good professional capabilities (Walker & McLean, 2013), through affiliation and connectedness. From the graduates' views, it seems graduate preparation in most universities does not take into account students' interaction with the rural communities. Thus, students lack opportunities to connect and affiliate with rural communities. By implication, we see the missing link of what Benneworth (2013) calls the engaged university; there seems to be no evidence of engagement between university students and the rural communities. An engaged university has the potential to foster graduates' capabilities, and enhance their agency and aspirations to contribute to solving emerging rural social problems.

8.2.4.2 Technical preparedness

Intuitively, graduates are generally inclined to indicate that they are well prepared in their specific professional disciplines of study (Rayner & Papakonstantinou, 2015). It would take one's low self-confidence in their discipline for them to accept that they are not technically

well prepared. Thus, almost all the twenty-two graduates interviewed in this study, including the six whose perceptions are discussed in this chapter, were of the view that technically they were well prepared in their various disciplines of study.

Graduates who felt universities prepared them well for rural development supported their claims by reflecting on the curriculum they followed and the way it was delivered. Most of these graduates were from the faculties of development studies, who had either studied extension or agribusiness. They valued specific courses that they felt shaped them into ideal rural development practitioners. Some of these courses were: agriculture and rural extension, community of practice, behavioural sciences (sociology, psychology, and anthropology), agrarian change, community development, and project management, among others. This finding reveals that university graduates are products of their curriculum (McCowan, 2019; Walker, 2012). The curriculum was the measure or indicator of graduates' assumed technical preparedness for rural development. An example of such views is given below:

The curriculum, which I followed, touched on the very important aspects of rural development. For instance, we did courses in agribusiness, business management, and entrepreneurship, local economic development, environment, and natural resources management, agriculture and food security, water provision, gender and development, biodiversity conservation, climate change among others. These areas are key areas in rural development work, they touch on what matters for the rural poor. If they were taught in practical ways, graduates would be well prepared for rural development. The gap I can notice is that of remaining at theory, not getting into the practice of these things (Graduate 13).

From the excerpt above, graduates' preparation for rural development fell short of practice. The problem of theory-based university education was identified among the majority of the graduates. The identified challenges call for the need to imagine new possibilities for enhancing graduate preparation.

8.3 Imagining future possibilities for graduate preparation

In response to the question of how to foster graduate capabilities for rural development, interviewees imagined different ways in which these would be enhanced. This section explores these possibilities and shows why and how they are particularly suited to forming engaged graduates for rural social change. I draw on empirical data from interviewees to discuss their ‘imaginations’ on graduates’ preparation for rural development.

I prefer to call these perceptions ‘imagined possibilities’ because, throughout the discussion, there was no evidence that universities were actually carrying these out. In other words, they are ‘wish lists’ for how they envision a university education that would foster graduate preparation for rural change. In this case, graduate preparation would be construed in Barnett's (2012) terms as ‘learning for agency and social change’ with emphatic aspirations to contribute towards rural development.

There was consensus among the interviewees that the development landscape in Malawi demands that graduates should become motivated and inspired to work in rural areas. For instance, among the deans, the wish was that universities would do more to contribute to national development. Deans lamented a loss of civic and national responsibility among graduates, in what was referred to as *‘lost culture of development’*. Deans seemed to indicate that graduates who have been formed in the last decades, following multiparty dispensation, lack a sense of patriotism and responsible citizenship. Deans appeared to concede that there is something wrong with the current preparation of graduates. They argued that Malawi embraced democratisation without responsibility, and this has negatively infiltrated into the higher education system. They argued that as graduates come

out of the university they misconstrue democracy as individuals' unlimited freedom. Thus, in their perceptions, one would read that deans lamented the loss of the much-heralded view of 'universities as unique pedagogical spaces of public importance' (Masschelein & Simons, 2012). Deans seemed to argue that misconceptions about human rights placed individual interests at the expense of their social and public responsibilities.

Acknowledging the significance of the public role of universities in circumstances of poverty and democracy, deans 'imagined' graduate preparation which would bring back the culture of national development. Deans' views would seem to push universities towards their public good roles, which would be manifested through the type of graduates they produce. Their suggestions were intended to demonstrate possibilities for valuing the preparation of graduates with zeal, passion, zest, empathy, care, interest, and commitment to the public or common good. Nixon (2011) aptly summarises these perceptions:

If we value the university as a constituent element of our common good, then universities will have to reorder their priorities, the public will have to acknowledge that higher education is to be valued for its social as well as individual benefits, and the government will have to ensure a strong public presence in whatever arrangements emerge from the current impasse.

A common sentiment from the deans on the matter are found in the excerpt below:

We need to get back to the culture of national development, where graduates, with free will, without coercion would abide by that culture, and freely go to work in rural areas. We were trained here [university 1] in the 1990s and we knew exactly where we were going to work and what we were going to do and with whom we were going to work. But I can tell you that there is something wrong with how we are training our graduates; we have completely neglected the focus on rural people. You know this university was meant to address issues of rural poverty. By then the thinking was that rural poverty would be addressed by investing in agricultural capital and human resources. But our graduates are the first to desist from working in rural areas. Why? (Dean 1)

Common perceptions among the deans were centred around seeing universities as public institutions for public service. Thus, the image of graduate preparation was moved from its narrow self-serving concerns (Kromydas, 2017), to public good values. The idea of civic-minded graduate preparation pointed towards the production of ‘civic engaged graduates’ (Mtawa, 2019), as an expected outcome of an ‘engaged university’ (Benneworth, 2013). Cultivating the culture of national development would be contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of society at large (Mtshali & Middleton, 2011). This would be achieved by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual into a responsible citizen for society. By implication, this would mean graduates are prepared to use their knowledge for the common good.

Within the capability approach, the possibility of fostering the culture of national development would be interpreted as enhancing graduates’ agency and aspirations. However, apart from agency enhancing, Unterhalter (2009) cautions that education can also be detrimental and impose life-long disadvantages to individuals and society if delivered poorly. For instance, the deans’ admitting to the current challenges in graduates’ preparation confirms that something is wrong, which might have led to the loss of the culture of development.

Imagined future possibilities for graduates’ preparation would be interpreted from an all-important standpoint of interviewees’ convictions in universities’ role in promoting human well-being. All interviewees seemed to argue along Maxwell’s (2012:123) line that “we urgently need to bring about a revolution in universities” so that students acquire knowledge and it is used to help solve social problems, pushing universities towards the

conscious realisation of their public good roles of producing public good citizens (Leibowitz, 2012; Walker & McLean, 2013; Walker & Boni, 2013). Participants imagined universities producing graduates with democratic and civic-minded dispositions, as agents of rural social change.

From the data analysis, three pathways for effective graduate preparation for rural development have been identified. Interviewees imagined that ‘curriculum relevance’ and ‘rural sensitive pedagogies’ would enhance graduates’ preparation for rural development.

8.3.1 Curriculum relevance

Curriculum relevance, as defined by UNESCO (2013:21), is the “applicability and appropriateness of a curriculum to the needs, interests, aspirations, and expectations of learners and society in general”. I adopt this definition in discussing how interviewees imagined how ‘curriculum relevance’ would contribute to fostering graduate capabilities for rural development. Foregrounding interviewees’ perceptions, curriculum relevance is not only viewed in terms of learner-centredness but also, importantly, society-centredness or a society-oriented approach. Interviewees speak of how the curriculum would shape individual graduates as citizens of the ruralised societies of which they are part. This is similar to what Dall’Alba (2012) calls re-imagining ourselves in the university, in view of care and empathy for the rural people. It is an instrumental view of the way universities would be seen to foster rural human well-being through the delivery of relevant curricula to their graduates.

Interviewees seemed to agree that universities have to contribute to the economic and socio-political transformation of their country. They appeared to argue that universities

would need to include in their degree programmes curricula elements that would not only enhance graduates' particular professional growth but their capabilities as responsible citizens. An example would be letting students undergo some national service program, with deliberate efforts of placing them in rural areas, as this would potentially cultivate civic responsibility in them. Their understanding of responsible citizenship encompassed graduates' aspirations to be of service to their society, in what others call 'engaged scholarship' or 'scholarship of engagement' (Mtawa et al., 2016; Cuthil, 2012). In a close reading of the responses, participants seemed to advocate for graduate preparation that would enhance graduates' 'civic engagement'. Where civic engagement would involve the notion of care and empathy, and being concerned with other people and things around one's community, such as rural poverty.

Possibilities of universities producing graduates who can effectively contribute to rural development would be imagined through Boland's (2012) notion of 'engaged curriculum'. An engaged curriculum would be one that cultivates graduates' capabilities that enhance aspirations and agency for rural development. Lecturers argued that as universities they ought to produce graduates who can contribute to national and global development, in what Nussbaum (1997, 2002, 2006) refers to as world citizenship. The lecturers' views seemed to imply that the preparation of graduates should not only be limited by the curricular focus on broad development issues but also contextual relevance.

Respondents' views seemed to demonstrate clear linkages between the concepts of 'curriculum relevance' and that of 'engaged scholarship'. The two concepts seemed to underline imagination or reframing of the purpose of the university in being responsive to

the national development agenda. The two excerpts from the deans below highlight such perceptions:

The attainment of the ambitious sustainable development goals, for instance, in the case of Malawi, rests on how much effort is put into rural development in Malawi. When we talk of leaving no one behind, in our context, we look at how we are taking on board the wishes and needs of the rural people in our curriculum as we prepare graduates. What kind of education forms our university? (Dean 2).

Keeping a blind eye to rural development is planning to fail as far as development is concerned in Malawi. Rural poverty is the greatest enemy the country has to fight. While we can train graduates who can work elsewhere in the world, our primary responsibility should be to prepare graduates who can address contextual issues. Therefore, a good university curriculum should first and foremost prepare graduates to address Malawi development challenges (Dean 1).

From the excerpts above, a relevant curriculum would be that which aims at transforming rural communities, which also has the potential to contribute to SGDs. For instance, from the human development and capabilities standpoint, evidenced above, development that ignores or leaves rural communities behind is not development at all. Based on the foregoing discussion on the concepts of ‘curriculum relevance’ and ‘engaged scholarship’ it would be argued that curriculum content and mode of delivery have the potential to ignite or not graduates’ agency and aspirations for rural development. Therefore, it would seem participants’ imagination of possibilities of graduate preparation point towards the direction “to re-consider not only *what* students and staff in universities know or can *do*, but also how [they] are learning to *be*” (Dall’Alba, 2012:113).

The interest in curriculum relevance seemed to focus on how the acquired knowledge would enhance possibilities for rural well-being enlargement, at individual and collective levels. It is along these lines that interviewees’ perception of curriculum relevance would

be further aligned to the notions of ‘learning outcomes’ and ‘constructive alignment’ (Biggs & Tang, 2007). Respondents seem to argue that the curriculum should be able to define *what* kind of graduates the university wants to produce (learning outcomes), *how*, and for what purpose to society (constructive alignment). In the context of this study, the argument is that universities produce graduates who would effectively contribute to creating well-being opportunities for the rural people in utilising their varied university knowledge.

Interviewees appeared to consistently argue that the curriculum should be able to point to the direction and ideals which the university stands for. This was evident in responses which pointed out that universities should always keep in mind their contribution to national development, and in this context rural development in particular. The idea of curriculum pointing towards what universities stand for implies that before we could analyse, assess, or criticize universities’ roles in rural development, we ought to understand their foundational missions and mandates. Fortunately the theme of national transformation roles runs across the missions of the four public universities under exploration (see Chapter one). This makes the argument of interrogating curriculum relevance to rural development pertinent. Again, rural development is one of the national development priorities in Malawi. Hence, interest in relevant curriculum and pedagogical practices, aimed at enhancing graduates’ preparation for rural development, would be considered an issue of national importance. A curriculum that is relevant to graduate preparation for rural development, would for instance, take into account courses or modules that would help students understanding rurality and rural development in their discipline specific areas. For

instance, be it medical students or engineering students, they would need to study rural sociology, a course that does not appear in any of the curriculum for these programs.

8.3.2 *Rural sensitive pedagogies*

In delimiting the conceptualisation of pedagogy, I apply Walker's (2006:11) definition:

I take pedagogy to mean the method of teaching in the widest sense, that is, it extends beyond only the role of the lecturer or teacher. It involves not only who teaches, but also who is taught (and of course is interwoven with what is taught – the curriculum), and the contextual conditions under which such teaching and learning takes place.

Complexities associated with graduates' preparation for rural development merit such a comprehensive and multidimensional definition. Interviewees seemed to argue that preparing graduates for rural development would require a set of rural sensitive pedagogical practices. Internship/practicum, service/work-integrated learning, and customised courses were envisioned as practical pathways for fostering graduates' capabilities, which enhance and harness their agency and aspirations for rural social transformation. It was envisioned that rural development capabilities (see Chapter seven) would stir graduates' spirited desires, motivation, and drive to contribute to improving the well-being of the rural poor. These 'imagined' and 'proposed' 'rural sensitive pedagogies' would be considered to be at the heart of the capability to be educated, when education is conceived as a capability in itself (Terzi, 2007).

8.3.2.1 *Internship/Practicum*

The internship was viewed as a pedagogical practice with the potential to enhance graduates' capabilities for rural development. Participants were of the view that structured internships/practicums would have the potential to develop not only employability skills

and attributes but also capabilities that enhance their aspirations and agency for rural development. Again, it would appear, the idea of an internship/practicum is conceptualised within the bounds of ‘imagining a curriculum for an engaged university (Sachs & Clark, 2017b). The argument is that, by letting students engage more fully with the members of the community through internship/practicum, they would better understand the social issues of concern for the general public (Sachs & Clark, 2017a). Thus, fostering graduate capabilities, agency and aspirations would quintessentially entail engaging them *in* and *with* the world of rural work as they undertake various undergraduate programmes. The concern was that with textbooks and lectures remaining the mainstay of education delivery, graduates are not adequately exposed to the realities of rural development, and hence are often under-prepared. Views on internship pointed towards what Rowe and Zegwaard (2017) refer to as work-integrated learning. The underlying premise seemed to be that with work-integrated learning, universities can (and could) produce ‘work-ready’ or ‘employable’ graduates (Holmes, 2013) for rural development. However, this study goes beyond looking at work readiness, to consider their capabilities for rural development, in terms of the opportunities and choices they have to contribute to the well-being of the rural people.

Interviewees would be interpreted as arguing that internship could be a form of a ‘critical capability pedagogy’ (Walker, 2010), which would foster the formation of other capabilities. Internship as a pedagogical practice appeared to have been premised on the assumption that fostering capabilities for rural development would require more than classroom activities. Internship was considered as an integrating and transformative

strategy, through which students would obtain real-life experiences in rural areas, away from their books.

Participants posited that internship has the potential of offering students spaces of relating classroom theoretical concepts to practical experiences. For instance, it was argued that through practica, students would be able to cultivate capabilities and ‘skills in solving rural practical problems’. Internship, construed as a form of community engagement, dissolves the theory-practice divide to more students’ participation of societal issues as co-citizens and co-activists rooted in their local contexts (Holmes, 2013). Excerpts below represent interviewees’ general perceptions on how internships would push graduates’ preparation forward in a promising direction of fostering capabilities and cultivating agency and aspirations:

The job environment is not for learning, it is for the graduates to deliver what she/he has learned while at the university, but what happens is that graduates learn the application of what we teach them on the job. Of course, the reason is that as universities we are not well funded to accommodate such kind of graduate preparation, such as internships and industrial attachments, as they come with huge costs (Lecturer 8).

The major component of our courses is theory-heavy, I think we take it for granted that we are giving them the theory and they will practice at the workplace. The assumption is that they will apply whatever we have taught them out there. How our programs are structured, we hardly offer them work-based learning through internships (HoD 2).

Internships are good to our students as we prepare them, although we do not seem to do them for the obvious reasons of resource constraints. Internships help students to interpret things they learn at the university into practice when they go into the local community...it gives them the ability to understand the world of work (Dean 2).

Maybe as a country if we can set aside a year for every graduate to work as part of internship and get a certificate so that we have graduates who are already exposed to the work environment. And there can be a deliberate effort that this kind of

internship should be in rural areas. However this would require government political will to support financially (Dean 3).

Our way of teaching is so much hegemonic; the power and knowledge is with us the lecturers. Hegemonic approaches to teaching and learning subject students to memorizing what we teaching them, and in the process, no actual learning takes place. Sometimes we cage students with our own views, creating no room for them to learn by doing (Lecturer 6).

Most interviewees see the internship as “transformational learning that promotes deep learning because of the kinds of critical reflection it encourages students to engage in” (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2017:103). Interviewees argued that internships would give opportunities for students to explore rural complex issues and problems and develop personal responses to them (agency and aspirations). From a pedagogical point of view, internship would be described as student-focused learning likely to contribute to many goals of importance to graduates. These would include “employability and work readiness, transformative learning, development of graduate capabilities like global citizenship, [and] social responsibility” (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2017:111), among others.

8.3.2.2 Service-learning and/or problem-based learning possibilities

Service-learning is a broad area of study. Here the concept is applied as a pedagogical practice that would foster graduates’ agency and aspirations for rural development. From the interviewees’ perceptions, there seems to be a recognition of service-learning’s transformative role in graduate preparation. Interviewees seemed to argue that by engaging students more with their communities during their university period, they would come to appreciate the underpinnings of rural development and become better prepared for it. These views confirm earlier observations by others on the impact of service-learning as a pedagogical practice:

Service-learning has emerged as a high impact...experiential pedagogy for cultivating citizenship and as a change agency because of its capacity to involve participants in community-engaged activities that promote civic learning (i.e. civic knowledge, civic skills, civic dispositions, civic identity) and also enrich academic learning (Bringle & Plater, 2017:309).

Participants seemed to argue that service-learning, which is a unique type of experiential education and/or problem-based learning, would offer effective pathways for fostering graduate agency and aspirations. The position was supported by ideas that service-learning would prepare graduates to be critically and civically engaged, for it is a form of learning that is hands-on. For instance, respondents claimed that *service-learning has the potential to offer students opportunities to generate from their learning, knowledge, and skills to solve problems, such as rural poverty* (Lecturer 7).

Other scholars such as Mtawa et al. (2016, 2019) and Cuthil (2012) have considered service-learning as an alleyway to developing public good oriented professionals. Interviewees' responses pointed in this direction when they indicated that service-learning had the potential to connect students and to get them to appreciate and value their contribution to the public, while they learn to earn their qualifications. Service-learning is a pedagogical practice that could be described as based on citizenship formation and would be instrumentally important in graduates' preparation for rural development. Service-learning helps students to think critically, examine, evaluate and analyse their roles in society with regards to civic, social, economic, and political issues, and then develop the skills and dispositions to act on those roles (Mtawa, 2019; Bringle & Plater, 2017; Rawlings-Sanaei, 2017).

The imagined possible future was based on the assumption that through structured service-learning, universities would prepare graduates who are caring and empathetic to their

society's development issues. Service-learning would potentially foster students' agency and aspirations to "have a strong sense of social responsibility and commitment to promoting social justice, particularly in the unequal and diversity contexts" (Mtawa, 2019:26). Respondents appeared to aspire for universities to produce graduates who act as members of their society, connected and affiliated, and embracing respect for the entire human race. Not only are ideas of public good professionals (Walker & McLean, 2013) emerging from these perceptions, but also those of global or world citizenship (Nussbaum, 1997). Through the interviewees' perceptions of service-learning as a pedagogical practice, we see the emergence of the recognition of the transformative power of education (Nussbaum, 2004) that leads to 'capability development' (Walker, 2010). Service-learning would actually lead to the formation of capabilities relevant to rural development.

The dominant views among respondents were that service-learning should not be carried out as 'charity or philanthropy' (Mtawa, 2019) or grounded in a 'voluntaristic model' (Zlotkowski, 2007), but integrated and organised. The excerpts below provide a synopsis of evidence from the participants' voices:

A few times, we had projects where we had what we call community engagements, and some students were involved. They would go and understand some local governance structures that we teach them. They [students] got a chance to interact with these structures through the community engagement projects, which were sporadic and often initiated by us lecturers, not as something that is structured and institutionalized within the university. Actually, it was our personal initiative, which had no credit hours; often students voluntarily engaged in them as outside curricular activities (HoD 2).

From my department, as far as I know, service-learning is attached to a specific project which is supported by the Norwegian University, but beyond that, I have not seen anything of that nature where lecturers would initiate something for students to interact with the communities and making that part of their teaching approach. And I can confidently say this does not even happen in the sociology department (Lecturer 6).

We are emphasizing on problem-based learning and practicals here. What you see there [pointing] is the model of the respiratory system developed by a student. We make students critically think and come up with innovative ideas to identify problems. That is our model of teaching. I do not stand for hours teaching. We engage the students to think, and that is how they come up with things like those you see. We give them preliminary concepts to get them into thinking, rather than sit in front of them giving them materials that they can only regurgitate in exams, no, I do not do that, we are training them to be invention leaders, and so that they can go out into the society and change it (HoD 4).

Voices from respondents seemed to indicate their conviction and belief in service-learning as a pedagogical approach that would foster graduates' capabilities and enhance their agency and aspirations. Interviewees seem to believe that service-learning would foster among students what Mtawa (2019:26) refers to as "caring and compassion, social activism, and sense of responsibility" towards the rural people.

However, from the study findings, service-learning appeared not to be one of the current utilised pedagogical approaches at one of the public universities. Among the 34 faculties from the four public universities, only one faculty and one department in that faculty had a teaching arrangement akin to service-learning. In the department of extension and rural development, graduates were prepared through an 'action-research based learning' for their entire four years of undergraduate study. Based on the description provided by Lecturer 1 (University 1, Faculty of Development Studies), about the Bachelor of Science in Agriculture study programme, it could be considered a prototype of immersive service-learning. It is grounded on students' continuous engagement with communities throughout their undergraduate studies. It is a programme that could offer lessons for other universities to design programmes oriented to being rural- and context-sensitive in the way it prepares graduates. Box 8.1 provides a detailed description of how the programme is organised in terms of its delivery and focus on students' learning from doing.

Box 8.1 A prototype case of service/problem-based learning from University 1

Our Bachelor of Science in Agriculture Extension is a very unique program. It is the only program that we have here at [University 1], which is action research oriented, and probably even in the region. We have very few universities that are doing action research based degree programs. So what makes it unique is that our students, apart from just taking the course lectures, the program also brings them forward to do field research throughout their program of study. This is a four-year degree program, but they start their research right away from second year, and every year they have to go to the rural areas to interact with the rural farmers. They do needs assessments with the communities, identify development problems with the communities and after that they have to prioritize the problems and decide on one problem, which they think they can come up with a solution, and work with the communities. They take up this as their individual project; therefore, they are involved in rural problem solving when they are still in the university. We require of them to keep all documentation as it forms data for their academic long paper project report. In third year, they continue the same engagement with the communities, and in the fourth year, they actually have the whole semester where they stay in the rural area working on their project. For this full semester they do not come to college, we only go to supervise them on what they are doing.

Through the project that the students do, we encourage them to come up with their own solutions on how they think they can deal with the issues that they encounter in their research, what they think could be the solutions; we ask them to propose what they think can work to solve the problems. We are encouraging them as well that much as they are doing research in a specific field, they should be able to diversify; whatever skills they get is preparing them for living a holistic life; so we challenge them to innovate in different areas, not only restricted to land surveying for instance.

Our students in agriculture extension engage with farmers for roughly three years, with continued engagement with the communities, learning by doing. Actually, the community informs their research. So if you ask me how we prepare graduates for rural development, I would be quick to tell you that we are the only university and the only department, if I may boast, in Malawi, which can ably stand tall and say our graduates are well prepared for rural development. And that their training is always centred on contextual issues that the rural smallholder farmers are facing in Malawi. The degree program is designed around students learning through services to the rural areas.

Source: Excerpt from interview with Lecturer 1

What seems to emerge from the foregoing discussion is that learning that only takes place in classroom settings on campuses may do little to foster students' capabilities or their aspirations and agency for rural development. Therefore, a more immersive version of service-learning could be an example of a pedagogical approach that offers possibilities for fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development.

8.3.2.3 Customised courses/training in rural development

Graduates made propositions for 'customised courses/training' for rural development. Interviewees suggested that universities offer training programmes that are more specifically designed to align with various disciplines of graduates' studies. Customised training would relate to the conceptualisation of what Walker and McLean (2013) call professional education for the public good. Interviewees assumed that customised courses would foster students' professional capabilities to contribute to the transformation of rural communities across different disciplines. Participants identified courses in rural sociology, community-based participatory research methods, and moral and ethical studies as courses that support capabilities for rural development. It was argued that customised courses offer three powerful advantages to graduates, the first and the most important one being connections with the world of work. The second advantage is graduate opportunities for a combination of general and specific training, and the third, improved productivity. Thus, the idea for customised courses was that they would improve graduate work readiness in various disciplines whilst being conscious of rural dimensions.

Deducing from the interviewees' perceptions, customised courses would be interpreted as pushing towards 'vocalionalization of university education'. Vocationalisation relates to

the comprehensive embracing of different aspects of the education process, involving, in addition to the general study, the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes and knowledge relating to specific occupations (UNESCO, 2013). However, vocationalisation is a problematic concept in that:

Each university system in each country has its own history, traditions, and contemporary circumstances. Ideas of and the possibilities for the university always have their place in a context (Barnett, 2017:4).

Nonetheless, the assertion that universities always have their place in the context affirms the push for customised courses, which are aimed at ensuring context-specific relevance. Interviewees propose rural sociology, community-based participatory research methods, and ethical and moral studies as core courses that should be included in different study programmes to make them more relevant to rural contexts.

8.3.2.4 Rural sociology

It is not surprising that when graduates were asked what courses they valued most in their university education in relation to rural development, most of them mentioned sociology. Interviewees seemed to argue that sociology enhanced their abilities to ‘negotiate social well-being’. Negotiating social well-being is understood within the premise that “What we each understand to be valuable freedoms is dependent upon shared meanings and what we are prepared to agree upon in social collectives in order to live well together” (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010:512). Nevertheless, there were dissenting views on customising *rural* sociology across undergraduate disciplines. Those who objected to the idea of customising rural sociology argued that rural development in itself is divisive terminology. They argued that it is better to talk about national development than rural development, for whatever

constitutes rural is already embedded in national development. The quote below is an example of those who held contrary views to seeing rural sociology as instrumental in fostering graduate capabilities for rural development:

As for me, the term rural development in itself is bad. In its conceptualization it deliberately separates rural societies and economies from society as general. I do not like this separation. Malawi is one, urban or rural. I believe we should not talk about rural society or the rural economy. These analytical distinctions make us forget the important things we need to think about the country, we are left thinking in cogs, in the end, we leave behind those we thought we are promoting their well-being. There cannot be rural development that does not affect the total economy or society. Anyway, in medical sciences, we do not make those distinctions as we prepare our graduates (HoD 3).

These perceptions appear to appeal to the growth maximisation ideas that the rural poor gain from the ‘trickle-down’ benefits of rapid overall economic growth (Dixon, 1990). However, the ‘trickle-down effect’ fails to succeed in rural development as it further widens inequalities between the urban and the rural (Achiv et al., 2014). Thus, it seems proponents of rural sociology envisioned it as a course that would capacitate graduates to understand the dynamics that deprive rural people of their well-being, as often they are socially, economically, physically, and politically isolated (Shortfall & Book, 2015). Again, given that what people have reason to value may differ, or conflict calls for graduates to understand societal norms and structures that may guide humanity in how to deal with those differences or conflicts over what is valued or not (Deneulin & McGregor, 2010). Thus, rural sociology could potentially provide opportunities, skills, and capabilities to graduates to deal with such conflicts or differences for co-existence towards the advancement of well-being for all.

Rural sociology could potentially preserve graduates' recognition that we exist for each other. Thus, from the interviewees' perspectives, rural sociology would give students different conceptions of social reality, different aspirations, and hopes for rural well-being.

It was argued that a course in rural sociology would enhance graduates' social embeddedness, as a way of developing citizenship capabilities, contributing to the expansive notion of transformative citizenship. Connectedness has the potential to foster a sense of citizenship, which could potentially deepen graduates' empathy, agency, and aspirations for the well-being of rural people. Excerpts below represent views in support of customising rural sociology in graduates' preparation:

The university education prepared me so well for rural development; I studied sociology and did rural development as a module and agrarian change. I got a good understanding of rural development in Malawi and Africa in general. But looking at other disciplines, I feel universities could do better in preparing graduates for rural development; those who didn't do sociology really struggle at first in this work (Graduate 15).

Rural sociology would be a pinnacle of the curriculum for citizenship formation. It would foster the Malawian identity among students, give them a true sense of patriotism and civic responsibilities (Graduate 6).

Thus, rural sociology is considered one of the courses that would need to be offered to all undergraduate students regardless of their disciplines of specialisation.

8.3.2.5 Community-based participatory research methods

Interviewees were of the view that community-based research would unearth many development challenges facing rural communities, from where new interventions could be proposed. In the history of higher education, "Community-based research has emerged in response to the criticism that colleges and universities are insufficiently responsive to the needs of communities" (Strand et al., 2003:15). Graduates seemed to argue that

community-based participatory research would enhance student-community engagement, and nurture students into drivers of rural social change. These views assumed that graduates' skills acquired through community-based participatory research would go beyond their university education to the world of work. In the words of Smyth (2011), Walker (2010), and Giroux (2011), 'community-based participatory research methods' can be considered as examples of 'critical pedagogy for social justice'. Interviewees argued that through community-based participatory research, students would be able to explore the binary divisions of rurality and urbanity and prepare themselves as agents of rural change. In a related manner, Strand et al. (2003) argue that community-based research has the potential of making universities more relevant to the wider community and society. It also has the potential of turning students into engaged citizens, as they learn to solve problems by doing.

Interviewees argued that students should be encouraged to focus their research on real community issues and make research a meaningful component of their preparation for work. Again, these perceptions would be interpreted as pushing universities' roles towards 'civic engagement' (Bawa, 2007; Boland & McIlrath, 2007), and/or 'engaged scholarship' (Mtawa et al., 2016; Mtawa, 2019).

Community-based participatory research, as a way of preparing students, is also an example of what Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, and Johnson (2005) call 'pedagogies of engagement'. By implication, through community-based participatory research, as a pedagogy of engagement, students would be able to practice what they learn through

researching rural communities. Interviewees proposed community-based participatory research methods to be one of the core courses in undergraduate preparation aimed at fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development. Evidence on the preceding discussion comes from the interview excerpts below:

It is therefore important that universities should make a deliberate effort in researching rural poverty in order to innovatively counter the challenges faced by the rural poor. Research would bring out new ideas to accelerate development in rural areas. So because of the centrality of research in development, universities can contribute a lot to the development of the rural areas if they focus on practical research (Graduate 6).

We would want universities to encourage students to do research that is answering the needs of the communities in different areas. As I said, the focus on research is key in graduates' preparation for rural development. We need research that focuses on real problems affecting the rural areas of people across different development sectors (Graduate 13).

Community-based participatory research is highlighted as important in graduate preparation for rural development. Most respondents appreciated community-based participatory research as a practical way of learning that complements theory-based learning. The underlying argument was that in service-learning, students learn by doing. It is action-oriented learning, and hence could potentially enhance students' agency and aspirations for rural social change. Interviewees argued that through community-based participatory research students in various disciplines would engage deeply with the question of why Malawi remains heavily rural and poor, thus allowing universities and community members to work together to better understand and find solutions to this challenge. Because of its long-term social change effect and for its potential in agency cultivation, community-based participatory research methods were identified as one of the fundamental customised courses in graduate preparation for rural development.

8.3.2.6 Moral and ethical studies

Interviewees proposed moral and ethical values studies as an important component in graduates' preparation for rural development. They argued that by including moral and ethical studies in the curriculum, it would be addressing universities' public mandates to produce graduates who are prepared to serve the public purpose as morally responsible citizens within society. A course in moral and ethical values was seen as being particularly instrumental in the process of 'citizenship formation' (Marovah, 2019), and/or 'educating citizens' (Colby et al., 2003). Participants seemed to argue for the integrative and interdisciplinary kind of education that does not prepare graduates only as professionals, but also as civically and morally responsible citizens. Thus, the central push was that university curricula and pedagogies for preparing graduates for rural development should be grounded on the cultivation of their moral, civic, and ethical agency. Using the words of Barsky (2010:2), the argument for the inclusion of moral and ethical studies in graduates' preparation seemed motivated by the interviewees' perceptions that "moral values and ethics pervade all areas of practice".

Some of the core values that respondents identified in relation to graduates' preparation for rural development were: service to the other; respect, dignity and human worth; the importance of relationships and connectivity; and integrity. Inferring from the study findings, the phase of going to university was viewed as one of the most important phases in the individual's process of moral and civic development. Participants argued that the kind of education one receives shapes what they become. Similarly, Colby et al. (2003:xii) also argue that university education "can be pivotal, leading to new ways of understanding the world and one's place in the world, providing new frameworks through which later

experiences are interpreted, and equipping the individual with a wide array of capacities for moral and civic engagement”. The excerpts below provide a synopsis of participants’ views on the possibilities of moral and ethical studies in fostering graduates’ capabilities, and their aspirations and agency for rural development:

Cultivation of ethical and moral values in graduates prepared for rural development is key. People can be trained as accountants, nurses, doctors, engineers, teachers, extension workers, physicians, agronomists, name it, but without moral values to do their work in the context of rural Malawi? I think we need to ensure that when students leave universities, they do not only have the expert knowledge, but the values to be responsible citizens of this country. This cannot come by itself; we need an education curriculum that considers this aspect (Lecturer 5).

Our universities do not offer courses in moral and ethical studies, except for the philosophy department at [university 3]. Unless we embed moral and ethical studies across the discipline, we shall continue training students who come out of the university without compassion and moral consciousness for the rural people living in poverty (Dean 1).

We have graduates who are academically well qualified in different fields but lack moral and ethical principles to understand the problems rural people face. Students need to be brought the conscience realization that rural poverty is a social injustice; and that they have a role to play in ending it. Unfortunately, our universities are ‘breeding graduates’ who are leading in mismanaging resources meant for the rural people themselves (Graduate 6).

I think we need a course in the universities that is solely focused on preparing students on how to conduct themselves in rural areas. Most of us lack the mannerism in the way we conduct ourselves in rural areas. Sometimes the sense of right and wrong pushes one to act, there are a lot of injustices in rural societies, but sometimes graduates who have no background in ethics consider such as normal and take no action to help the rural people (Graduate 13).

From the participants’ views, the general goal of moral and ethical studies is the preparation of students for the education that shapes personal values and promotes the common good. In identifying moral and ethical studies as a customised course, interviewees implied that

all students, regardless of their field/discipline of specialisation, would be required to complete a course in humanities. In summary, interviewees were of the view that fostering graduates' capabilities and their agency and aspirations would require graduates who show moral and ethical commitments, such as compassion, altruism, and concern for the common good. Interviewees' perceptions seemed in agreement with Walker and McLean (2013:145) that "being technically highly skilled is not sufficient: professional work has always involved ethical dilemmas and the need for integrity, which cannot be taken for granted". The interviewees assume that moral and ethical education would enhance a sense of agency and aspiration among students, making them civic-minded and committed to the public good, i.e. being able to stand for and do what they value to be of good for all.

8.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed multiple perspectives of graduates' preparation for rural development from different university faculty members. In analysing various responses, it would seem interviewees suggest that rural sensitive pedagogies and rural sensitive curricula are more likely to foster graduate capabilities for rural development. Empirical evidence presented herein seems to suggest that community based participatory research methods, moral and ethical studies, as well as service-learning or problem-based learning are more likely to foster graduate capabilities that would enhance their agency and aspirations for rural development. Agency and aspirations are perceived to motivate graduates into action towards what they would value as change, and what they are able to be and to do in order to contribute to the well-being of the rural people. Similarly, internship/practicum and courses in rural sociology have been described as having the potential to foster graduates' capabilities and aspirations for rural development.

While agency cultivation and fostering aspirations would seem two separate processes, they are dialectical and to a certain extent depend on each other, and influence each other. Throughout the chapter, there are shades of interviewees' visions an/or aspirations to see universities prepare graduates to acquire knowledge, skills, values, attributes, and capabilities that will make them effective citizens and agents of rural social change. Scholarship is valued for its relevance, as well as its rigor to produce engaged and contextually relevant citizens. This means that the ends of graduates' academic knowledge ought to be for the benefit and use of enhancing human well-being, the rural people in particular. Of course, the study acknowledges that academic knowledge should be used for common good or public good not just the rural people in particular. Therefore, employers, deans, lecturers, and graduates seemingly imagined a type of university education that would produce graduates who can effectively contribute to national development and rural development in particular given the context. In the next chapter, I conceptualise graduate preparation for rural human development by mapping out a re-imagined or different kind of university education that is explicitly conscious of rurality.

Chapter 9

Conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development

9.1 Introduction

Chapters six, seven, and eight have presented the study's findings on how policymakers, lecturers, deans, employers, graduates, and students perceive universities' roles in graduates' preparation for rural development. This chapter re-imagines a rural human development-oriented, or rural-facing university that is informed by contextual relevance and aims to enhance graduates' capabilities whilst also taking into consideration the conversion factors. All of this is understood within the capability approach and human development framework. The study also acknowledges that agency and aspirations matter in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development. This study offers to the body of literature on higher education and rural development a unique conceptualisation of graduate preparation that is capabilities-based, and rural contextually focused. Thus, this chapter, in answering the research question on how universities can foster graduate capabilities for rural human development, and or rural facing graduate training, proposes a multi-layered framework of graduate preparation. The chapter begins by re-imagining a university education that is oriented towards rural human development, then proposes a multilayered framework of graduates' preparation for rural development.

Discussion in this chapter pushes universities to be more responsive to contextual problems that are unique to their immediate surroundings, such as rurality in the case of Malawi. The study argues that universities should 'think contextually', i.e. orienting their basic functions of teaching, learning, and community engagement more towards local contexts. I propose

a framework that reconfigures how universities would prepare graduates who have the capabilities, in a way that enhances and harnesses their agency and aspirations towards rural human development.

9.2 Re-imagining a university education oriented towards rural human development

Conceptualising graduates' preparation for rural human development has to start from re-imagining a different kind of university education that is tailored towards producing graduates who would contribute to the well-being of rural people. In other words, a rural-facing university, a university that considers the needs of the rural people in its graduate training programmes. Thus, re-imagining a rural-facing university is in cognizance of not only the universities' roles to society but also of the kind of graduates needed and how society's needs should inform graduates' preparation. In re-imagining this kind of university, I draw on three conceptual framing ideas. These are: (1) context, which is about the environment in which the university exists, (2) capabilities, which are the opportunities graduates have to contribute to the well-being of the rural people, and (3), conversion factors, which are resources that would enhance or constrain graduates' preparedness to contribute towards rural human development.

9.2.1 A contextually -focused university

Calls for universities to foster graduate capabilities, which would enhance their agency and aspirations, are not totally new in the history of higher education. However, re-imagining a rural contextually-oriented university adds to expanding the contribution of higher education to development, and rural development in particular. The rural contextually-

focused conceptualisation of university education is pertinent for Malawi, more so from the human development perspective. The majority of Malawians live in rural areas under multiple forms of poverty, not only limited to economic poverty. Earlier calls for universities' rural consciousness were more bent towards economic transformation as if economic growth equaled well-being. For instance, Yesufu (1973:41) imagined an African university that:

Must be accountable to, and serve, the majority of the people who live in rural areas....must be committed to active participation in social transformation, economic modernization, and training and upgrading of the total human resources of the nation, not just of a small elite.

The study findings indicate that university education is still suffering from postcolonial reminiscences (see Chapter six). This is manifested through incidences of graduate elitism, lack of motivation to work in rural areas, and perceptions highly focused on university education's contribution to economic development only. Re-imagining a contextually relevant university is to realise that having fulfilled their post-independence roles of training a cadre of civil servants, universities needed to reflect on their contribution to national and contextual developments. This reflection ought to entail awareness of the universities' context and societal needs, through and within its mission and activities, in this case, a consciousness of rural human development. The study acknowledges that the type of development argued for here is not possible without economics, and of course the CA does acknowledge that economic growth entails or makes possible well-being.

The implications of re-imagining university education for rural human development is that it would mean it ought to change its content and purpose, curriculum, and pedagogy and relate them to the rural context and its associated human development aspirations. Thus, universities would have to produce graduates who are more connected to their contexts,

with agency and aspirations to be agents for rural social changes. In Chapter seven I have discussed selected attributes and capabilities that would foster graduates' preparedness for rural development. These calls are also made mindful that universities do not operate as closed systems and research, teaching and community engagement roles of the university are not "closed process". What the analysis in the study is point at is a differentiated approach to the role of universities in national development. A differentiated approach recognizes that a country can set up universities with different missions depending on the context. Not all universities therefore can squarely focus on rural development as closed circuited approach to national development but as a matter of systematic higher education development, universities or department or centers might be dedicated to such endoveours. It is because of the uniform context in Malawi that these calls would almost apply to each university in the country.

Contextually-focused university education would potentially avoid the problem of blanketing national development problems as if they are homogeneous. Rural people face different problems in comparison to their urban counterparts. This ought to be considered in preparing graduates who can contribute to various sectors of national development. It is actually against this line of thought that rural human development becomes central to the attainment of sustainable development. The ambitious dream of leaving no-one behind in the SDGs (UNDP, 2015), would not be met if the rural poor are left behind. More importantly, if development efforts only focus on one dimension of their well-being, such as economic growth, it is also a failed project. Rural contextually-focused university education would be valued as a panacea, through its graduates who would be adequately prepared to contribute towards addressing multiple deprivations which the rural poor face.

Re-imagining a university oriented towards rural human development centres on conceptualising the primary processes of teaching and learning, which are central in graduate preparation. It envisions universities producing graduates who have the

capabilities to enhance and harness their agency and aspiration to work in rural areas. In this case, the university's worth would be valued by the type of graduates it produces and their contribution to society. Re-imagining a university education oriented towards rural human development is grounded on the belief that "higher education has a very significant role in the development of societies – in terms of economic development, human development, gender-biased development, improvement in health, life expectancy, and reduction in problems relating to fertility, infant mortality, and poverty" (Tilak, 2003:11). Thus, the re-imagined university oriented towards rural human development encompasses multiple dimensions of economic and human development, intentionally conceptualised within the context of rurality. For instance, the University of Venda in South Africa is trying to position itself as a research leader in indigenous knowledge. Through the Institute for Rural Development (IRD), which is its flagship unit, the University of Venda (UNIVEN) in South Africa is spearheading programmes designed to achieve the institution-wide vision, *to be at the center of tertiary education for rural and regional development in Southern Africa*. A brief note about IRD on their website reads: "As *the rural development propeller*, the IRD's work derives its energy from the dream of "*Taking the university to its rightful owners – grassroots communities*" (UNIVEN, 2020). It is this kind of a university I re-imagine in the context of Malawi; a university which is committed to rural transformation and development given the country's rurality and its associated rural poverty. Therefore, the 'culture of development' is needed to counteract the disinclination of students towards rurality and the 'amnesia' on the part of universities for rural development. And an education which shapes 'civic minded graduates, responsible citizens oriented towards the well-being of others, without coercion or preaching, grounded on the

need for ‘intentional decisions in fostering students’ capabilities that harness their care, empathy, agency, and aspiration for rural social change.

9.2.2 Capabilities-based graduate preparation

It has been established that university education potentially positions graduates to develop rational choices and freedoms to choose valued beings and doings. From the analysis of the study findings, the preparation of graduates for rural human development comprises several intersecting and overlapping constitutive capabilities (Chapter seven). For instance, deducing from interviewees’ perceptions of graduate preparation for rural development, four capabilities were identified as instrumental in fostering graduate agency and aspirations. These are: practical reasoning, affiliation, integrity, and moral consciousness, and respect and dignity. In re-imagining the university oriented towards rural human development, I consider how some capabilities have a positive effect on expanding other capabilities. Some capabilities have a multiplier effect or are foundational to others. Thus, although the identified capabilities may be valued singularly, they also depend on other capabilities in enhancing the cultivation of the desired graduate outcomes.

For instance, from the study findings, affiliation stands out as a multiplier capability for graduate preparedness for rural development. However, embedded within the notions of affiliation and empathy towards rural people are ideas of freedom and choices. Graduates would be potentially affiliated or connected to that which they have reason to value. Thus, reason to value, and/or practical reasoning run within the definition and/or manifestation of other capabilities such as affiliation. The capability for dignity and respect for the rural poor is also subject to graduates’ reason to value. Reason to value can constrain or enhance

graduates' freedom to choose, for instance, to contribute to the well-being of the rural poor or not. Freedom to choose to be or not to be is central in conceptualising graduate capabilities for rural human development. What this entails is that universities would need to think about how to foster graduates' affiliation for rural development. It has been discussed in this study that this would be achieved through rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum (Chapter eight).

Rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum would foster graduates' 'agency opportunities', which according to Sen (1999) is about their freedom to act on something that they have reason to value, in this case, rural poverty reduction. The identified capabilities for rural development are instrumental in giving the graduates "capacity to make informed and reflexive choices" (Walker, 2005:108) about what they can do and be to contribute to rural social change. However, what seems to emerge from this conceptualisation is that every chosen capability for rural human development is informed by graduates' agency and aspirations, much as that capability also influences or affects other capabilities.

Agency is a strong determinant that ought to be considered in graduates' preparation for rural human development. While it is important to foster graduates' capabilities for rural human development, it is equally important to enhance and harness their agency. Agency sits at the centre of capabilities formation and execution. For instance, agency contributes to practical reasoning, as it drives graduates to make informed decisions and actions to do something about the rural people. Agency fosters graduate practical reasoning to have empathy and feel for the rural poor, respect, motivate, and/or inspire them towards change. For instance, drawing on examples from the data analysis, graduates' desire and motivation towards rural development is sometimes inspired by their respect and sense of dignity

towards the rural poor (Chapter seven). In conceptualising graduates' preparation for rural human development, expanding students' agency and freedom is central as it has the potential to foster other capabilities. Agency is core to capabilities formation and plays a relational role in their intersecting dependability (Wilson-Strydom & Walker, 2015; Sen, 2003). For instance, Walker (2005:105) states:

Notions of agency are central to the capability approach. At the boundary of functionings and capabilities is the matter of choice, where a person exercises his or her agency, having the requisite set of capabilities, to make choices from a range of options and alternatives, if such a choice achieves his or her well-being.

From the discussion above, it would be argued that agency is central to the identified capabilities for rural human development. Figure 9.3 elaborates on the interconnections of different capabilities in a mutually reinforcing relationship with agency centrally positioned and touching on each capability.



Figure 9.3. Interlocking graduates' capabilities for rural development

Conceptualisation of graduates' preparation for rural human development considers different capability dimensions within a single interlocking unit of influencing and

dependability. Throughout the study, agency and aspirations are conceived as central and as pre-conditions for rural human development and they sit at the pinnacle of conceptualising graduate preparation. What kind of graduates are needed in different development sectors in rural settings? Ostensibly, given the reach of rurality in Malawi, many disciplines would require rural touch. For instance, there would be such programs as engineering for rural development, nursing for rural development, teaching for rural development, agriculture for rural development, and ICT for rural development, among others. However, that being said, many factors would influence graduates' preparation for rural human development in the re-imagined university.

9.2.3 Consideration of multiple conversion factors in graduate preparation

In re-imagining the rural conscious university, considerations are placed on multiple conversion factors that can foster or constrain graduate capabilities. These factors would be internal or external to the university and/or to the individual student, but with significant influences on graduate outcomes. Conversion factors have an impact on how universities would cultivate students' capabilities and their agency and aspirations for rural human development.

The study findings indicate that different factors would affect graduates' ability to convert their university education resources into capabilities that can foster rural people's well-being. Conversion factors determine the degree to which an individual graduate can transform capabilities into functionings, such as the rural people's well-being, or turning resources into a capability (Robeyns, 2017). For instance, given the same resources,

students are likely to convert them differently into opportunities that would enhance their preparedness for rural human development.

In re-imagining a rural oriented graduate preparation, the next section discusses three inter-related conversion factors which can enable or constrain graduates' ability to engage in and contribute to advancing rural human development.

9.2.3.1 Graduate personal conversion factors

Personal conversion factors have to do with the being of an individual, such as genetic disposition, and they are internal to the person (Robeyns, 2017). The study findings highlight that some graduates have inherent aspirations and predispositions towards enhancing the well-being of others. There were examples of students whose responses indicated that they felt it was within them that they should contribute to the well-being of the rural poor. However, it is important to note that while personal conversion factors are shaped by one's inherent attitudes, sometimes they are as a result of one's social and family background, as well as educational exposure. This means that even personal conversion factors are subject to and depend on other factors, which would be environmental or social. Therefore, graduate preparation for rural human development ought to recognise these multiple factors that would contribute to or constrain graduates' conversion of resources into capabilities towards the rural people's well-being. Interview excerpts below provide examples of how personal conversion factors are likely to shape the kind of graduate one becomes as well as harnessing their agency and aspirations for rural human development:

When I was coming out of college, my attitude was that I am a degree holder. I felt I would perform in any kind of work. However, the work environment in rural development has taught me so many things. I have learnt to value interpersonal

skills, and each passing day my attitude towards what I do in rural areas changes (Graduate 6).

Thus, in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development, universities ought to consider personal factors. For instance, graduates' personal background stands out as a central predictor in determining what graduates would aspire to and value being. This justifies calls for rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum in preparing graduates for rural human development. Therefore, in cases where students come with those values then university education should deepen the values and equip them with necessary knowledge and skills. For those who don't come with these values university education needs to inculcate these values as well as knowledge and skills.

9.2.3.2 Graduate social conversion factors

Graduate social conversion factors relate to what Robeyns (2017) refers to as factors that emanate from society under the dictates of social norms, rules, values, policies, and power relations among others. From the study findings, social conversion factors that prominently emerged and are worth considering in the conceptualisation of graduate preparation for rural development are: policies, social values, curriculum, and pedagogies. For instance, in terms of curriculum, interviewees identified rural sociology, ethical and moral studies, and community-based participatory research methods among the factors that would enhance graduate capabilities for rural human development. In terms of pedagogies, there is a call for rural sensitive pedagogies, such as internship and work-integrated learning among others. Lack of stand-alone policies in higher education was identified as a drawback in graduate preparation. It is assumed that such legislations have binding power in shaping how universities prepare graduates relevant to the context. The study findings indicate that

multiple social factors would enable or constrain graduates' capabilities, their agency, and aspirations for rural human development. Understanding and considering these factors is important in re-imagining a university oriented towards rural human development, for they shape the kind of graduate universities produce.

9.2.3.3 Graduate environmental conversion factors

Graduate environmental conversion factors relate to the physical or built environment in which individuals live (Robeyns, 2017). From the study findings, some graduates are not motivated to work in rural development because of the geographical conditions in which they grew up. One's environment in which she or he grew up or attained education contributes to shaping their life priorities and choices. For instance, some graduates who grew up in rural areas felt that going back to work in rural areas would demean their status as graduates. Again, some students from urban backgrounds detested working in rural areas as they had no emotional affiliation or connection to issues of rural poverty. Yet others, both from urban and rural backgrounds, felt that going back to work with the rural people would bring them satisfaction in that they would be contributing to the development of the less privileged. These divergent examples justify the idea of foregrounding rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula in graduates' preparation. For instance, graduates who have not had an experience of living in rural areas valued internships in their preparation for rural development. Internships gave them a deeper understanding of what rural poverty is. The excerpt below provides an example:

I do not have a tragic story to my upbringing comparable to what I have experienced in rural areas. I grew up in a modest family, with both parents working and giving us a decent living. My first encounter with rural poverty was during attachments with Plan International. I was involved in a project which targeted the

youths. Cases of unplanned pregnancies among rural girls, below sixteen years of age are appalling. My age mates three years ago [she said she was 25] were already mothers to three or four children (Graduate 7).

Factors such as the geographical area of upbringing may constrain or enhance graduates' agency and aspirations for rural human development. They are a key factor in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development.

Again, in circumstances where “specific resources...are not provided, or where the physical environment is not appropriately designed” for rural development (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007:10), graduate preparation for it would mean nothing. An example of this would be a community that is not reachable because of poor road networks, i.e. the infrastructure does not support graduate efforts in enhancing the rural people's well-being. Graduates may have the desire to do something for the rural people but the environment is not always enabling. Thus, the environment would need to be enabling for graduates to convert their resources into capabilities.

9.2.3.4 Trilateral intersecting relationships of conversion factors

From the discussion above, the three dimensions of conversion factors seem to depend on each other in an intersecting relationship. Figure 9.3 illustrates their trilateral and interconnecting relationship which is instrumental in conceptualising graduates' preparation for rural human development.

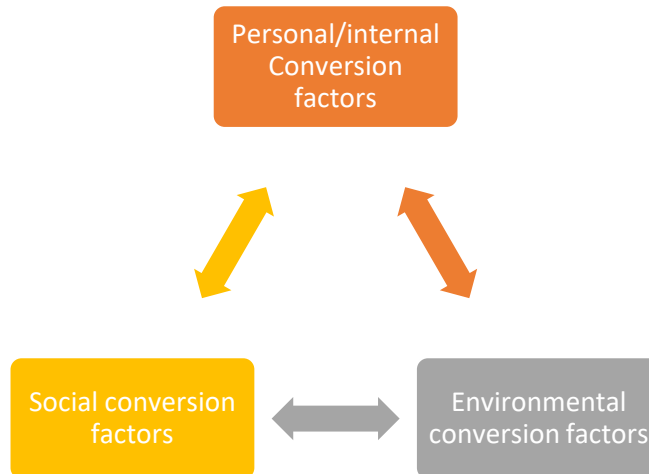


Figure 9.1 Triangular relational dependability of conversion factors

In explaining the interactions in Figure 9.3, we can draw from Crocker and Robeyns (2010:68) that “conversion factors influence how a person can be or is free to convert the characteristics of the good or service into a functioning, yet the sources of these factors may differ”. The above triangular relational framework helps us understand not only how the higher education one receives can prepare them for rural human development, but also under what personal, social, and environmental conditions it is given. Paying attention to multiple conversion factors would give universities a mechanism for understanding what is needed in graduates’ preparation to realise potential graduate outcomes for rural human development. For instance, some students would require more than knowledge of rural development to attain aspirations towards rural human development. The case of the student below provides evidence of this:

Seriously, I have never lived in rural areas, and I can’t imagine life out there. I, for one, I am not ready to take up any work in rural areas; I would rather stay home and wait for an opportunity that will befit me. That’s me anyway! All my engagement with rural communities this far was just for my degree. Life after the degree has to be different...Fact! (Student (M), FGD, University 3).

While this student has the freedom to choose the kind of work he has to do upon graduation, contextual factors in Malawi ought to compel him towards rural development. Exposure to rural development, for example, through internships, would prepare him for default future career possibilities in rural development. Therefore, reflective consideration of the three dimensions of personal, social, and environmental conversion factors is instrumental in the conceptualisation of graduates' preparation for rural human development.

9.2.4 Agency and aspirations as pre-conditions to rural human development

Agency, according to Walker (2006), is about an individual's ability to pursue goals that one has reason to value, and are considered important in terms of the life an individual wishes to lead. Thus, embedded in the concept of agency is the freedom to choose, the freedom graduates have to be and to do that which they have reason to value in relation to contributing to rural social change. For instance, from the study findings, it would be the inner agency that motivates some graduates to commit to working in rural areas, following their choices that doing so is something they have reason to value. Furthermore, graduate preparation for rural human development would require universities to prepare them in a manner that they would aspire to, want to, and be moved to contribute to rural social change. Thus, beyond just aspiring, graduates take action towards rural social change. Taking action is a manifestation of their agency-freedom, as something they are determined to do from their own volition, after being reflective about it.

On the other hand aspirations, according to Mkwanzani (2019) and Hart (2012), is about individuals' wants, preferences, choices, and calculations. This is another key concept in

conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development. Aspirations, which tell us about graduates' desires, wants and choices, are fundamental in thinking about their preparedness. As we saw in chapter seven, where capabilities formation is closely influenced by graduates' aspirations and agency. Thus, in the same way as with agency, freedom to choose is central in conceptualising graduates' aspirations for rural human development.

From the analysis of the data, practical reasoning, affiliation, integrity, and moral consciousness, and respect and dignity, are considered vital in fostering graduate capabilities and enhancing agency and aspirations for rural human development. These capabilities are understood as core in cultivating and harnessing the graduate's desire, choices, and motivation to contribute to rural human development. For instance, by being affiliated and connected with the rural poor, one may develop interests and empathy to do something about their situation.

However, the desire to do something for the rural poor may require one's practical reasoning about what is valuable to do. Again, sometimes this would be motivated by the respect and dignity one holds for the rural poor as human beings in their own right despite their deprived situations. The sense of valuing the rural poor's humanity/humanness is principle to the capability of integrity and moral consciousness. It borders on imagining what is wrong with rural poverty, and what can be done to correct the situation for the rural people to live in a humane way. In all these processes, agency and aspirations play the background influencing roles and are thus necessary dimensions in conceptualising graduates' preparation for rural human development. In the re-imagined university,

graduates ought to cultivate these capabilities, agency, and aspirations through rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum.

Given how agency and aspirations play out and how they influence and are influenced by different capabilities, it is important in conceptualising graduate preparation to give attention to what DeJaeghere (2016) calls intersecting influences of agency and aspirations. In this study agency and aspirations are conceptualised differently but are intertwined in their functions. They both have the potential to foster graduates' decisions and choices towards contributing to the well-being of rural people. Agency and aspirations are important dimensions in capability formation (Pym & Kapp, 2011), hence their centrality in the conceptualisation of graduate preparation for rural human development. Both have the potential to foster human freedom and inner obligation to act on something (Sen, 1999), in this case, to act on rural poverty reduction.

From the study findings, graduate preparedness for rural human development entails one's motivation, empathy, commitment, passion, and interest towards working for the well-being of the rural poor. These are driven by one's agency and aspirations for rural social change. In Walker's (2006:4) terms, "agency is both being and becoming". Thus, in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development, the study envisions a university that is geared towards unlocking graduates' capabilities that can enhance and harness their agency and aspirations towards rural human development. This study re-imagines graduate preparation that helps "students to have the capacity to aspire, to be able to imagine possible futures and have the agency conditions to move them future-forward" (Walker & Fongwa, 2017:184). The re-imagined university ought to help students develop

an awareness of the opportunities and constraints of their environments and develop future goals that are meaningful to them and the rural poor around them.

9.3 A proposed multi-layered framework of graduates' preparation for rural human development

It has been established that agency and aspirations have the potential to increase graduates' preparation and readiness for rural human development (Chapters 6, 7, & 8). In this section, in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural development, I propose a multi-layered framework of graduate preparation. From the study findings, preparing graduates for rural human development is a multi-dimensional process. Many actors and dimensions are involved, each playing their roles, sometimes in an intersecting or overlapping relationship as they foster graduate agency and aspirations. For instance, it has been discussed how rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum could shape graduates' consciousness about rurality. Limited engagement of rural development stakeholders in graduates' preparation affects the type of graduate universities produce. The study findings indicate that employers and graduates working in rural development sectors are left out in deciding on graduate preparation for rural development. For instance, they are not actively involved in curriculum formulation so that it might contribute to developing the type of graduates they want. The proposed multi-layered framework of graduate preparation opens up future possibilities for a more integrated, multifaceted, and heterogeneous way of graduate preparation, that would be considered encompassing.

The proposed multi-layered framework moves beyond the dominant views of enhancing graduate employability attributes and work readiness competences. It envisions

universities' roles in graduate preparation that centres on fostering their capabilities, agency, and aspirations as enablers towards their desires, motivation, and choices to contribute to rural social change.

While agency and aspirations are central to graduate preparedness for rural development, they would depend in part on a comprehensive capability-focused understanding of what rural development is. For instance, a capability-based understanding of rural development which is beyond economic-based perspectives may inform how universities prepare graduates for it. The capability-based understanding of rural development focuses on capabilities as opportunities and freedoms which would enhance the rural people's well-being. The conceptualisation of graduate preparation for rural human development assumes that capability-understanding of rural development would result in universities considering capabilities-based pedagogies and curricula as they prepare graduates. Rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula, which are capabilities-based in themselves, would enhance the cultivation of various graduate attributes and capabilities. Also, key to the multi-layered framework are various stakeholders (employers, graduates, deans, lecturers, students, and policymakers) whose perceptions would shape the types of graduates universities produce. Figure 9.5 illustrates the complex multi-layered framework, showing interconnectedness, and the interplay of different dimensions with their varied constituents and constituencies in fostering graduate agency and aspiration for rural human development.

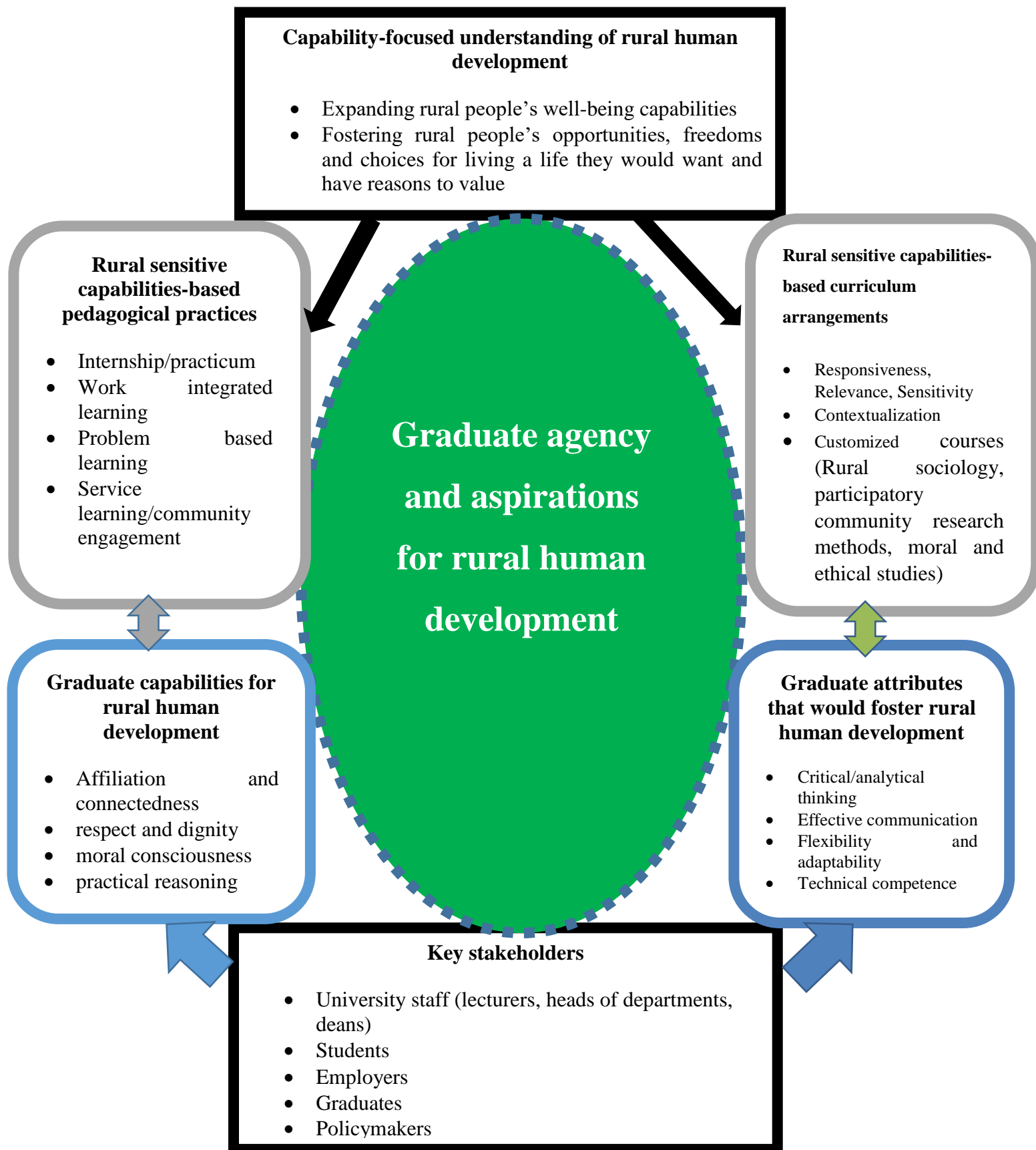


Figure 4. A multi-layered framework of graduate preparation for rural human development

9.4 Conclusion

Conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development entailed several processes. First, it was necessary to begin by re-imagining a university that is oriented towards rural human development in its functions of graduate preparation. This would be characterised by rural consciousness in its graduate preparation. Second, was interrogating factors that would influence graduate preparation for rural human development. Internal and external factors influence the conversion of graduates' available resources into capabilities. Third, was to discuss the intersecting capabilities which impact on each other in enhancing graduates' agency and aspirations in an interlocking relationship of cause-effect dependability. The fourth aspect involved putting together the discussions into a complex multi-layered framework of graduate preparation for rural human development.

The following conclusions are drawn from the multi-layered conceptualisation of graduate preparation for rural human development. Firstly, recognition of a capability-based understanding of what rural development is and what it entails. This would allow universities to have a critical and more nuanced conception of the multidimensionality of rural poverty and align their graduate preparation towards this understanding. Through the capability-based understanding, universities would prepare graduates whose frame of reasoning is not only guided by the economic benefits of their education but also non-economic ones, for their own good and that of the rural people.

Secondly, the framework highlights that rural responsive, rural sensitive, and contextual pedagogical arrangements and curriculum practices are particularly salient for graduates' preparation. Rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula determine how universities would enhance the development of multiple capabilities among students and harness their agency and aspirations. They confirm the assertion that education which expands capabilities and agency freedoms, is a capability multiplier. Further, as Boni and Walker (2016:154) assert:

Curriculum foregrounds knowledge, how it is selected and how it is mediated pedagogically and acquired by learners. Put simply, curriculum determines the selection of what counts as valid knowledge.

Thus, rural sensitive curriculum and pedagogy are central in the conceptualisation of graduate preparation for rural human development.

Thirdly, developing a well-defined but open list of graduate capabilities for rural human development would guide what universities and stakeholders expect as graduate outcomes. In the context of rurality, the list would have to include capabilities that have the potential to foster graduate agency and aspirations as drivers for their motivation towards rural human development. The proposed complex multi-layered framework would apply to different disciplines and contexts of rurality, not only in Malawi. It has the potential to produce graduates who are civic-minded and who demonstrate public good values through affiliation, empathy, respect, and moral consciousness towards the well-being of the rural poor. However, it would be practical if different disciplines/field study would come up with their well-defined, but open list of graduate capabilities for rural development. I emphasize on different study/discipline because graduate preparation varies according to disciplines, others would have their students exposed to rural development through

attachments, while others will have all their graduate training in classroom set up or laboratories.

Chapter 10

Summary, reflections, and conclusions

10.1 Introduction

In this summative discussion, I reflect on the study's conceptual and empirical insights based on the capabilities approach that guided the development of the study's main argument. The study's central argument is that universities can contribute to rural human development through fostering graduate capabilities, which enhance their agency and aspirations towards rural social change. Universities' intentional inclusion of rural sensitive pedagogies and curriculum in graduates' preparation has the potential to nurture graduates' capabilities for rural development. From the study findings, capabilities, agency, and aspirations for rural human development are also nurtured through experiences on the job. This chapter is divided into seven sections, which are an introduction, reflections on conceptual insights, a summary of the key findings, policy implications, epistemic boundaries, areas for further research, and finally the conclusion.

10.2 Summary and reflections on conceptual insights

10.2.1 Re-imagining a university education oriented towards rural human development

In re-imagining a rural oriented university, the study assumes that capabilities would play a catalytic role to trigger, inspire, motivate, and push graduates into action towards contributing to the rural social changes that they have reason to value. While different

capabilities identified for rural development³⁵ would be cultivated through rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula, this is assumed possible within a contextually-focused and capabilities-based understanding of rural development and graduate preparation.

10.2.2 Multiple conversion factors in graduate preparation for rural human development

Graduate preparation for rural human development is shaped by many factors which universities ought to consider in their core activities of teaching and learning. These include students' personal, social, and environmental factors that can potentially affect their ability to convert university education resources into beings and doings that they may have reason to value in relation to rural human development. Understanding factors that may enhance or constrain graduate preparation for rural human development is instrumental in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development.

10.2.3 Intersection of capabilities for rural human development

Although the capabilities of practical reasoning, affiliation, integrity and moral consciousness, and respect and dignity would each be valued singularly, they operate in an intersecting manner. They influence each other; each is foundational and a multiplier of the other. However, common among them is their corresponding objective to foster graduate agency and aspirations for rural human development, if the educational

³⁵ The identified capabilities from the empirical analysis are: affiliation and connectedness, practical reason, integrity and moral consciousness, and respect and dignity (see Chapter 7).

opportunities and freedoms are within a rural sensitive pedagogy and curriculum. This simply imply that all elements of the framework proposed are essential.

10.2.4 Agency and aspirations as pre-conditions to rural human development

Theoretically, agency and aspirations have been given central spaces in conceptualising graduate preparation for rural human development. They hold the key to graduates' freedoms and choices to be what they want, and what they have reason to value as regards contributing to rural social change. Capabilities without agency and aspirations for rural change are nothing.

10.2.5 A multi-layered framework of graduate preparation for rural human development

The study contributes to the higher education and rural development discourse by proposing a complex multi-layered framework of graduate preparation. The proposed multi-layered framework is capability-based, contextually-sensitive, and rural-focused in its curriculum and pedagogy integration. It also integrates views from different key stakeholders within and outside the university, each playing out their roles and views, which contribute to cultivating agency and aspirations for rural human development.

Summary of the key findings

Finding 1: An ideal graduate for rural development described as being rural conscious BUT Graduate preparedness limitedly perceived in terms of employability attributes

In Chapter seven, multiple and divergent views emerged on what an ideal graduate prepared for rural development would look like. Employers emphasized striking a balance

between technical and non-technical attributes. On the other hand, graduates emphasized on capabilities of affiliation and connectedness to the rural poor, which they argued foster acceptance and confidence between the graduate and the rural people themselves. Again, practical reasoning was identified in the analysis as a multiplier and/or foundational capability for other capabilities. But the challenge was that

Graduate preparedness was limitedly defined by interviewees in terms of readiness for work as employable graduates. For instance, throughout Chapter seven there was less focus on capabilities as opportunities which would widen graduates' choices and freedoms to decide what they want to be and do in relation to rural development. Most of the employers' and graduates' views on graduate preparedness focused on their readiness for work, in terms of possessing employability attributes. However, the study looks at graduate preparation beyond their work readiness but possessing capabilities that foster their agency and aspirations to be agents of change for the rural people.

This emphasize the need for theoretically thinking about the Intersection of capabilities for rural human development. Although the capabilities of practical reasoning, affiliation, integrity and moral consciousness, and respect and dignity would each be valued singularly, they operate in an intersecting manner. They influence each other; each is foundational and a multiplier of the other. However, common among them is their corresponding objective to foster graduate agency and aspirations for rural human development.

Finding 2. Most graduates are not ready or motivated to work in rural areas

Chapters six, seven, and eight highlighted that most graduates are not interested or motivated to work in rural areas. Lack of graduate interest in rural areas is partly because of elitist perceptions associated with university education. It is assumed that university education sets graduates apart; they consider themselves belonging to a privileged stratum of society. Other reasons for the lack of graduate motivation to work in rural areas relate to how they were prepared without conscious intention to include rural dimensions in the curricula and pedagogies which they followed. Thus, agency and aspirations ought to be pre-conditions to rural human development programs in universities

Theoretically, agency and aspirations have been given central spaces in conceptualizing graduate preparation for rural human development. They hold the key to graduates' freedoms and choices to be what they want, and what they have reason to value as regards contributing to rural social change. Capabilities without agency and aspirations for rural change are nothing.

Finding 3. Rural sensitive curricula and pedagogies hold the key for future possibilities in graduate preparation for rural human development

Rural sensitive curricula and rural sensitive pedagogical practices hold the key to preparing graduates for rural human development. In Chapter eight recommendations were made on standardizing internships and service-learning across disciplines with a focus on placing graduates in rural areas for their exposure. Aside from these pedagogical practices, core courses were identified which are proposed to run across all the programs in undergraduate curricula. The proposed courses are rural sociology, community-based participatory research, and moral and ethical studies. The underpinning argument is that rural sensitive

curricula and pedagogies would foster graduates' capabilities and enhance their agency and aspirations for rural human development.

But these need to consider multiple conversion factors in graduate preparation for rural human development. Graduate preparation for rural human development is shaped by many factors which universities ought to consider in their core activities of teaching and learning. These include students' personal, social, and environmental factors that can potentially affect their ability to convert university education resources into beings and doings that they may have reason to value in relation to rural human development. Understanding factors that may enhance or constrain graduate preparation for rural human development is instrumental in conceptualizing graduate preparation for rural human development.

10.3 Policy implications

The study has identified several policy implications, which would be of interest to those working in higher education and rural development in Malawi, and by application beyond.

10.3.1 Implications for law and national policy

The study findings point to some implications for law and national policy gaps needing attention. Lack of a standalone higher education policy in Malawi would necessitate redefinition of the roles of higher education in national development with clear policy statements on universities' roles in rural development. Leaving higher education to be discussed just as part of the national development policies has implications, as Cloete and Maassen (2015:110) argue that “they support the role of higher education in development; [but] they do little to clarify what this role is”. Likewise, ruralised contexts like Malawi

would imperatively be required to have a standalone policy on rural development. Rural development is a key sector in the attainment of the SDGs, in contexts where rural poverty causes the majority of people to not be able to fully enjoy their well-being. Legislation on rural development and higher education would potentially help universities to prepare graduates who meet the sectors' requirements, expectations, and needs in terms of their qualities, competences, attributes, and capabilities. The standalone higher education policy makes it imperative for the government to have enough personnel responsible for higher education in the country. For instance, in Tanzania, where this is part of the law, there is usually a minister responsible for higher education, with a fully resourced directorate of higher education. During the data collection at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, I discovered that there was only the Director responsible for Higher Education without a team to help him in ensuring issues of quality, policy adherence, curriculum relevance among others. Essentially, it looked like it is just a ceremony figure, mainly participating in higher education related meetings without a clear framework of its office.

10.3.2 Implications for University Policy and Practice

The study findings point to implications for university policy and practice. Firstly, as argued above on implications for national laws and policies, locating universities' roles in national development, and rural development, in particular, would require a detailed national development plan that defines the country's development ambitions and vision. It is within that overarching national long-term development plan that universities' roles in various sectors, including rural development, would be defined. Malawi is yet to develop its long-term development agenda following the expiry of the Vision 2020. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategies are short-term and pay no detailed attention in

articulating how universities would contribute to national development, and rural development in particular, through graduate preparation.

Secondly, throughout the thesis one of the outstanding argument has been for universities to be rural conscious in the training of graduates. This has policy implications on the part of the universities for they follow their strategic plans which outlines what should be taught and why. Hence, there is need to consider the centrality of rurality in the strategic plans as something that has implications in almost all the disciplines under study, for their graduates, given the rural context of the country would have to deal with the rural people or work in rural development related activities. It is also against this background that the study makes the recommendation on rural sensitive curricula and rural sensitive pedagogical practices, arguing that (a) they hold the key to preparing graduates for rural human development; (b) would contributing to foster graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development, (c) and enhance and or harness their agency and aspirations for rural human development.

10.3.3 Implications for practice

There are several questions that remain unanswered need to reflect on in relation to theory and practice. These are: who would manage the implementation of programs that produce such graduates with rural development capabilities and aspirations, where would they train? How would such programs be financed in the context of dwindling and competitive funding? How feasible is this approach to making such rural facing university mainstream? It is clear from the literature and the findings that before universities can contribute to rural or any form of national development, they must be proficient in higher education core business - enabling and graduating undergraduates, masters and PhD candidates, and

producing patents and all kinds of knowledge. Before this core business platform can be activated for development, there must be a pact - a collective understanding among key stakeholders about the role of universities in development and the contribution of new knowledge to it. For the pact to have 'teeth' there must be coordination between university activities and products on the one hand, and development plans and goals on the other.

10.4 4 Empirical Contribution to the field of higher education and development

The study contributes to Re-imagining a university education oriented towards rural human development. In re-imagining a rural oriented university, the study assumes that capabilities would play a catalytic role to trigger, inspire, motivate, and push graduates into action towards contributing to the rural social changes that they have reason to value. While different capabilities identified for rural development would be cultivated through rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula, this is assumed possible within a contextually-focused and capabilities-based understanding of rural development and graduate preparation. This study contributes to the notion of context-connected and differentiated universities. In Chapter six, policymakers' views indicated the need for universities not only to be contextually-relevant but contextually-connected, with particular focus on attention to rurality as a contextual issue in Malawi. There are calls that graduate preparation should entail cultivating capabilities that enhance and harness graduate agency and aspirations which would inspire their commitment towards changing the rural societies of which they are part. While other scholars (Cloete et al. 2015) have argued that university education would be valued by the role it plays in the socio-economic and human development of its society, this study pushes the value assessment in terms of the universities' relevance to their contexts, such as rurality in the case of Malawi. Such an approach to higher education

development can be achieved through a multi-layered framework of graduate preparation for rural human development. The framework calls for multifaceted approach to graduate preparation so that they are well prepared to face the challenges associated with rural poverty and rurality. The proposed multi-layered framework is capability-based, contextually-sensitive, and rural-focused in its curriculum and pedagogy integration. It also integrates views from different key stakeholders within and outside the university, each playing out their roles and views, which contribute to cultivating agency and aspirations for rural human development.

10.5 Knowledge boundaries

Firstly, the study was narrowed within the epistemic parameters of universities' roles in preparing graduates for rural development. The key focus was on how universities can foster graduate capabilities for rural human development. The study did not broadly look at universities' roles in national development, although one could argue that in preparing graduates for rural development, they contribute to national development.

Secondly, by adopting the capability approach, the study looked at rural development as an enhancement of the rural people's capabilities or opportunities for well-being, which are often constrained within the interlocking deprivations and other systemic or structural constraints.

Thirdly, higher education was understood to imply university education that leads to the attainment of a degree qualification. In most development policies in Malawi, higher education includes all post-secondary training, which has not been the case here.

Fourthly, although conclusions in this study were drawn from the case study of Malawi, the findings can offer a basis for reflections and recommendations that can be applied in similar contexts of rurality in Africa. Hence the relevance of the findings is not limited to the bounds of the case study.

10.5 Areas for further research

From the study, some areas for further research have been identified:

Firstly, from the study findings, perceptions of fostering graduate capabilities and enhancing their agency and aspirations for rural development were linked to rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula. There is a need for a comprehensive study that would explore what rural sensitive pedagogies and curricula would look like. Given the important space that curriculum and pedagogies hold in preparing graduate outcomes, such a study should aim at providing a broader picture of the processes which would be involved in developing rural sensitive curricula and deciding on the constitutive dimensions of rural sensitive pedagogies.

Secondly, there is a need for a study that would look at capability gaps in different development sectors in Malawi, which would inform what kind of graduates would be needed for such sectors. Tensions and contradictions on higher graduate unemployment rates against empirical evidence of high graduate vacancy rates in some sectors reflect a gap in what informs graduate preparation in universities. For instance, while there are high graduate vacancies in the agricultural extension service department and community development, students' intake into the related programmes in the universities is always low.

Thirdly, with continued stakeholders' dissatisfaction with graduates' preparedness for work, which this study's findings have also confirmed, there is a need for a study that would focus on universities' and stakeholders' engagement in graduate preparation. Traditional and conventional engagements have been through consultation during curriculum and hosting students for industrial attachments or internships, which are also sporadic as per the study findings. A study would be required to define mechanisms that can strengthen this engagement in a win-win situation, where the universities benefit from stakeholders and stakeholders benefit from universities as they prepare graduates. Such a study would provide a more nuanced articulation of how the universities and stakeholders would meaningfully engage in a collaborative manner, for their exclusive benefits.

Forthly, this study has proposed a model, a university, department, institution, or course that aspires for an academic pact for rural development would implement. We have no evidence yet that such a model works and how it would function and the evidence of the actual outcomes of such a model. Hence the need for further studies in this area. Further research therefore, would be to first carry out an implementation research of such a model and see if it works, second would be a kind of experiment that compares graduates from such model vs graduates who graduate from an alternative model and see what outcomes emerge in their ability to function in the said rural contexts.

10.5 Conclusion

The study reflections, literature, empirical findings, and theoretical insights provide compelling evidence that universities should contribute to rural human development through graduate preparation. However, for universities to achieve these objectives, they must align their programmes, in curriculum and pedagogy, to be sensitive to rurality. Rural

sensitive curricula and pedagogies should be designed to foster graduate capabilities, enhance and harness their agency and aspirations to contribute to rural development.

As argued by IFAD (2016) and the World Bank, (2017), sustainable development cannot be attained without inclusive rural development. Thus, the attainment of the SDGs depends in part on rural development. Rural development, which is about creating well-being opportunities for the rural people, who are often deprived of basic capabilities and freedoms to be what they have reason to value, can be enhanced to some extent by well prepared and capable graduates. The study has proposed a multilayered framework of graduate preparation in the re-imagined university. The proposed framework illustrates the connectedness between agency and aspirations in relation to capabilities for rural human development. Thus, universities through fostering graduate capabilities for rural human development are positioned as instrumental in national development and rural development in particular.

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Appendix A. Focus Group Guide for Final-Year Students

Demographic Data	
Date of Interview	_ _ / _ _ / _ _
Gender	Male _____ / Female _____
University	_____
Faculty	_____
Department	_____
Program of Study	_____
Age	_____
Background	Urban _____ / Rural _____
Great, thank you. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your perception of how the university prepares you to function in the world.	
<i>Understanding and Dimensions of RD in Malawi</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the main rural poverty issues in Malawi?2. What are the things that rural people value as well-being for them?3. In your own words, how would you define rural development?	
<i>Higher Education and Rural Development</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What have you learned in university education that will be useful in your RD work?5. What else would you have liked to learn from university education to prepare you well for rural development work?6. What would you consider to be the outcomes/benefits of university education?	
<i>Graduates Attributes/Capabilities for RD</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. What would you consider to be the key attributes/capabilities for a rural development worker?8. Of these attributes/capabilities, which do you think your university education has enhanced, and how?9. How would you describe an ideal RD practitioner?	
<i>Graduates' Preparation for RD</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">10. How can public universities in Malawi better prepare graduates for RD work in Malawi? What measures/or steps the universities need to take?	
<i>Graduates Aspirations and Agency for RD</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">11. Would you be willing to work in rural areas after your graduation? What would be your motivation?	
<i>HE' Relevance, Responsiveness, and Sensitivity to RD</i>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">12. Comment on the <i>relevance</i>, <i>responsiveness</i> and <i>sensitivity</i> of the universities' education in Malawi, to rural development needs(provide examples for each)	

Conclusion: What is your final reflection concerning our discussion on public universities' preparation of graduates for rural development work in Malawi?

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix B. Interview Guide for Higher Education Policymakers

Demographic and Work History

Gender Male / Female

Date |_|_|/_|_|/_|_|

Name of Institution _____

Position Title _____

How long have you been in the position? _____

What is your education background? _____

What is your role in this institution (probe: in relation to graduates' preparation in public universities? Or in terms of the kind of programs that public universities offer)

Great, thank you. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of graduates' preparation for rural development.

Understanding and Dimensions of RD in Malawi

1. What are the main rural poverty issues in Malawi?
2. What constitutes well-being for the rural poor in Malawi?
3. What is your understanding of rural development

Higher Education and Rural Development

4. What role do public universities in Malawi play in rural development?
5. How is graduates' preparation responsive to the rural development demands in Malawi?
6. What are the broad rural development issues that are taken into consideration when approving public universities' programs?
7. How do you ensure, or how would you ensure that public university programs are aligned with the country's development needs in Malawi, bearing in mind the country's rurality?

Graduates Attributes/Capabilities for RD

8. What kind of graduates do you expect public universities to produce in Malawi given the country's increased rural poverty?
9. What are the expected attributes and capabilities for a fully prepared graduate from the public university in Malawi?

Graduates' Preparation for RD

10. What can universities do to improve their preparation of graduates for rural development?

HE's Relevance, Responsiveness, and Sensitivity to RD needs

11. Why do you think there are continued reports that higher education in Malawi is not relevant to the development needs of the country? How can higher education relevance and responsiveness to contextual development needs be enhanced?

Aspiration

12. How can public universities motivate or aspire students towards rural development issues?

Conclusion: What is your final reflection concerning our discussion on public universities' preparation of graduates for rural development work in Malawi?

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix C. Interview Guide for Public Universities' Officials (Registrars and Deans)

Gender Male / Female

Date |_|_|/_|_|/_|_|

Institution: _____

Position Title _____

Years in current position |_|_|yrs|_|_|mths

What is your academic background? _____

What is your role in the institution?

Great, thank you. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of graduates' preparedness for rural development.

Understanding and Dimensions of RD in Malawi

1. What are the main rural poverty issues in Malawi?
2. What are the main things that constitute well-being for the rural poor?
3. What is your understanding of rural development?

Higher Education and Rural Development

4. How does your institution ensure that rural development needs are taken care of in the graduates' preparation for work?
5. What things in your graduates' preparation do you consider relevant to the rural development needs? (probe on curricula, programs or pedagogies)
6. How can your university improve the preparation of graduates for rural development work? What measures/or steps would you propose?

HE's relevance, Responsiveness, and Sensitivity to RD

7. What is the university doing to ensure that graduates' preparation is (1) *sensitive*, (2) *responsive*, and (3) *relevant* to the RD needs? (provide any documentation if necessary)
8. What specific programs does your institution offer that you consider being more *sensitive, responsive, and relevant* to the RD needs in Malawi? What is it about these programs that make them more sensitive, responsive, and relevant to RD needs? Please explain and give concrete examples where possible (provide any documentation if necessary)

Graduates Attributes/Capabilities for RD

9. What are the key attributes and capabilities your university considers for graduates prepared for rural development work in Malawi?
10. With what qualities would you describe a graduate who is well prepared for RD?

Graduates' Aspirations and Agency for RD

11. Why should graduate preparation for RD be a topical issue in university education in Malawi? Why should universities be concerned with graduates' preparation for RD in Malawi?
12. What factors do you think motivate graduates to get into RD work?

Conclusion: What is your final reflection concerning our discussion on public universities' preparation of graduates for rural development work in Malawi?

Thank you for participating in the study

Appendix D. Interview Guide for Rural Development Stakeholders

<p>Participant's Organization _____</p> <p>Gender Male / Female</p> <p>Date __ / __ / __ </p> <p>Position in the organization _____</p> <p>How long have you been in the position?</p> <p>What did you study at the university? _____</p> <p>Which year did you graduate? _____</p> <p>What is your role in the organization in relation to rural development?</p> <p>How are you involved with graduates working in the organization?</p> <p>Great, thank you. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of graduates' preparedness for rural development.</p>
<p><i>Understanding and Dimensions of RD in Malawi</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are the main rural poverty issues in Malawi?2. What are the main things that rural people in Malawi consider to constitute their well-being?3. In your own words, how would you define rural development? <p><i>Graduates Attributes/Capabilities for RD</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What <i>skills, competencies, attributes, and capabilities</i> are expected of graduates working in RD at your organization? Do you think public universities are fostering these skills/capabilities and how?5. What are the qualities of an ideal rural development worker? <p><i>Graduates' Preparation for RD</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. What are the things that graduates normally learn on the job that you find lacking in their university education?7. How can public universities in Malawi better prepare graduates for RD work in Malawi? <p><i>Graduates Aspirations and Agency for RD</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. What are the things that motivate graduates into rural development work? <p><i>HE's relevance, Responsiveness, and Sensitivity to RD</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Comment on the <i>relevance, responsiveness and sensitivity</i> of the universities' education in Malawi, to rural development (provide examples for each)
<p>Conclusion: What is your final reflection concerning our discussion on public universities' preparation of graduates for rural development work in Malawi?</p> <p>Thank you for participating in the study</p>

Appendix E. Interview Guide for Universities' Graduates working in Rural Development

<p>Participant's Organization _____</p> <p>Gender Male / Female</p> <p>Date __ / __ / __ </p> <p>Position in the organization _____</p> <p>How long have you been in the position? _____</p> <p>When did you graduate _____</p> <p>From which university did you get your first degree? _____</p> <p>What did you study at your undergraduate? _____</p> <p>What is your role in the organization (in relation to rural development)?</p> <p>Great, thank you. Now I am going to ask you some questions about your perceptions of graduates' preparedness for rural development.</p>
<p><i>Understanding and Dimensions of RD in Malawi</i></p> <p>13. What are the main rural poverty issues in Malawi?</p> <p>14. What are the main things that rural people in Malawi consider to constitute their well-being?</p> <p>15. How would you define rural development?</p> <p><i>Higher Education and Rural Development</i></p> <p>16. What things from your university education do you consider were relevant in preparing you for rural development work (curriculum, program, modules/courses, pedagogies)</p> <p>17. What are the things or elements of your university education that you do not value much as far as rural development work is concerned?</p> <p>18. How can universities improve their preparation of graduates for rural development work? What measures/or steps the universities need to take?</p> <p><i>Graduates Attributes/Capabilities for RD</i></p> <p>19. What are the things which you have learned on the job, which you did not learn at the university? (consider five things)</p> <p>20. What are the qualities of an ideal rural development worker (consider five things)</p> <p><i>Graduates Aspirations and Agency for RD</i></p> <p>21. Why should rural development be a topical subject in graduates' preparation in Malawi?</p> <p>22. What motivates you in your work with the rural communities?</p> <p>HE' Relevance, Responsiveness, and Sensitivity to RD</p> <p>23. Comment on the <i>relevance</i>, <i>responsiveness</i> and <i>sensitivity</i> of the universities' education in Malawi, to rural development (provide examples for each)</p> <p>24. Were you involved in service-learning as a student at the university? Explain what it entailed</p>
<p>Conclusion: What is your final reflection concerning our discussion on public universities' preparation of graduates for rural development work in Malawi?</p> <p>✓ Thank you for participating in the study</p>

Appendix F. Sample permission letter

University of the Free State

SARChI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research

Benito Khotseng Building, Room 114.

Senate Street North (IB 6)

PO Box 339,

Bloemfontein 9300

Republic of South Africa

13th September 2018

National Council for Higher Education

Malawi

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Seeking Permission from Your Institution to Participate in my Ph.D. Study

I, **Martino Kamwano MAZINGA**, a Ph.D. candidate in Development Studies, at the The University of the Free State, in South Africa, registered under the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences (EMS), seek your institution's participation in my study. I am a doctoral research fellow under the SARChI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research Group.

My study is titled “***The role of public universities in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi.***” The study aims at exploring public universities' role in graduates' preparation for rural development in Malawi, with a particular focus on how public universities *can* foster graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development work. Thus, the main research question is: **How can public universities, through graduates' preparation, contribute to rural poverty reduction in Malawi?**

Your institution, National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), has been identified as a key stakeholder in the study. Thus, I would like to request your participation in the research.

Findings from the study have the potential of influencing public universities' pedagogies, programs, and curriculum as well as policies through the recognition of the graduates' employability attributes and capabilities for rural development in Malawi. The study is partly in response to current studies (Mambo, 2016, World Bank, 2010) that have indicated higher education's inability to meet the development needs of the country and employers' dissatisfaction with the graduates' preparedness for work. Given the ruralised nature of the country, one would expect public universities to consider rural development as a cross-cutting issue in the higher education system in Malawi.

Your institution's voluntary participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. I am aware your institution is a key stakeholder in the higher education system. The permission sought is part of the Ethical Clearance process for my study with the host University of the Free State. Once the Ethical Clearance is granted, I will get back to your institution with a schedule of planned interviews. Participating individuals from your institution will be provided with detailed information on the study to consent for their participation.

I plan to conduct in-depth interviews with one of the senior officials at the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE). The study is targeting all four public universities in Malawi:

University of Malawi (UNIMA)

- Faculty of Social Sciences – Chancellor College
- Faculty of Commerce – The Polytechnic
- School of Public Health and Family Medicine – College of Medicine

Mzuzu University (MZUNI)

- Faculty of Environmental Sciences

Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resources (LUANAR)

- Faculty of Development Studies

Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST)

- School of Technology

These faculties have been targeted based on the relevance of the programs they offer in relation to rural development and also the number of graduates they produce that are employed in rural development work.

I will require official permission from your institution, as part of my Ethical Clearance application to the EMS Research Ethics Committee. I hope you will find this in order. Just to indicate that there is no potential harm or risk associated with your institution's

participation in this study. All research ethical procedures will be followed to the letter in the study.

Dr. Mikateko Hopponer, Dr. Ntimi Ntawa, and Prof Melanie Walker, from the Higher Education and Human Development Research Group, under the SARChI Chair, are moderating my study. They can be contacted on hoppenerm@ufs.ac.za, mtawann@ufs.ac.za, and walkermj@ufs.ac.za, respectively.

Yours sincerely,

Martino Kamwano MAZINGA

Email: mkmazinga@yahoo.com

Cell: +265999132468 (Malawi)

+27604132126 (South Africa)

Appendix G. Sample permission letter

The Executive Director

Malawi Health Equity Network (MHEN)

Lilongwe.

Malawi.

Dear Sir,

RE: Seeking Permission from Your Institution to Participate in my Ph.D. Study

I, **Martino Kamwano MAZINGA**, a Ph.D. candidate in Development Studies, at the University of the Free State, in South Africa, registered under the Faculty of Economic Management Sciences (EMS), seek your institution's participation in my study. I am a doctoral research fellow under the SARChI Chair in Higher Education and Human Development Research Group.

My study is titled "*The role of public universities in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi.*" The study aims at exploring public universities' role in graduates' preparation for rural development in Malawi, with a particular focus on how public universities *can* foster graduates' capabilities and attributes for rural development work. Thus, the main research question is: How can public universities, through graduates' preparation, contribute to rural poverty reduction in Malawi?

Your institution, MHEN, has been identified as a key stakeholder in the study. Thus, I would like to request your participation in the research. Findings from the study have the potential of influencing public universities' pedagogies, programs, and curriculum as well as policies through the recognition of the graduates' employability attributes and capabilities for rural development in Malawi. The study is partly in response to current studies (Mambo, 2016) that have indicated higher education's inability to meet the development needs of the country and employers' dissatisfaction with the graduates' preparedness for work. Given the ruralised nature of the country,

one would expect public universities to consider rural development as a cross-cutting issue in the higher education system in Malawi.

Your voluntary participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. I plan to speak to one senior person from your institution and two of your staff members involved in rural development work (one male and one female). I would like to interview those who have graduated recently (within the past five years) from any of the three public universities in Malawi: the University of Malawi, Lilongwe University of Agriculture and Natural Resource and Mzuzu University. I hope you will find this in order. Just to indicate that there is no potential harm or risk study involved in your participation in the study.

Dr. Mikateko Hopponer, Dr. Ntimi Ntawa, and Prof Melanie Walker, from the Higher Education and Human Development Research Group, under the SARChI Chair, are moderating my study. They can be contacted on hoppenerm@ufs.ac.za, mtawann@ufs.ac.za, and walkermj@ufs.ac.za, respectively.

Yours sincerely,

Martino Kamwano MAZINGA

Email: mkmazinga@yahoo.com

Cell: +265999132468 (Malawi)

+27604132126 (South Africa)

TELEPHONE: 01478000

FAX: 01 478 220

All correspondence to be addressed to:

University Registrar

registrar@must.ac.mw



Malawi University of Science and Technology

P.O. Box 5196

Limbe

MALAWI

OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

Ref: 1/10/3

12th September, 2018

University of Free State

SARCHI Chair in Higher Educ. and Human Development Research

P.O. Box 339

Bloemfontein 9300

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Dear Mr Mazinga,

Seeking Permission to Participate in PhD Study

I write to acknowledge receipt of your letter regarding the above subject.

I would like to inform you that permission has been granted to conduct research at MUST. However, our students are on leave at the moment and will be back to campus end October, 2018. I thought this information will guide your plan for focus group discussions with our students.

By copy of this memo, I would like to request the Executive Dean of MIT to give the necessary support during your study.

Yours Sincerely,

Tarsizius Nampota, PhD

UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

cc: Vice Chancellor
Deputy Vice Chancellor
Executive Dean, Malawi Institute of Technology
Deputy University Registrar
Assistant Registrar (HRM & D)

Appendix I: Ethics Statements



Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences

22-Nov-2018

Dear Mr Martin Mazinga

Ethics Clearance: The role of public universities in fostering graduates' capabilities for rural development in Malawi

Principal Investigator: Mr Martin Mazinga

Department: Centre for Development Support Department (Bloemfontein Campus)

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: UFS-HSD2018/1340

This ethical clearance number is valid from 22-Nov-2018 to 21-Nov-2023. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Petrus Nel

Chairperson: Ethics Committee Faculty of Economic & Management Sciences

Economics Ethics Committee

Office of the Dean: Economic and Management Sciences

T: +27 (0)51 401 2310 | T: +27(0)51 401 9111 | F: +27(0)51 444 5465

205 Nelson Mandela Drive/Ryalaan, Park West/Parkweg, Bloemfontein 9301, South Africa/Suid Afrika

P.O. Box/Posbus 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa/Suid Afrika

www.ufs.ac.za



Appendix J: Statement by language editor

I hereby declare that I language edited a doctoral thesis authored by
Martino Kamwano Mazinga with the title:

**“The role of public universities in fostering graduates’ capabilities
for rural development in Malawi”**

Jennifer Lake

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lake', written in a cursive style.

Accredited Professional Text Editor, SATI (APEd)

Membership no: 1002099

M. St. Linguistics (OXON)

Appendix K: sample of data set

Question	Response	Notes	Emerging themes
<i>What is your position in the organization?</i>	I work as the project coordinator for the organization, this is my third year. I graduated in November 2013, with a bachelor of science in natural resources management at University of Malawi		
<i>What is your role in the organization, in relation to rural development?</i>	<u>In the context of the project I am managing, I take care of the implementation of the project, the project activities. I give guidance to the field officers on what has to be done, and the expectations in terms of reporting on the activities that are carried out in and with the rural communities.</u> I also do monitoring and evaluation; I execute that function of	Responsibilities/Roles given to graduates in RD <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project management and administration • Supervising and guiding field officers • Reporting on project activities 	Project management

	<p>monitoring development projects in the rural areas. Since I am at the district level, I also act as the district coordinator in terms of collaboration with other district stakeholders working in rural community development. I also execute some administrative functions for the team that is placed in Kasungu district.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and evaluation • Coordination and collaboration with other stakeholders 	
<p><i>What are the main rural poverty issues in the context of Malawi?</i></p>	<p>Food security is a major issue, which is closely linked to the broader issue of agriculture, because most of the smallholder farmers who are often food insecure, It is because they cannot produce for themselves as they lack information and resources in agricultural</p>	<p>Main rural poverty issues in Malawi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food insecurity – rural smallholder farmers lack information and resources in agricultural technologies that can 	

	<p>technologies that can improve their farm yields. So as an organization, our role is to teach the farmers on how they can improve in their production and productivity. Climate change is another issue in rural areas, and we target interventions in this area. Most rural people lack the knowledge on climate change issues, such that they do not know how to manage their lives, how to manage their livelihoods in the events of climate change related disasters. There are also issues to do with economic challenges in rural communities; there is gap in the knowledge of the rural people in terms of how they can manage their own resources, that is</p>	<p>improve their farm yields</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change – proneness to disasters and livelihood shocks • Economic challenges – opportunities and utilization 	
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	<p>generating and also utilization of economic resources.</p> <p>Therefore, in developing these rural communities we take them through the ideal practices in terms of how they can improve their well-being and sustain their livelihoods.</p>		
<p><i>In one sentence, how can you define rural development ?</i></p>	<p>Rural development is fixing or giving the rural people a chance to alleviate the poverty gaps that they have in their lives. By poverty gaps I mean in terms of knowledge in terms of how they manage agriculture, their finance, how they can manage climate change and how they can manage their social life. Because if they are poor in managing these things, that it is what which, facilitates the</p>		<p>Defining of rural development</p>

	state of poverty in their lives.		
<i>What are the key dimensions of rural development in the context of Malawi?</i>	In my view, the following would be key dimensions of rural development: Agricultural growth, livelihood improvement, climate change mitigation and adaptation.		
<i>What do you mean by improvement of livelihoods?</i>	Let me begin by comparing the life we live in rural areas and the urban lives. Livelihood improvement is trying to raise the livelihoods of the rural people to at least match, maybe we cannot match, with the people in urban areas, but the gap in terms of income, the gap in terms of access to amenities has to be reduce. Reducing the gap between the well	Rural poverty as a gap in access and improvement of livelihood opportunities	

	to do people and those rural poor people in terms of accessing their amenities, income at household level and individual level is improving their livelihoods.		
<i>You talk about access to amenities, what are the key amenities that you consider when talking about rural development ?</i>	These amenities which the rural poor require, include: access to financial services, access to standard health services, access to advanced and up to date agriculture technologies, access to standard education, access to social services - empowerment opportunities in different areas, access to good road infrastructure, access to markets, access to built environments...access and opportunities to participate in decision	Access to social amenities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial services • Standard health services • Advanced and up to date agriculture technologies • Standard education • Economic empowerment opportunities • Good road infrastructure • Markets 	

	making and political activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built environment • Participation in decision making and political activities 	
<i>What are the things that the rural people value most as elements of their well-being?</i>	<p>they value most food availability- this is the most important thing to the rural people; everything about the rural people revolve around food; it is not that they live to eat, but eating makes them live, so food is central to their well-being. They can have money but if money cannot access them food it is nothing. Of course, the other things that the rural people value as elements of their well-being is a healthy life. That is when they live healthily without getting sick, or when they get sick they are able to access</p>		

	<p>medication, then their life is good. Things like education just create an enabling environment for the rural people's well-being. Another important element of the rural people's well-being is the possession of different assets and property. For example, livestock are valued so much in rural areas, if one has cattle, goats, pigs, they are considered well to do, people who have enough land are considered well off.</p>		
<p><i>Apart from the material things, are there other non-material things, or non-economic things that the rural</i></p>	<p>Mostly their bodily health, their social interactions in the society that is good relationships - living at peace with the entire community. People are happy to be at peace</p>		

<i>people value as elements of their well-being?</i>	with each other, access to extension services.		
<i>How did the university prepare you for rural development? you can provide examples by looking at the programs, courses, curriculum, pedagogy, practices etc).</i>	I would start by qualifying in percentage, I can say that I was 60% prepared for the rural development. The curriculum was good, the target of issues we learn was good, but the challenge is that there was a challenge with the articulation of contextual issues, saying this is what you are going to meet when you get in the field; I think that element misses in the university education. Much of the education focuses on management of people you are going to supervise but the practical experience of the rural grassroots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of practical learning 	Curriculum Pedagogy

	<p>community lacks. And it is the experience that I found it hard when I started my job as a community worker in the first place , it was so hard for me to interact with the people in the communities, I just took advantage of the people I already found in the system to learn from them. I learnt how to approach the community on job; the university education lacked that practical element in my preparation.</p>		
<p><i>You have indicated about the curriculum being good. What is it that is good about the curriculum?</i></p>	<p>The curricula, which I followed, touched on the very important aspects of rural development. For instance, in my case, in bachelor's degree we looked at issues of energy, natural resources</p>	<p>Theory based learning</p> <p>Lack of practicals</p>	<p>Relevant curriculum</p> <p>Theory based learning</p>

	<p>management, water provision, biodiversity conservation, climate change. These area are key in rural development work, they touch on what matters. If they were taught in practical ways, graduates would be well prepared for rural development. The gap I noticed is that of remaining at theory, not getting into practice of these things.</p>		
<p><i>What are the aspects of your university education that you do not value now in your work in rural development ?</i></p>	<p>Not really, everything was very important; everything was building on each other. I did a lot of courses, I do not consider anything less or not important because possibly at a point I will be able to use some of the knowledge.</p>	<p>Value of what learnt in the university</p>	

<i>What are the things that you have learnt on job, which you did not learn in the university but are useful in your work as a rural development practitioner?</i>	Community mobilization...I had not done it in college, I learnt through experiences,.....Another thing is Stakeholder management, I have learnt this on job; stakeholder management is about working with a number of players in your field who can contribute to its success.	Things graduates indicated that they learnt on job not from the university <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community mobilization • Stakeholder engagement 	On job learning
<i>What are the attributes for an ideal rural development worker?</i>	One needs to have top management skills, because in rural development you meet complex issues in rural development that require management skills in decision-making, thus decision making skills becomes the second attribute. You need to be flexible; working with	Graduate attributes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and project management skills • Decision making skills • Flexibility • Adaptability • Humility 	Graduate attributes for rural development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People and project management skills • Decision making skills • Flexibility • Adaptability • Humility

	<p>the rural people requires someone who is flexible, someone who can adapt to the environment or the situation that you have countered in the community. Another important thing is that one needs to be humble, in terms of doing what the romans do; so when in rural communities, do like them, you do not have to distance yourself from the rural community because of your education for instance; be humble and associate with the rural poor. You need to put yourself in their shoes. One needs to have good listening skills - you need to be able to attentively listening to the rural people and making them feel that you are listening to them. One</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closeness with the rural communities • Listening skills • Technical competence in your field 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closeness with the rural communities • Listening skills <p>Technical competence in your field</p>
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	<p>needs to be hard working as rural development work can be demanding, especially that sometimes you get to hard to reach areas.</p> <p>You also need to have substantial technical knowledge in the particular area you are focusing in rural development.</p>		
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