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Citizen Engagement and Local Governments in Zimbabwe: The Case of the Mutare City Council

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Abstract

The article assesses the success with which citizen engagement has been implemented in Zimbabwean local governments. The assessment was premised on the case study of the Mutare City Council in Zimbabwe. The research was carried out from June 2015-June 2016 through in-depth interviews of central government officials, the Mutare City Council administrators and councilors as well as Mutare residents and officials from the residents' associations in Mutare. From the situational analysis of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe it emerged that citizen engagement is currently rhetorical across the nation. This prompted a further investigation into the obstacles against the realization of citizen engagement at the Mutare City Council and Zimbabwe at large. From the research findings it emerged that the major obstacles to citizen engagement can be divided into four broad categories namely organizational, individual, inter-relations and contextual. However, the article argues that despite the multiplicity of obstacles towards the attainment of citizen engagement, the efforts by the citizens and administrators of the City of Mutare should still continue. This is largely due to the fact that citizen engagement is one of the key elements to the socio-economic and political transformation which Mutare and Zimbabwe at large so desires to achieve.

Key Words: Citizen engagement, Mutare, Mutare City Council, Zimbabwe

Jel Classification: N4, N47

Paper Classification: Research Paper

Introduction

When Zimbabwe attained independence in April 1980, citizen engagement was one of the many aims of the new government. This aim remained etched in the policy documents which directed governance in the country such as the Zimbabwe Prime-Minister's Directive of 1984, the Provincial and Administration Act of 1985, Urban-Councils Act of 1996, Rural Councils Act of 1996, the Traditional Leaders Act of 2000, the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe as well as the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET) of 2013-2018. Thus the main research questions which informed this research were; how effective has Citizen Engagement been implemented in Zimbabwe? What factors explain the current status of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe's 60 rural and 31 urban authorities? How best can citizen

engagement be made successful in Zimbabwe? The research was focused on the instrumental value of citizen engagement and was done so as to attempt to make a theoretical contribution towards the existing academic gap of the nature of citizen engagement in the City of Mutare in Zimbabwe. Practically the study was intended to assist Zimbabwean policy makers in comprehending challenges of citizen engagement in Mutare and Zimbabwe at large. The study is also intended to act as a guide to the successful implementation of citizen engagement in Mutare and Zimbabwe at large.

Research Methodology

The article is based on primary and secondary research conducted from June 2015-June 2016. The research was conducted over a period of a year. The field work was conducted at the City of Mutare council offices and the 19 wards of the City of Mutare. Structured questionnaire were administered face to face in either English or Shona depending on the preference of the interviewee. The study participants were purposively sampled and comprised councilors and the council administrators. These were selected due to the fact that they had the hands on experience with regards to citizen engagement and its challenges on the ground. However, the general citizens were purposively selected. The sample size was 71 comprising 6 participants for the in-depth interviews as well as 50 households and 15 councilors for the questionnaire. The data was analysed using the Statistical Package Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 due to the fact that the data was voluminous and required to be analysed.

Limitations of The Study

The study focused on the Mutare City Council only out of the other urban and rural councils in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the study focused more on the obstacles of citizen engagement at administrative level meaning that the councilors and council administrators were the focus of the research and not citizens.

Scope for further Research

Further research might need to be done again on citizen engagement in the Mutare City Council. This primarily due to the facts that there is very little research that has been done and also there are many facets of citizen engagement. For instance research might need to be focused on the perceptions of the citizens of Mutare themselves with regards to citizen engagement.

What is Citizen Engagement?

In order to comprehensively identify the obstacles and possible solutions, it is essential to define and expand on the meaning of citizen engagement. Arnstein (1969:216) states that citizen engagement is the process of re-distributing power in which the citizens and other stakeholders who are currently excluded from the political and economic processes are deliberately included in the future. Roberts (2004:319) further notes that citizen engagement is the fulfillment of one's legal rights and duties as specified by the constitution as well as the active involvement in substantive issues of government and community. Parker (2003) maintains that citizen engagement is a process which provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions.

Thus in simpler terms, citizen engagement is the involvement of ordinary citizens in the affairs of their respective local governments. It is important to note that among other things, citizen engagement aims to galvanise democracy through building a sense of community. Meskell (2009)



states that, "for democracy to flourish, citizens need to take an active part in public life, sharing their ideas and opening their minds to the opinions of others and taking ownership in the well-being of the country." Nancy Roberts (2004:315) also adds on and posits that citizen engagement is the cornerstone of democracy as it keeps public institutions accountable.

Legal Frameworks for Citizen Engagement in Zimbabwe

Despite the current dismal and lackluster practice of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe it is interesting to note that the concept itself has the backing of various legal and even socio-economical frameworks of the nation.

Zimbabwean Constitution 2013

The practice of citizen engagement is legally provided for in various sections of the new Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 which is the supreme law of the land. The following Chapters and Sections of the constitution provide for citizen engagement

- Chapter 1: Section 3
- Chapter 2: Sections 9,17 (1a, b, c), 18, 20b, 21
- Chapter 4: Sections 51,62, 67
- Chapter 14: Sections 264, 265

This is a rather welcome development in the discourse of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe considering the fact that the previous constitution of 1979 was silent on the role of citizen engagement in local governance. It further had various Acts, Amendments and Bills mentioned earlier which were deleterious to the well-being of engagement and participation.

Zimasset 2013

The ZIMASSET (Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Social-Economic Transformation) is the economic blue-print for Zimbabwe. It will serve as the developmental manual for Zimbabwe from 2013-2018. As much as it is economic, it supports citizen engagement through clauses 1.2 and 1.7. This implies that the much sort after economic emancipation of Zimbabwe will be realized if citizens are made part and parcel of the transformation process. Moreover it dovetails with the African Charter on Popular Participation in Development and Transformation of 1990 which recommends Africans to be involved in the crafting and engineering of their developmental road maps.

Urban Councils Act 1996

The Zimbabwean Local Urban Councils Act Chapter 29:15 furthermore supports the practice of citizen engagement through the decentralization and democratization of the local government system. This is similar to the new constitution of 2013 in that, the Urban Councils Act of 1996 attempted to reverse the colonial injustices which were intolerant to participation and engagement of Africans. Under the colonial Urban councils Act of 1973 African townships were not considered part and parcel of the urban council and thus they had no say in the affairs of the local governance. Furthermore, rent-paying African lodgers were not even allowed to vote.

Historical Context of Citizen Engagement in Zimbabwe

Despite the clarion call by regional and international bodies for citizen engagement, the

practice still remains rhetorical in the Zimbabwean context. Citizens continue to be marginalised from decision making and their views are excluded from the final decision making policy. The basis of this assertion emanates from a 2016 study of 17 councils in Zimbabwe (10 rural and 7 urban) spear-headed by the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) and funded by the European Union. Moreover, Musekiwa and Chatiza (2015) reveal that councilors in Zimbabwe do not prioritize citizen engagement in local government affairs. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Bulletin (2014) states that during parliamentary committee meetings citizens and stake-holders only attend as observers and not as participants. They only listen but do not voice their concerns. This is a fact which was confirmed by one of the researchers of this study who took time to attend a full council meeting and was only allowed to do so in the capacity of an observer. Chikerema (2013) came to the same conclusion during his study in which he stated that the Zimbabwe government system is mal-functioning due to the lack of active participation of citizens. Makumbe (2009) informs that in 2000 Zimbabwe suffered a huge setback to Democracy. The United Mutare Residents and Rate-Payers' Trust baseline survey (2016) also stated that citizen engagement was critically low.

Mapuva (2014) informs that the Zimbabwean government has made it difficult for citizen engagement to effectively take place due to various pieces of legislation such as:

- Private and Voluntary Organisations (PVO) Act of 1996
- Urban Councils Act of 1996
- NGO Bill of 2004
- Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2005
- Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2005
- Interception of Communications Act of 2007
- Broadcast Services Act (BSA) of 2000

It should be noted however, that citizens require information so as to assist them to participate fruitfully in the governance of their respective localities as well as to make informed decisions and not from a point of ignorance. Martin and Feldman (1998) argue that, "countries that are committed to democratic good governance should adopt a legal regime that promotes access to information in the possession of the state."

The irony of this current state of affairs should be highlighted considering the fact that one of the major reasons which fueled the Zimbabwean liberation struggle was that the indigenous African citizens were isolated from engagement and participation in the development of their respective areas of residence and the nation at large. The residence of Africans in urban areas was made temporary prior to the Second World War (1939-1945) and its resultant industrial development in Zimbabwe. Thereafter African labor was in high demand and African male citizens were driven to the urban areas after of the enactment of the injurious Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 which according to Machingaidze (1991) was deleterious towards the sizes of African herds of cattle and the pieces of land. Moreover, he notes that the African townships in the urban areas to which they were driven to were characterized by deplorable accommodation facilities accompanied by poor service delivery. In addition, the working conditions of Africans were poor to say the least and the remuneration was racially biased owing to the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934. The 1958 Plewman report exposed that the African wages were 35% below the Poverty Datum Line. The Southern Rhodesian government had pegged the average African income at £4 15s per month. Meanwhile, Professor Batson of the Cape-Town University had pegged it at £7 7s per month for an average family with 2 children. In addition,

the greater part of the African population was not allowed to vote. The 1898 Reform Proclamation had reserved voting only for those Africans who were male, 21 years of age, with £75 worth of property and £50 worth of annual income. All these qualifications were way above the reach of many Africans. In 1948, 50 years after the proclamation only 258 Africans qualified to vote country-wide. Omer-Cooper (1971:263) states that the Federal Parliament of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland era (1953-1963) Africans were allowed to have only 2 representatives per country. However, the irony of it is that these representatives would be selected by European settlers.

Resultantly, all this then led to the intensification of the culture of Trade Unionism and subsequently the radicalization of African nationalism by transitioning from Elite Mass Nationalism to Mass Nationalism. This can be seen by the prevalence of strike action and the formation of political parties. Dhliwayo in an unpublished article titled *The Creation of an African Middle Class in Colonial Zimbabwe: An Analysis of Modern African Nationalism* supports this argument. He informs that in 1945 the Railway Workers' Strike took place involving an unprecedented 10 000 workers in all the major towns in the then Southern Rhodesia and even Northern Rhodesia. The 1947 Students' strike at Dadaya Mission took place led by female students. In 1948 the National General Worker's Strike also occurred. In the immediate post-Second World War period an additional 8 more strikes were reported. All of these demanded better conditions of service and service delivery from the government. On the part of the political parties, Martin and Johnson (1981) reveal that the City Youth League (CYL) was formed in 1955 with a membership of 1300. It was formed under the leadership of George Nyandoro, James Chikerema and Edison Sithole. In 1957 the Southern Rhodesia National Congress (SRANC) with a membership of 170 000 workers and 477 branches which was quite staggering at the time. Thereafter the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed in 1960 followed by the Zimbabwe African Peoples' Union (ZAPU) in 1961 and then the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in 1963.

Therefore, one can safely conclude that the dis-engagement of Zimbabweans dwelling in Southern Rhodesian administration from the governance of their country was one of the main instigators of the liberation struggle. Zimbabweans demanded one man one vote, majority rule. One of the slogans of the era was, "seek ye first the political kingdom and everything else shall be added unto you." This was a clear cry by the Africans to have a government that involved, consulted and engaged them on anything that pertains to their welfare (land, employment, education and accommodation). They wanted power to be re-distributed into their hands so that they could have a say in matters of governance. Thus given that scenario, it would be assumed that soon after independence citizen engagement would be implemented. However this is yet to come to pass in Zimbabwe and the question is why?

Findings: The Major Obstacles to Citizen-Engagement in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of The Mutare City-Council

One of the major aims of the research was to ascertain the factors militating against the successful implementation of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe using the case study of the Mutare City Council. Listed and expanded below are the findings from the study, the findings have been conceptualized into 4 categories namely individual, inter-relations, organizational and contextual obstacles to citizen engagement.

- **Organisational**
Depletion of Council Revenue

- **Contextual**
Shrinkage of Local Industrial Base
Lack of Political Will
- **Inter-relations**
Frosty Relations Between Government and Civil Society
Fragmented Residents Associations
- **Individual**
Unemployment amongst Citizens
Citizen Apathy
Limited Capabilities of Local Councilors

Organizational Obstacles

Depletion of Council Revenue

The in-depth interviews that were carried out suggest that the chronic lack of finances is the primary factor frustrating citizen engagement at the Mutare City Council. It should be noted that without finances it is difficult to implement citizen engagement. Resources are required to finance engagement activities such as consultative budget meetings, road shows and local elections among others. However, the financial crisis at the Mutare City Council is partly attributed to internal issues at the council itself and the economic recession which Zimbabwe is experiencing as whole.

During an interview with the chair-person of the Finance Committee, it was revealed that the council's FBC bank account in 2014 had an overdraft of US\$ 3 479 million which was withdrawn by the out-going councilors of 2013. Furthermore, the council is also owed US\$ 28.4 million by struggling Mutare residents and surrounding companies. Furthermore, during an interview with one of the councilors who is also a member of the finance committee he revealed that for the council to operate optimally on a monthly basis it requires no less than US\$1.7 million however, due to the current national economic hardships, the council is only getting US\$ 900 000 per month. Thus in 2015 the council required US\$17.7 million to be fully functional, but due to the economic recession it only managed to rack in US\$14.4 million.

This financial crisis at the Mutare City Council has not only affected the practice of citizen engagement. It has also disabled the council from meeting its other financial obligations. During a June 2016 interview with the current Mayor of Mutare he revealed that the council owes money to institutions such as Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) and National Social Security Authority (NSSA). In addition the city council owes its workers a total of US\$3 million in unpaid salaries including bonuses of 2012 and 2013.

However, it should also be acknowledged that the financial crisis has also been brought about by rampant corruption at the local authority. This is based on the audit report of February 2016 which revealed that the council had failed to account for US\$5.2 million which works out to almost 50% of its annual budget (Office of the Auditor General :Local Authorities Report 2015). Furthermore senior officials were claiming US\$2.4 million worth of allowances. This was done at a time when the work-force going for periods as long as 17 months without salaries.

Furthermore, the administrators stated that the financial crisis is due to Zimbabwe's prolonged national economic recession. This assertion was further corroborated by the statements of

academic scholars and economists with regards to Zimbabwe's economic status. Zimbabwe has been experiencing economic turbulence since the beginning of the new millennium. Monyau (2015) reveals that unemployment is at a staggering 80% in Zimbabwe and 80% of the population is employed in the informal sector. Currently Zimbabwe is also facing severe cash shortages such that cash withdrawal limits as low as US\$20-US\$200 per day (depending on the bank) have been imposed upon the citizens (Daily News, 01 June 2016). Furthermore, citizens employed in the civil service are experiencing delays in their payment dates by an average of 2 weeks or more (Herald, 22 July 2016). Chatiza (2016) traces this impending economic decline to the Fast Track Land Reform program of 2000. He reveals that it has transformed vertical and horizontal industrial linkages, land tenure, ownership and development, food production and agricultural productivity. Furthermore, Chatiza states that the land reform has displaced socio-economic actors, disempowered local development institutions.

As a result, the tax base has shrunk and the government basically does not have adequate revenue. The little that it is receiving is being used by its rather heavy expenditure. Moyo (2014) posits that the Zimbabwean government expenditure is 97.8% of GDP. In addition the Confederation of Zimbabwean Industries survey of 2014 warned that the number of industries closing in Zimbabwe has reached alarming levels (Confederation of Zimbabwe Survey 2014:06)

Consequently the financial crisis greatly limits the activities which the city council is supposed to execute and citizen engagement is one such crucial activity. Thus the lack of financial resources ends up having a process of engagement which is merely ornamental or rhetorical. This is because it lacks the financial resources with which to fully implement the issues raised during the engagement sessions. This dovetails with the argument postulated by Przeworski et al (1996) and Moyo (2006) who argue that democracy succeeds better in a country with an annual per capita income of US\$4 000-6 000. On the other hand, Zimbabwe has an annual per capita income of US\$1 054 as of July 2015. Without resources there can be no meaningful engagement.

Inter-Relations Obstacles

Frosty Relations between the Local Government and Civil Society

Furthermore, citizen engagement is being frustrated owing to the strained relations between the City Council and the civil society organisations. This came to light during interviews with the former town clerk, the current acting town clerk and the leaders of some of the civil society organisations in Mutare. The acting town-clerk (Interviewed 26 May 2016) openly stated that relations with the civil society was somewhat strained due to their sometimes unrealistic demands for service delivery on the city-council. It was also further realized that these strained relations between the City Council and the civil society are actually originating from the attitude of the central government towards the civil society as well.

These statements were further juxtaposed to the scholarly evidence on the country and found to be true. Mapuva (2014) traces the emergence these tensions to the rejection of the 1999 draft constitution. The government blamed the civil society organisations for influencing the masses to reject the draft constitution. Raftopolous (2000) notes that, "the state is eager to control the growing NGO sector and in particular the funding channeled into these organisations." The World Bank Country Report of 2004 stated that the government was pessimistic about the civil society due to its potential to organize people outside state structures as well as its reception of funds from international donors which previously went to the national coffers.

Apart from the scholarly arguments, the negative perception of the civil society held by the government can also be detected in the crafting of some Bills mentioned earlier such as the Private and Voluntary Organisations Act of 1996 and the proposed NGO Bill of 2004 among others that made the operations of the civil society nearly impossible.

Moreover, it was also interesting to note that this attitude is not only peculiar to Zimbabwe; rather it is prevalent among many African governments. Thompson (2010) attributes this state of affairs to Africa's colonial experience. He argues that during the colonial era the administrations were oppressive and did not entertain any opinions or concerns raised by the African citizens. African governments inherited these structures of governments which they were not adequately capacitated to relate to civil society. Therefore as a result African governments are failing to master how to have a working relationship with the civil society. Mapuva (2010) informs that due to the colonial experience African governments are sensitive to non-governmental organisations and perceive them to be agents of neo-colonialism. Furthermore both the local and central governments treat the attempts to civil society in this light. Thus the attempts at engagement are strangled.

This state of affairs however, is injurious to the success of citizen engagement in that it is through the civil society that both the local and central government can gain direct access to the ordinary citizens. The civil society acts as the middle-man and has the potential to thaw the existing tensions between some of the citizens and the government. Furthermore, the civil society can even assist the local authority by complementing its efforts when given a chance.

Despite this state of affairs it was interesting to note that these current frosty relations, the Mutare civil society continues to ensure that the interests of the citizens are protected. In 2010, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) also donated refuse collection trucks to the Mutare City Council. In 2014, the Peace Facilitation Partnership (PFP) joined forces with the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO) to train the Mutare City Council Officials on Conflict Resolution. In 2015, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) carried out a citizen engagement workshop in Nyanga and took time to train the councilors in citizen engagement. In April 2015 the IRC in collaboration with the Peace-building and Capacity Development Foundation (PACDEF) collaborated to establish the Mutare Data and Technology for Accountability (MDATA) project in 2015. The MDATA project is an SMS platform to be used by citizens to communicate faults and other grievances to the city council.

This then illustrates that the civil society is in a position to do more for the government and the citizens combined if it is given the latitude to execute its mandate.

Fragmented Residents Associations

The council officials also pointed out that citizen engagement in Mutare is being hampered by the discordance amongst the residents associations in Mutare. In a May 2015 interview, the Mutare City Council Town Clerk stated that the council was failing to work harmoniously with residents associations. This was attributed to the officials who appear to be pursuing their own interests. Furthermore the Town Clerk stated that the leaders of these associations are not elected regularly. In addition, he pointed out that the residents associations, "are vociferous members of society, who promise to unseat existing councilors and to confront council officials... This instills resistance from incumbent councilors." These sentiments were further echoed by the new acting Town Clerk who stated that residents' associations' officials use their positions to propel their personal political agendas. He exposed that these officials use their positions as launch pads for political

careers as councilors or joining opposition politics. He further mentioned that even the protests organized by the residents associations were meant to gain political mileage. These protests were then abused by the officials as credentials to gain nominations as councilors for the next City Council elections.

Furthermore, councilors also voiced similar issues about the resident associations. They asserted that the residents associations have also fallen prey to politicization by the major political parties of the land. One of the Councilors of the Mutare City Council argued that one of the residents associations had become an appendage of one of the opposition parties in Zimbabwe. He further affirmed residents' association officials had a tendency of harassing councilors instead of working with them. This association with political parties has the unfortunate effect of dividing communities and also reducing the effectiveness of the residents associations as espoused by Musekiwa and Chatiza (2015).

The researcher approached the residents associations in Mutare to investigate the claims. In Mutare there are 3 residents associations such as the Mutare Residents and Rate-Payers Association (MRRRA), United Mutare Residents and Rate-Payers Trust (UMRRT) and the Combined Mutare Rate-payers Association Trust (CMRRT). These have been instrumental in the achievement of several milestones such as the campaign against the installation of water meters, campaign for the relocation of street vendors, tree planting, clean up campaigns as well as training residents about the Bill of Rights amongst others.

However, amidst these milestones the representative groups appear to be held back by working against each other instead of working together and champion the interests of the residents. Furthermore, they are made ineffective by their own internal squabbles concerning leadership.

During the interviews that were conducted with officials from the 2 main residents associations in Mutare it became apparent that they were not working harmoniously. CMRRT officials (Interviewed 02 June 2016) indicated that it was problematic to work with other residents associations in Mutare as they have been politicized. An UMRRT official (Interviewed 01 June 2016) did not recognize the existence of other residents associations and dismissed them as mere portfolios. Furthermore, it was claimed that the interests of the citizens of Mutare are varied and thus it is necessary to have multiple associations.

However, the benefit of this multiplicity of residents associations is not being realized due to structural flaws of these associations. A research on the subject that was conducted by Musekiwa and Chatiza in 2015 exposed that these resident associations were becoming politicized which had the effect of dividing communities. And reduce their communities. Moreso, it was realized that these residents associations do not have membership lists; their data-bases were not updated and aggregated according to gender or age. It was also revealed by the study that these residents associations have lax administrative systems to such an extent that membership fees are not accounted for.

It should be realized that the fragmentation of the residents associations comes as an unfortunate development. This is because to make citizen engagement effective a local authority needs to work hand in hand with functional residents associations. This relationship is as important as the City Council's relationship with the civil society. The Chartered Institute of Housing (2007) defines a residents association as a voluntary body of citizens representing the views of its membership to the local authority and any other relevant agencies. Chatiza and

Musekiwa (2015) states that residents associations are pressure groups which are meant to ensure service delivery by the council to the rate payers. The Harare Residents Trust (2010) adds on and states that resident associations are civic associations which are primarily concerned with lobbying and advocacy.

Thus the conduct of resident association officials is working against the success of the implementation of citizen engagement in Mutare.

Contextual Obstacles

Shrinkage of Local Industrial Base

Another issue that emanated from the interviews was that the liquidation of various industries in Mutare has also affected citizen engagement. This is because through the rates and water bills paid by the industries and their employees, the City Council could realise streams of revenue sufficient to execute numerous activities such as citizen engagement among others. This was confirmed during separate interviews conducted with the council administrators: Mayor (24 May 2016), the Acting Town Clerk (26 May 2016), Finance Director (27 May 2016), Chamber Secretary (28 May 2016). The Acting Town Clerk affirmed that the payments from industries such as the Mutare Board and Paper Mills alone contributed to 25% of the council's budget. The Manicaland Minister of Provincial Affairs in 2014 bemoaned the decadence that has affected the industrial sector. He stated that, "90% of industries that used to operate in this province such as Karina, PG glass, Mutare Board and Paper Mills and Cairns have collapsed." These assertions were validated by facts on the ground in the Mutare Industrial sector.

Prior to the current economic melt-down, Mutare was a city which boasted of a wide range of industries which specialized in agro-processing, timber-production, glass manufacturing and the automotive industry. However all this has come to pass. Karina Textiles is an example of one of the industries that shut down in Mutare. It used to produce knitting yarn, but shut down in January 2012. Border Timbers and Mutare Board and Paper Mills also shut down.

The few industries that are remaining such as Quest Motor Manufacturing are under-performing. The car assembly which was operational since 1960 has the capacity to employ 1 500 workers, produce 35 vehicles a day and 700 vehicles a month. In July 2016, the Chronicle's senior business reporter Kazinga stated that Quest's capacity utilization had dropped to 1%. From January to June it had only sold 40 units. The situation is the same for Tanganda Tea Estates, according to the operations manager (interviewed 03 June 2016) the packaging plant is operating at 40% capacity utilisation. Cairns Holdings which was one of the industrial giants in Mutare is operating at an average rate of 50% in terms of capacity utilization according to the Operations Manager (interviewed 01 June 2016).

Thus the City Council will be affected in terms of revenue as most industries have either shut down or are operating at a lower capacity.

Lack of Political Will

Citizen engagement in Mutare is also being hindered by the lack of political will on the part of the central government itself. This became apparent to the researcher from the questionnaire that were filled in by the councilors. 75% of the respondents attributed the failure of citizen engagement to the lack of political will on the central government itself.

The researchers took time to then investigate the commitment of the central government to the cause of citizen engagement. During the interrogation of the facts on the ground it was then established that government had made efforts towards the realization of citizen engagement. One of these efforts was the Prime Minister's Directive of 1985. This policy document established structures of engagement at grass roots level. These structures consisted of Village Development Committees (VIDCOS), Ward Development Committees (WADCO) Rural District Development Committees (RDDC) and Provincial Development Committee (PDCS). These were meant to ensure democratic governance at a local level in rural areas. However they were never legislated and thus remained on paper. In July 1986 the 13 Principles on Decentralisation were enunciated by the government. These principles outline the guidelines for decentralizing the functions to local authorities however these principles too were not legislated or transformed into action.

In the urban areas, the city councils are governed by the Urban Councils Act of 1996. Upon further inspection it became apparent that the document was amended by the government and emasculated the local authorities. This was done by transferring a lot of executive powers from the councils and citizens to the Minister responsible for Local Government and Public Works.

Commenting on this situation, De Valk and Wekwete (1990) argued that the central government had a lot of power. Resultantly, in the end it abused the local government by using it to advance its own priorities. This in essence disrupts citizen engagement because the government puts its interests above those of the citizens. In a way this takes back governance to the era of Totalitarianism in which the individual served the state and not the other way round. Under this type of governance the citizen is treated as subject rather than a customer of the state.

Upon closer inspection, it became clear that this amendment followed the inception of opposition politics in Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s. Prior to this development, Zimbabwe was virtually a one party state after the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 between ZANU PF (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front) and PF ZAPU (Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union). Chatiza (2010:2) stated that the vulnerability of local authorities to opposition politics has contributed to a limitation of its powers by the state. The amendment was a counter-move meant to neutralize the influence of opposition councilors upon council decisions.

However, as a result of this amendment, citizens have experienced very unpleasant situations in their local governments. The councilors whom they democratically elected can be replaced by a commission at a moments' notice. This occurred to the Gweru City Council in April 2015 when the Mayor and 14 councilors were expelled and replaced by a commission. The Mutare City Council as well went through this harrowing experience. Its Mayor was unceremoniously fired by the Minister of Local Government and Public Works in April 2013 without the consultation and consent of the citizens who had elected him and other councilors in 2008.

Moreover, the new Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 supports citizen engagement as mentioned earlier. However, Mapuva (2014) posits that it has not been activated, reconciled and harmonized with the existing legislation. As a result the government is still relying on the old Lancaster House constitution of 1979 which has colonial tendencies of marginalizing the African citizenry.

However, it is interesting to note that this situation is not only peculiar to Zimbabwe, Makumbe (1996), Mukandala (1998) and Ddungu (1998) state that the lack of political will on the part of government is a characteristic of fragile democracies with one party states and or weak opposition parties. Zimbabwe is one such country in which the culture of democracy is rather weak and yet to be fully established. Makumbe (2009) concludes that, "it is generally

agreed in Zimbabwe that the nation has moved several steps backwards since 2000 in terms of the democratization process." Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) classify Zimbabwe as a liberalized autocracy or competitive authoritarianism.

In simpler terms, this illustrates the fact that the government itself has reservations towards the fruition of citizen engagement. The various policy documents appear to be a cover up to be somewhat politically correct.

Individual Obstacles

Unemployment amongst Citizens

From the research it was further revealed that the high levels of unemployment are also militating against citizen engagement. This obstacle is directly linked to the shrinkage of the industrial base mentioned above. According to the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries Survey in 2015 key industrial giants have shut down and thus rendered 76% of the Mutare citizens jobless and unable to meet their financial obligations to the Mutare City Council. The timber industry on its own employed an estimated fifty thousand workers including those employed in downstream industries. Boarder Timbers on its own had a wage bill of US\$1.2 million. Afro-Safety Glass formerly known as PG employed 400 workers which supplied vehicle windscreens and other glass related products.

A 2015 study of Mutare further exposed that only 24% of the citizens of Mutare are fully employed whilst another 41% and 30% are engaged in piece-meal work and buying and selling respectively. Moreso the study estimated that in this informal employment the Mutare Citizens generate an average monthly income of US\$30. This income is insufficient to say the least considering the fact that the Poverty Datum Line in Manicaland as of July 2015 was pegged at US\$ 510.42 according to the Zimbabwe Statistical Agency. Furthermore, even those who are engaged in full time employment are not being adequately paid and in some cases are going for months without even getting paid such as the City Council employees themselves who have gone for up to 17 months without salaries.

The effect of this staggering rate of unemployment and the resultant poverty is that citizens do not have time and financial resources to engage with the government. This also explains why the citizens of Mutare owe the City Council US\$28.4 million in arrears. Moreover the debilitating levels of unemployment leave the citizens in a position where they don't have time to attend engagement meetings. Roberts (2004) attributes this to the fact that they will be busy scrounging around for alternative ways to survive. Irvin and Stansburg (2004) reveal that the vulnerable find it difficult to engage for they have to provide for their families as opposed to spend time in meetings.

Citizen Apathy

The findings of the research also revealed that part of the blame for the failure of citizen engagement can be apportioned on the citizens themselves. The majority of citizens appear to be passive and disinterested to citizen engagement i.e. citizen apathy. This assertion is based on the observed low attendance of the citizens to the budget consultative meetings carried out in 16 of the 19 wards of the City of Mutare from October-November 2015 as shown in Table 1 below. This citizen apathy is attributable to three issues namely the complexity of issues related to governance, misunderstanding of the concept of citizenship and the image of the city council itself.

Table 1 Attendance of Mutare Citizens in Budget Consultative Meetings (Oct-Nov 2015)

Ward Number	Venue of the Meeting	Date of the Meeting	Time of the Meeting	Attendance	Ward Population (2012 Census)
1, 2 & 10	Moffat Hall	28 October 2015	11am	75	16 290
3&4	Sakubva Beit Hall	30 October 2015	11am	58	15 337
5.	Boys Club	30 October 2015	11am	64	8 954
6 &7	Baring Primary School	29 October 2015	2pm	22	12 778
8.	Dangamvura Poly-clinic	28 October 2015	10am	67	6 188
9.	Dangamvura Primary School	30 October 2015	4pm	6	7 947
11.	Mutare Junior Primary School	30 October 2015	4pm	21	10 052
12.	Baring Primary School	29 October 2015	2pm	28	13 744
13.	Prison Primary School	30 October 2015	10am	25	2 905
14&16	Chikanga Community Hall	30 October 2015	2pm	20	40 943
15.	Chirowakamwe Primary School	05 November 2015	4pm	98	9 700

It is important to note that citizen engagement is not an easy task. It actually requires complex skills, knowledge, experience, leadership and managerial capabilities on the part of both citizens and the council officials. Studies have revealed that often-times citizens lack these essential qualities (Gaventa and Valderama 1999). Valelby states that citizen engagement requires skills such as political philosophy, political science and sociology. Much as the citizens of Mutare and Zimbabwe at large are said to be among the most educated in Africa they are aloof from matters to do with their local authorities. Muguti (2013) reveals that the literacy rate in Zimbabwe stands at a staggering 91.9%. During an interview with the Mutare City Council town clerk he stated that, "the issues of local governments are complex and go beyond the level of understanding of the some Mutare citizens." The Minister of Local Government reiterated the same argument and concluded that the majority of Zimbabwean citizens lack the capacity to understand issues of local government.

Citizen apathy in Mutare is indicative of two issues. The first issue is that it suggests a misunderstanding of the concept of citizenship. It appears the citizens expect the city council to take care of everything considering that they pay rates and elect the councilors into office. However, it should be noted that being a citizen does not only refer to the legal status of just belonging to a certain country. It also does not only mean possessing the rights to demand service delivery from the local government. In actual fact it transcends the legal realm and encompasses the obligations of the citizen to that very same government. Many-a-times citizens are of the opinion that the local government owes them always. They fail to comprehend that they have to be involved in the process of governance and actually assist the government in the execution of its duties. Valelby (2011) calls it Democratic Citizenship whereby the citizen enjoys rights and liberties from the government on the one hand, but also partakes in influencing public debate and policy choices. John F. Kennedy stated that, "It's not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." It is more of a give and take relationship.

Svara and Denhardt (2010) encapsulate this broadened sense of citizenship and define a citizen as, "a person with concern for the larger community in addition to his/her own interests. In addition he/she is willing to assume personal responsibility for what goes on in their neighborhoods and communities. Citizenship is more than a legal status and rights." Dimock (1990) adds on and states that citizenship is more to do with a sense of duty and community. Roberts (2004) also points out that it is actually the duty of the citizens to guide the local

government with a moral purpose. What she means is that the citizens should actually be the true north of the local government and not the other way round.

The second issue contributing to citizen apathy is the fact that the citizens hold the council in low regard. This affirmation was also seconded by the council administrators themselves. In an interview with the Acting Town Clerk, he confessed that attendance to consultative meetings was low due to the fatigue on the part of the citizens. He linked this fatigue to the fact that the council has not been taking the considerations of the citizens on board. The Chamber Secretary also echoed similar sentiments and posited that the image of the council was discouraging citizen engagement. The Acting Finance Director (27 May 2016) also affirmed that citizens do not attend due to the failure of the council to meet their needs.

In simpler terms, citizens are frustrated by the poor service delivery of the council. This is confirmed by the Service Delivery Baseline Survey Report conducted by the UMRRT during the period of December 2015 to January 2016. The report disclosed that the Mutare City Council is not delivering on any of its lines of service delivery. These lines consist of services such as Housing, Water and Waste Management, Urban Infrastructure and Health Service among others. According to the report, the city council is no longer servicing stands for housing leading to a back-log on housing for the residents. Resultantly, in areas such as Sakubva (Chisamba singles, blocks, Old location) and Dangamvura (area A) 4 families were dwelling in the same room and sub-dividing the rooms using curtains. Water and Waste Management has also suffered as well due to ageing water pipes which the council does not have the capacity to replace. This has left places such as Dangamvura in dire conditions where water is available for limited hours only. New found settlements such as Gimboki do not have water connections at all and thus having to depend on communal taps and stream-bank springs. In other parts of the city refuse has not been collected in four months and only one refuse truck is operational out of the 10 trucks that the council possesses.

This kind of state of affairs has the effect of causing citizen fatigue which breeds citizen apathy which discourages the process of citizen engagement. However, it should be noted by the citizens that citizen apathy is not the appropriate response to poor service delivery. If at all anything, the voice of the citizen is required more at the onset of poor service delivery.

Limited Capabilities of Councilors

The findings are also indicative of the fact that the caliber of councilors that represent the citizens in Mutare also contributes to the failure of citizen engagement. This is based on the statements of council administrators which were further corroborated with the data accrued from the questionnaires distributed to the councilors. In an interview with the Acting Town-Clerk of the Mutare City (26 May 2016), he bemoaned the lack of experience and exposure of the councilors. He further stated that some of the councilors find themselves chairing committees which they are not experienced to run. In a separate interview with the Mayor (24 May 2016) he added that, "They (councilors) have attended various capacity building workshops for them to have an oversight of what a budget formulation is all about, but in a nutshell it is not enough for one to understand. You need to have a back-ground to define what's a balance sheet, income and expenditure account?" During the same interview the Mayor also revealed that some of the councilors are struggling with the procedural way of conducting council activities.

To validate the assertions of the Mutare City Council administrators, questionnaires were administered to 15 of the 19 councilors to ascertain their familiarity with council procedures, levels of education and the concept of citizen engagement among other things. The diagrams below

illustrate the findings emanating from the questionnaires.

Table 2: Table showing the number of years of experience of Mutare City Councilors

Experience (years)	No. of Councilors	Percentage
0-5	10	67%
5-10	5	33%
10-15	0	0%

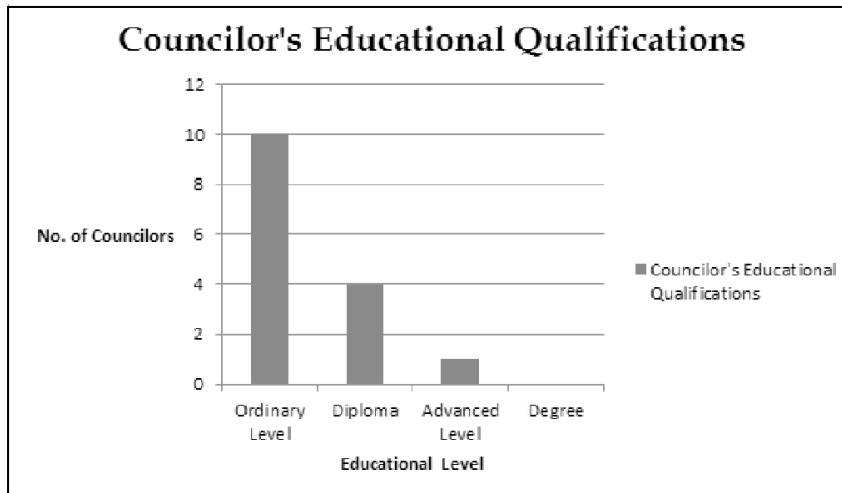
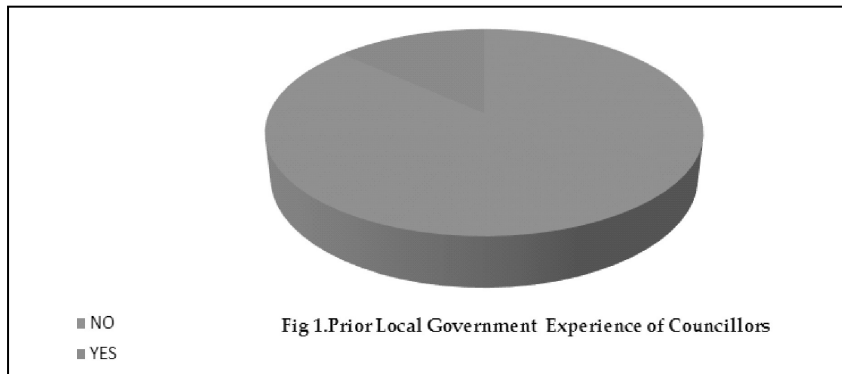


Fig 2: Educational qualifications of councilors of Mutare City Council (2013-2018)

The findings of the questionnaire that were administered to the councilors, confirmed the claims of the council administrators. The councilors are not fully equipped intellectually and experience wise to execute their duties. The data acquired revealed a number of findings. One of them is that councilors do not have a clear comprehension of the governance procedures. Some of the questions on the questionnaire checked if the councilors understood the operations of the council itself including the budget procedures, the Urban Councils Act of 1996 and citizen engagement. 80% of the councilors agreed that they fully understood whilst 20% was honest enough to state that they did not understand. However, when further asked to demonstrate their comprehension of council procedures by defining citizen engagement, 73.3% of the councilors

failed to define the concept and only 26.6% showed a rudimentary understanding of it. Moreover none of the councilors had ever heard of Sherry Arnstein and her Ladder of Citizen Participation of 1969.

These findings as well as the claims made by the council administrators earlier come as no surprise considering the intellectual and experience background of the councilors. The graph above (Fig 2) shows that most of the councilors have only been educated up to the Ordinary Level. None of them have gone past the stage of advanced level and furthermore as illustrated in Table 2 for 67% of the councilors this is the first time that they have become councilors whilst 33% have been councilors before this current term beginning in 2013. The pie chart labeled as Fig. 1 illustrates the fact that 86.7% of the current crop of councilors (2013-2018) have never had any prior experience or training in matters of governance save for 13.3 % of the councilors who have had some experience in governance matters.

This proves to be a challenge not only for the success of citizen engagement, but for governance in general. Once upon a time it was assumed that the election and or appointment of educated officials into public office was not a wise idea as these officials would be totally divorced from the sentiments of the grass-roots due to their elitist behavior. Nelkin (1981) argues that technocrats have failed to solve the social problems, but have actually caused them. Kantrowitz (1975) argues that technocrats are not suitable for deciding over normative and societal issues. Technocracy is defined by Parker (2003) as the application of technical knowledge, expertise, techniques and methods to problem solving. However, considering the nature of the current crop of challenges confronting governments such as climate change, corruption, global recession and diseases such as Ebola, it has become imperative more than ever for public officials such as councilors to have a sound academic footing. This is not to imply that uneducated public officials are completely obsolete and redundant. They still have their uses, but the argument is that they will be limited in their abilities to turn the fortunes of their respective localities without a sound academic footing. Jan Eliasson during a public lecture for the Dag Hammarskjöld commemoration in 2011 at the Uppsala University reinforced also supported this line of thought. He asserted that a sound academic footing accompanied by an inter-disciplinary approach was required for the successful confrontation of the current global challenges.

Thus given their lack of education, experience and comprehension of council procedures the councilors have to rely on the council administrators of the local authority for guidance. However, it should be noted that yet it should be the other way round the councilors should actually guide the council administrators. However the councilors end up being guided by the administrators for they are more knowledgeable, educated and experienced about government procedures. The Mutare City Council has 1200 workers and among them are highly skilled personnel such as Engineers, Accountants and Medical Doctors among others. Thus the councilors and their current educational background will not be able to effectively represent the desires of their citizens for they will be lacking the technical know-how.

It should be noted that the lack of understanding is not entirely of the making of the councilors themselves, but the local authority itself. The council administrators were questioned as to whether or not they had provided any form of training for the councilors with regards to citizen engagement. The responses from the administrators alluded to the fact that training for citizen engagement had been done, but not by the council itself, but rather through Non-Governmental Organisations such as IRC and PACDEF. However, upon further investigation of these trainings, it was emerged that the trainings were a once off exercise and not done at regular intervals. What the council had done was to offer induction training for all the councilors at the inception of their

tenures. An assessment of the induction hand-book Councilor's Induction Hand-book (2009) was conducted by the researcher and two flaws related to the research became apparent among others. The first issue was that the induction does not directly address the issues of citizen engagement. Furthermore, the training process itself does not take time to examine whether the councilors have fully understood what is expected of them. One of the councilors alluded to the point that the council had not provided them with copies of the Urban Councils Act of 1996 and at times they tended to be operating blindly in representing the needs of their people. Thus the councilors appear to be inadequately capacitated with the skills of citizen engagement and thus expecting it to succeed before such issues are addressed would rather be unfortunate.

Apart from the statements by the council administrators and the data acquired, academic scholars on the subject have also concurred with this argument. Mapuva (2011) states that, "Some councilors have rudimentary understanding of local authority legislative provisions and modalities let alone the low literacy levels of some of them." The councilors thus fail to contribute meaningfully to the council meetings. They further then fail to translate local needs into technical proposals leading to the local authority rejecting these plans.

Recommendations: How to Improve Citizen Engagement in Zimbabwean Local Authorities

Moreover, to improve citizen engagement the Zimbabwean central and local governments and their citizens might require implementing the following changes in its system:

Decentralisation of Government

The government needs to give executive powers to the councils and their mayors regardless of their political affiliations. The citizens are what matter the most and their interests should be protected and be prioritized above all other partisan interests. Apart from that, the government also needs to relax its grip on the access to information. Citizens need to be informed of what is transpiring in terms of governance. This will assist citizens to make informed decisions and contributions to their respective local authorities. The government should note that withholding information and excluding citizens from decision making only breeds resistance against policies. The government also needs to stop interfering with the operations of local authorities. The powers of the Minister of Local Government and Public Works have to be curtailed with special reference to the administration of the councils. Local authorities should not be seen as an extension of the government, but rather they should be independent and left to the citizens.

Training of Council Administrators

The local authorities need to invest resources in training its administrators so as to know how to handle matters concerning citizen engagement among others. This is particularly crucial for Zimbabwean local authorities because they were inherited from the colonial administration whose structures did not accommodate the concerns of citizens especially those of African origin. Furthermore, after independence the central government for the sake of nation building also employed a top-down approach in dealing with the citizens. Thus for citizen engagement to succeed the government needs to train its administrators not to implement the top-down approach always. The trainings need to be done at regular intervals and council officials should be examined on their understanding of these trainings. Government also needs to establish consequences of those who fail these examinations as they will be injurious to the agenda of national development.

Qualifications for Councilors

A minimum standard of qualifications have to be set for councilors. Zimbabwe is an educated nation and thus it has to make use of the pool of educated minds it has to improve the fortunes of the nation. Councilors should not be appointed on the basis of loyalty to a certain political ideology, but rather on the basis of merit. The current challenges facing governments require a sound intellectual background in order to be comprehensible and thereafter dealt with accordingly. A minimum of a degree related to governance should be put as qualification for councilors. For the mayor it should even be higher than that. Furthermore, the government has to re-configure these posts and make these positions attractive to the best minds of the land. The caliber of the current crop of councilors is indicative of the fact that the position of councilors is not held in high regard by the government itself. Councilors are the transmitters of the wishes of the people. However, if they are incapacitated it means that their transmission of the interests of the people will be compromised as well.

Implementation of The Constitution

Government also needs to implement the new constitution of 2013 in letter and in spirit. The Urban Councils Act of 1996 has to be harmonized with the new constitution. The reliance on the 1979 constitution has to be terminated in favor of the new constitution. As much as the citizens do not know much about government issues they should still be involved and learn during the process. Furthermore government should make sure that it eradicates pieces of legislation that are deleterious to the well-being of citizen engagement.

Partnerships with Civil Society

As much as there is a lack of mutual trust between the government and the civil society the two need each other for the success of citizen engagement. The civil society is the government's gateway to the citizens as they are already working hand in hand with them. The government on the other hand is responsible for creating the enabling environment for civil society to operate in. Thus the central government needs to reach out to the civil society and come to a mutual understanding and work together for the betterment of the process of engagement. The partnership between the Mutare City Council and the International Rescue Committee is a good starting point and should be encouraged further. The contributions which the civil society has made under the current conditions should be taken into consideration.

Conclusion

Citizen engagement is experiencing stunted growth in Mutare in particular and Zimbabwe in general. The reasons behind this state of affairs are to be found in all the three parties involved in the process of engagement namely the citizens, the councilors and the government of Zimbabwe itself. However it should be pointed out that regardless of the obstacles that lie in the path of engagement, the struggle to make it successful should continue. This is premised on two main reasons, the first one being that it is through citizen engagement that the culture of Human Rights and Democracy will be reinforced. To say the least this is a development that is desperately needed in Zimbabwe. Secondly it is through citizen engagement that the nation of Zimbabwe and Africa at large will achieve the true meaning of development. It is through the involvement of the ordinary citizen that the governments will be able to contextualize the political and economic models being flaunted in the world to suit their own local needs. Furthermore, citizen engagement

will not only lead to national development, but also communal and even individual development. The citizenry becomes united and enlightened thus being in a better position to contribute meaningfully to the discussions in council. In other words, citizen engagement has more rewards than limitations.

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