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# **The Roles, Approaches and Mechanisms of Traditional Institutions in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. A Case Study of Traditional Chiefs in Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe.**

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### **Abstract**

This study explore the roles, approaches and mechanisms of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe following political dynamics of early 2000s to date. The study employed a mixed method approach combining questionnaires with community members, focus group discussions with traditional chief's council members and in-depth interviews with traditional chiefs. The findings indicate that traditional institutions roles, approaches and mechanisms which need modification to match contemporary peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes. The study recommended that there was need for improving roles, approaches and mechanisms which traditional institutions use in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Zimbabwe.

### **Key Words**

Traditional institutions, approaches, mechanisms, peacebuilding, conflict transformation

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The traditional life in Africa has an implication in how conflicts are resolved. The major considerations of African traditional conflict transformation and peacebuilding mechanisms are how to bring about united social fabrics, peace and harmony. In this regard, traditional institutions do not simply focus on the punishing measure nor do they merely resolve the conflict. Therefore, traditional institutions practically try to bring about long-lasting peace among the warring factions thus, the incidence of hostility and abhorrence within as well as across communities would lastingly be gone, (Tsega, 2002).

One of the key institutions in African communities is that of traditional institutions, which forms the backbone of community life. Traditional institutions have been in existence during pre-colonial era, colonial era and post-colonial era. The centrality of traditional institutions was and is pinned on the preservation of

African culture, African traditions, customs and values which represent the initial stages of societal structures and governance systems.

Traditional institutions vary depending on their main functions and key objectives. These traditional institutions encompasses different social structures which operate as original organisations which do functions as governance authorities at village level. These structures also developed acceptable methods of resource mobilization at community level, responsible for community security services, preside over communal courts in conflict resolution, responsible for asset management and preservation of traditional culture (Donnelly-Roark et al., 2001).

In some African countries such as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria and South Africa, traditional institutions had special roles in spiritual guidance and African Traditional Religion, were found to have a key responsibility over the land allocation (Blom 2000; Virtanen 2000; Serra 2001. Furthermore, in certain countries which include Mali, Burkina Faso, as Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa and Niger, traditional institutions are informally part of the local governance systems which had an important function and responsibility over the preservation and management of natural resources. Eventually, traditional institutions promote their subjects to create a long-term participation by developing regular expectations and form the basis on which cooperation goes beyond personal interests. At the end, the extent to which traditional institutions are considered as justifiable made subjects to comply without any form of inducements, force and sanctions (Mowo et al., 2011).

According to Mbwirire and Dube (2017) traditional institutions in Zimbabwe have a mandate towards the preservation of community peace and conflict resolution. Above all, traditional institutions well aware of the processes involved for conflict transformation to take place. Because of this, there are approaches and mechanisms meant to ensure that they attain the intended goal of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Due to the modern day technology and globalisation, what are the roles of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation? What are the approaches and mechanisms used by traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes? These were the issues which motivated the researcher to carry out the study. The purpose of this study was to identify the roles of traditional institutions in modern day life.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Mashonaland Central Province. The province has a total area of 28 347km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1 152 520 representing about 8.5% of total population of Zimbabwe, The province have seven districts which are Guruve with a population of 200 833 people, Shamva with a population of 98 people 077, Mount Darwin with a population of 307 946 people, Muzarabani with a population of 121 127 people, Mazowe with a population of 198 966 people, Rushinga with a population of 67 829 people and Bindura with a population of 156 842 people, Census Report (2012).

The study used a mixed methods approach combining questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Survey data was collected from a sample of 250 respondents which was drawn using a stratified random sampling approach from all the 7 districts in the province. In-depth interviews were done with 7 participants representing the 19 traditional chiefs in the province. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with 65 out of 87 members who comprise the Chiefs' Councils (Dare Ramambo). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Roles of Traditional Institutions

FGDs and KIIs gathered data indicated that one of the main roles of the traditional leaders was to being in charge of the society on maintenance of peace and order within their communities. When probed further on how traditional institutions maintain peace and order, key informants indicated that they apply both customary law and judicial powers through conflict resolution strategies such as mediating, negotiation, facilitation and arbitration. One of the informants said *“Rimwe remabasa edu madzishe kugadzirisa nyaya dzinonetsa vanhu pakugarisana mudunhu”* (KII informant). (One of the roles traditional leaders perform is to resolve conflicts in society).

Also, both FGDs and KIIs gathered data indicated that traditional leaders work closely with the local Rural District Councils (RDCs) through revenue collections at household level through taxes that are charged for the development of community projects like; household tax, borehole maintenance and cattle dip tank fees. One informant said *“Tine basa zvekare samadzimambo nemadzishe kushanda nekamakanzuru tichibatsira kuunganidza mitero yemaritero kubva kuvagari vomunharaunda tichibatsirana namasabhuku edu”* (KII informant). (Another role of traditional institutions is to work in collaboration with district councils on revenue collection from communities through different structures which meet with community members).

All FGD and KII informants indicated that traditional institutions had power to allocate land in communal areas for use by their subjects for both crops farming and grazing livestock. One informant said *“Zvinozivikanwa kuti dunhu rimwe nerimwe rine varidzi. Isu madzimambo, madzishe, nemasabhuku tisu varidzi venzvimbo. Tisu tinogovera minda nepekugara”* (KII informant). (It is a well known fact that traditional institutions own land. We are responsible for land allocation, for both settlement and farming).

Informants through FGDs and KIIs indicated that traditional institutions were in charge of implementing the zunde ramambo project which was a co-operative of food production farming programme to cater for the underprivileged members of in a community. When probed on who constitutes the underprivileged category, informants indicated that widowers and widows, orphans, the mental challenged and elderly members of the community were the underprivileged considered. One informant went further to elaborate saying *“Government supply farming inputs, the village heads supply labour needed for fieldwork zunde ramambo program on a rotational basis but these are not be part of the targeted beneficiary underprivileged category”* (KII informant).

Both FGDs and KIIs data indicated that traditional institutions had a role to preserve African traditional culture as well as to provide traditional leadership. When probed further to specify how they execute such a duty, all informants indicated that they were responsible for leadership and culture through making sure no violations on sacred environments and monitoring of cultural norms and values. One informant said *“We have sacred places in our areas of jurisdiction and we have to observe that the relations between the community members and ancestors are well respected”*.

The roles of traditional institutions indicated above show that traditional institutions were key players on issues which are sources of conflict at grassroots. This could be so because much of the politically motivated conflicts involve land disputes, sharing of resources (including power), poverty and other issues which politicians instigate for political support. Therefore, when considering peacebuilding and conflict transformation, traditional institutions are strategic players for change particularly at grassroots levels.

Data presented above shows that traditional institutions preside over the communities, ensuring that there is maintenance of peace and order within their communities. This notion is supported by Mazo (2005) who

indicated that traditional institutions have served local administration roles; particularly in maintaining the rule of law and order. To support the above roles of traditional institutions, Khonou (2011) illustrates that since pre-colonial period, that traditional institutions were extremely an important category, through carrying an active role in the administration of local communities and protection of their subjects. Rambe and Mawere (2012) concur with the view that they were custodian of traditional customs, values and culture as well as presiding over social disputes such as battles, divorce, witchcraft and land disputes. In support of this, Pickell (2000) in Morgenmen (2003) observed that customarily conflicts are mainly presided over by traditional institutions. This was habitually through bringing the warring parties together to discuss the root causes of conflict, trying to find a solution to the conflict and reach an agreement. In resolving disputes of this nature, traditional institutions apply ADR techniques such as mediation, negotiation and arbitration (Madondo, 2010).

### **Approaches which Traditional Institutions used in Peacebuilding Activities**

Table 1 below indicates that alternative dispute resolution (ADR) activities were used traditional institutions at grassroots levels. The activities were based on promoting peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Only a few respondents indicated that traditional institutions were not involved at all.

Table 1 Approaches used by Traditional Institutions

Approaches used by Traditional Institutions	Sex of Respondents		Total 100% (N=249)
	Male (N=175)	Female (N=74)	
Promoting healing at grassroots level	84.0%	78.4%	82.3%
Mediation	76.0%	52.7%	69.1%
Involved but being partisan	76.0%	52.7%	69.1%
Local authorities in supporting government initiates on reconciliation and peacebuilding	61.1%	64.9%	62.2%
Resolved political and socio-economic disputes to promote justice, peace and political tolerance	36.0%	32.4%	34.9%
Not involved at all	20.0%	12.2%	17.7%
Source; Primary data			

There were no differences between male and female on the approaches used by traditional institutions. However, on mediation and on being involved but were partisan, more male than female indicated that traditional institutions were affiliated and or aligned to a political party, which male do understood more than female. This could be caused by the fact that women in most cases were or are not interested in political matters than men despite constituting the majority of the Zimbabwean populace.

All FGD informants indicated that community gatherings, partnership with development activists and government departments and act as local authorities in communities, were the approaches used by traditional institutions. One of the informants expressed this by saying *"We preach the gospel of peace at different community gatherings"* (FGD informant).

KII informants indicated that they work with various government departments which include the police,

councillors and member of parliaments. Also key informants partner up with some NGOS. The popular view thorough KIIs indicated that traditional institutions were `politically the eye` of the government, totally supporting the ZANU PF government. Some of the key informants indicated that they held community meetings monthly at ward level At times they held emergency meetings as per rising issues. Also village heads were encouraged to have village assemblies to deal with conflicts and other problems affecting the community. When probed further on why they align themselves to the ruling ZANU PF parties when they must be apolitical, mixed responses were obtained. Some of the key informants indicated that they want to safeguard the gains of the liberation struggle. The reason for safeguarding the liberation struggle was influenced by the destructive atrocities witnessed during the liberation struggle. Some key informants indicated that they did it for their own safety since going against the dictates of the ruling ZANU PF may lead to their expulsion, not only from the party but also from their position as traditional chiefs. One key informant said, *“for the sake of safety, I simply comply to be safe”* (KII informant).

KIIs, FGDs and survey data were similar on approaches used by traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The approaches mentioned above were carried out and primarily pinned on the principles of mediation, negation, facilitation and arbitration at community level. In African countries, traditional institutions play a paramount task as mediators of violent conflict (Merry, 1982). Depending with the nature of issue between warring parties, penalties could be instituted, usually focusing on compensation or restitution in order to restore the status quo, rather than retribution. According to Madondo (2010) in pre-colonial Africa, the traditional institutions assumed a more adjudicatory role for the largest part severe crimes such as murder and witchcraft. In some cases, capital punishment would be considered. Basically, traditional institutions carry out activities aimed at bringing disputing parties together and to generate an environment in which warring parties could resolve their differences. Clearly, traditional institutions act as facilitators in conflict resolution, peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Of importance to note if the fact alternative dispute resolutions (ADR) do not have synonymous or equivalent Shona terms, however, related words are used but they do not demarcate the difference between negotiation and mediation or arbitration and facilitation. Related terms used are kutamba nyaya, kutonga mhosva, kugadzirisa zvinotso and kuenzanisana.

Also, data presented above revealed that customarily conflicts are mainly resolved by traditional institutions by bringing the warring parties together. The warring parties should discuss the root causes of the conflict until a settlement is reached. This assertion is also supported Morgenmen (2003) who posit that settlement of burning issues in society are not only meant to re-unite conflicting parties but are necessary in helping the warring parties agree to value living together peacefully. The purpose of conflict resolution, peacebuilding and conflict transformation lies in traditional institutions, friends, relatives, church leaders and police depending on the severity of the case. Traditional institutions carry activities aimed at resolving conflict, peacebuilding and conflict transformation through activities as they play a role in mediation and arbitration.

### **Peacebuilding Mechanisms Used by Traditional Institutions**

According to Table 2 below traditional institutions do have mechanisms of fostering peacebuilding and promoting conflict transformation at grassroots levels. The mechanisms were applied to any form of dispute among community members.

Table 2 Traditional Mechanisms used by Traditional Institutions

Traditional Mechanism	Gender	Used	Not Used	Don't know
Nyaradzo	Male (n=175)	88.0%	22.0%	0.0%
	Female (n=74)	70.3%	14.9	14.8%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>82.7%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>4.4%</b>
Kurovaguva/Magadziro/Umbuyiso	Male (n=175)	81.20%	13.1%	5.7%
	Female (n=74)	86.5%	13.5%	0.0%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>82.7%</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>4.1%</b>
Nhimbe	Male (n=175)	46.9%	46.9%	6.2%
	Female (n=74)	71.6%	14.2%	14.2%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>54.2%</b>	<b>37.3%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>
Chenura	Male (n=175)	53.1%	28.0%	18.9%
	Female (n=74)	50.0%	29.7%	20.3%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>52.2%</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>19.3%</b>
Ngozi	Male (n=175)	36.6%	33.1%	30.3%
	Female (n=74)	29.7%	40.5%	29.8%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>34.5%</b>	<b>35.3%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>
Botso	Male (n=175)	18.9%	54.9%	26.2%
	Female (n=74)	0.0%	67.6%	32.4%
	<b>Total n-249</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>58.2%</b>	<b>28.6%</b>
Traditional communal courts	Male (n=175)	0.0%	83.9%	16.1%
	Female (n=74)	0.0%	86.5%	13.5%
	<b>Total (n=100)</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>84.7%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>
Source; Primary data				

There were similarities between male and female on nyaradzo and kurova guva as a mechanisms used by

traditional institutions. This could be attributed to the fact that community members from different religious differences did pay respect in consoling the deceased's family, be it for political reasons or any other cause of death. However, the two mechanisms were almost identical but nyaradzo was popularly used by Christians while kurova guva was popularly used by ATR. More female than male indicated that nhimbe was a mechanism used in the community. This could be so caused by the fact that the majority of the workers in community farming fields are predominantly female. Because of this, they might be aware mostly on communal farming methods. In some cases, males are organisers and supervisors while female and children do the fieldwork. There were no differences between male and female on ngozi as a mechanism which traditional institutions used. It was not popularly used because it only happens between families of the perpetrator and the victim, which could make it difficult to mention its use and effectiveness. On botso, more female than male indicated that it was not used. This could be based on the fact that botso occurs when a biological son beats or mistreats a biological mother. In this instance, it shows that the level of children beating biological parents were quite low from a women perspective. Traditional courts and chenura had no notable differences between male and female. This shows that the way these two mechanisms used are similar to both male and female.

According to data gathered through FGDs, all informants indicated that mechanisms used to preaching the gospel of peace at all community gatherings were communal courts, nyaradzo, kuridza ngozi, chenura and magadziro. Nhimbe has been a thing of the past, rarely done by kraal heads. A few of FG informants indicated that mechanisms used resolved disputes traditionally according to tradition according to circumstances which led to the rise of a conflict. One of the informants said "*kubvira kare, nhimbe, botso, ngozi, chenura nematare zvaitirwa kusimbisa ukama nehumwechete, zvakakosha chose*" (FGD informant). (Ever since, were mechanisms meant for strengthening relationships and unity, that's very important".

In addition to this, data gathered through KIIs indicated that mechanisms such as nhimbe, nyaradzo, magadziro and kuripa ngozi were in use but the use of such mechanisms requires initiation from affected family members, not imposed by the chiefs. Traditional institutions would bless the occasion. In some cases, there is strong alliance with the spirit mediums particularly on magadziro and ngozi. When probed further on the application of these mechanisms on political victims, one of the key informants expressed these sentiments as "these mechanisms are not initiated by traditional institutions but are done after the approval *by traditional institutions when the families affected initiated the ceremony*" (KII informant). Few of the informants indicated that they held meetings through monthly ward assemblies. Another informant said "At *times such meetings are held after occurrence of emergency issues which demand urgent attention*" (KII informant). Some key informants indicated that they encourage village heads to have village assemblies to deal with conflicts and other problems affecting the community at grassroots levels.

Popular traditional mechanisms used in peacebuilding and conflict transformation activities by traditional institutions were nyaradzo and kurova guva. Data presented above shows that community members were aware of traditional mechanisms of peacebuilding and conflict transformation but do not know how they are used. This is indicated by the fact that traditional institutions were not responsible for initiating all mechanisms which include nhimbe, nyaradzo, magadziro, kuripa ngozi and communal courts.

According to Benyera (2014) in Zimbabwe, a surfeit of these mechanisms have been definitely used to compel perpetrators to face the reality of their wrongful actions, acknowledging wrong doings, seek forgiveness and repentance, pay restitution and reunite with the victims. These traditional mechanisms of transitional justice have guaranteed truth telling, compensation and forgiveness, resulting in reconciliation. Where compensation has been due, offenders have used the mechanism botso and ngozi to ask for forgiveness and achieve reconciliation (Benyera, 2014).

This study explored traditional mechanisms, specifically focusing on transitional justice in Zimbabwe. It concurs with Moumakwa (2010) that focusing on the family and community is the nucleus of community peace where reconciliation is a requirement.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Conflict resolution, community governance, community development and preservation of cultural and traditional values were the main roles of traditional institutions at grassroots levels in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes.

The study also indicated that mediation, partnerships with other governmental and non-governmental organizations, presiding over communal courts as well as resolving socio-economic and land disputes were the prominent approaches used by traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes.

Also, the study find out that nyaradzo, nhimbe, kurova guva and magadziro were the main mechanisms used by traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes.

The study recommended that traditional institutions should impartially deal with political and socio-economic disputes in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

The study also recommended that traditional institutions should revisit and tailor-made botso, chenura, ngozi and communal courts to make them appropriate mechanisms suitable for contemporary peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes.

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