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# Effectiveness of Traditional Institutions in Peacebuilding and Conflict transformation: A Case Study of Mashonaland Central Province, Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

This study was a comparative analysis to assess the effectiveness of traditional institutions during the periods 2002-2008 and 2009-2013 in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. The mixed method approach was study employed by 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 were not effective in dealing with politically motivated disputes in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. However, traditional institutions were effective in dealing with socio-economic disputes and land issues. The study recommended that the governments, civil society and all civic organizations should acknowledge traditional institutions as lawful authorities for promoting peacebuilding initiatives in their respective communities.

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### Key words

Traditional institutions, peacebuilding, conflict transformation, effective

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### Introduction

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation have become issues of distress after violent conflicts throughout the world. In all continents of the world, there is conflict within nations as well as between nations. At the end of atrocities, warring parties should reach a peace agreement. In most cases, local and international

organizations do spearhead peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes. Rarely are local players included in such programmes. Once a peace agreement is reached, it is expected that relapse into conflict will not occur. The world over, the importance of peacebuilding and conflict transformation is the same.

The key consideration in evaluating effectiveness is the relationship between conflict outputs, conflict outcomes and the impact of the degree to which the objectives were met whilst noticing the contribution of changes in the environment. Evaluation, therefore, should engross both anticipated changes and purpose of carrying out the project plus considering both negative and positive involuntary changes (Andrews, 2008).

Evaluation in conflict and peace studies should assess project results at different levels. Precisely, assessment should be done at project management level, programme execution methods, strategy and policy implementation, responses of people at grassroots level going up to regional level and national level. This should be followed by analysing the information gathered and review of the outcome, by systematically following evidence-based results which followed the project chain of project inputs → project outputs → project outcomes → impacts on peacebuilding. However, it may take time for evaluators to understand the long term impacts of a programme than to understand short-term impacts of a project. These impacts on time scales can be looked at in relation to how they are seen in constructing structures for sustainable peace. Evaluators all the time have to look at impacts (Adams, 2008 and Andrews, 2008).

Evaluation presents methodical and objective considerations on the implications, usefulness, impact, sustainability and effectiveness of interventions. In order to determine the suitability, relevance and applicability of policies and programmes, and as a measure to enhance and/or improve performance of participants, evaluation helps to identify factors to consider in order to come up with best practices as well as to characterise suitable values for future operations. Assertions about visible, verification-based policy building and programme plan, recommend that evaluation serves a purpose to track the appropriate effects of conflict prevention and management as well as peacebuilding. This can be achieved by using designs which encompass more tactical approaches in order to improve accountability. A more tactical approach can be optimistic because of assessments which connect programme, strategy and project levels transversely governments and the donor community. With the introduction of new systems and instruments for improving the effectiveness of aid, it appears that approaches and tools used to evaluate conflict and peace programmes are developing well (OCDE DAC, 2008 and Reinman, 2007).

The questions involving post-conflict situations offer factual information pertaining economic and political situation and the general post-conflict conditions concerning victim contentment, visible impacts of conflict, causes of conflict, and consideration of priorities in development. Questions concerning formal policy-making and accomplishment structures replicate the extent of citizens' awareness of institutional trustworthiness, policy-making styles, consulting the affected community, usefulness, recognition, formal peace processes, precision and responsibility, and selection methods.

With informal peace structures, arising questions should have answers associated with presenting information concerning cultural and societal unity, and traditional methods of conflict management. Social issues questions should evaluate the impact of extraordinary interest in groups, inter-social group associations, and existing social risks. The socio-economic issues questions should focus on the positive or negative implications of the project on areas such as state of education, health conditions and health institutions, employment status, management of natural resources, use of productive resources, physical infrastructure, and the possibility of conflict eruption. The environmental issues questions must be relevant to the project's effects on rural areas, urban areas, interregional associations, and international associations. Lastly, the questions concerning security issues evaluate the level of community circumstances in terms of the common

operating environment. In particular, focus should be on health and safety conditions for women and children, political status, circumstances affecting internally displaced persons, and the state of security (Jeong, 2005).

Behavioural change and change of mind-set in most cases takes a long time and at the same time, is difficult to quantify. Because of this, it is not logical to anticipate considerable conflict impacts, therefore, evaluators must focus on project outcomes and testing of the peacebuilding and/or theory of change based on the programme strategies to make a contribution towards attaining peace. When violence is still intense, evaluators may possibly have to focus on output indicators for instantaneous measures of noticeable results and substantial short-term changes in contemporary circumstances, instead of trying to assess deeply the outcomes or impacts (Adams, 2008; Andrews, 2008 and OCDE DAC, 2008).

In Zimbabwe, traditional institutions are tasked with the preservation of peace and enabling conflict resolution, and are well versed with the process of conflict transformation. These traditional leaders include chiefs, headmen, religious leaders, village heads, family heads and women who play a major role in peacebuilding.

Beginning from the early 2000s, communities in Zimbabwe witnessed the worst forms of politically motivated violence by state agents as well as civilian on civilian clashes at grassroots levels. Efforts to resolve contemporary Zimbabwean politically motivated conflicts are proving difficult if not impossible. This is caused by the efforts which are mainly top-down and conventional in nature. The application of local traditional awareness and procedures in conflict resolution and conflict transformation has been very negligible as many prefer the contemporary law court system. The study assessed the effectiveness of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Mashonaland Central Province at grassroots levels. More to this, focus is mainly on the role played by traditional institutions in order to encourage peaceful co-existence, unity and democratic principles among the community members at grassroots level in Zimbabwe. Still, traditional institutions can motivate members of the community to realise the important issues to consider when building peace at grassroots level among community members in Zimbabwe. There are methods and strategies which could help to enhance and/or improve co-operation, accommodation, transformation and minimise any developing conflicts which may perhaps be polarized into politically motivated violent conflict.

### **Statement of the problem**

The politically motivated nature of conflicts which Zimbabwe experienced during 2002 to 2013 was mainly between people living in the same neighbourhood. Peaceful co-existence was no longer part of communal life. Physical, verbal and psychological abuse was rampant among people living in the same area. Traditional institutions being the custodians of the people as well as being local authority agents were caught wanting. This has led the researcher to ask the question: how effective were traditional institutions of peacebuilding and conflict transformation in the light of the changing conflict dynamics in Zimbabwe? The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in the light of the political conflicts which happened in Zimbabwe during 2002 to 2008 and 2009 to 2013.

### **Research Objective**

- To critically assess the effectiveness of peacebuilding and conflict transformation mechanisms used by traditional institutions in at grassroots level.

### **Research Question**

- How effective are traditional mechanisms in peacebuilding and conflict transformation?

## Methodology

The study used the descriptive survey design which incorporates the Case Study approach. This study was descriptive in nature. By handing out questionnaires and conducting focus group discussions and in-depth interviews sessions, the research study followed the lane of descriptive research.

## Study Area

Mashonaland Central province in Zimbabwe was the case study area for this thesis. It has an 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 98 077 people, 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).

## Population

The target population for this study was for people who were above the age of eighteen years. They were 518 634. This comprises of community members and local leadership structures as well civic organizations.

## Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study was 41 comprising of 15 teachers, (respondents to questionnaires), 20 care givers (respondents to questionnaires), 5 orphans (informants through interview sessions) and 1 community social worker (for in-depth interviews)

In this study the researchers used the simple random sampling technique to come up with participants for survey data using questionnaires and purposive sampling to identify participants for the case study data. Expert sampling (a type of purposive sampling) was used to select the key informants for purposes of conducting in-depth interviews.

## DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### Perception on Effectiveness of Traditional Institutions

Table 1 shows the responses from province survey, indicating why traditional institutions were not effective in peacebuilding and conflict transformation matters.

Table 1 Respondents perception on effectiveness of traditional institutions

| Respondent perception                  | Gender               | Not effective | Less effective | Effective   | Very effective |
|--|----------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|
| Promoting resolving political disputes | Male (n=175)         | 78.9%         | 15.4%          | 5.7%        | 0.0%           |
|  | Female (n=74)        | 50.0%         | 28.4%          | 10.8%       | 10.8%          |
|  | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>70.3%</b>  | <b>19.3%</b>   | <b>7.2%</b> | <b>3.2%</b>    |
| Stopping political violence            | Male (n=175)         | 53.1%         | 34.3%          | 6.3%        | 6.3%           |
|  | Female (n=74)        | 45.9%         | 39.2%          | 8.1%        | 6.8%           |

|                               |                      |              |              |              |              |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>51.1%</b> | <b>35.7%</b> | <b>6.8%</b>  | <b>6.4%</b>  |
| Promoting human security      | Male (n=175)         | 72.0%        | 18.8%        | 6.3%         | 2.9%         |
|                               | Female (n=74)        | 47.3%        | 41.9%        | 10.8%        | 0.0%         |
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>64.7%</b> | <b>25.7%</b> | <b>7.6%</b>  | <b>2.0%</b>  |
| Promoting social inclusion    | Male (n=175)         | 58.9%        | 13.1%        | 21.7%        | 6.3%         |
|                               | Female (n=74)        | 55.4%        | 31.1%        | 0.0%         | 13.5%        |
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>57.8%</b> | <b>18.5%</b> | <b>15.3%</b> | <b>8.4%</b>  |
| Provision of social justice   | Male (n=175)         | 56.0%        | 18.9%        | 18.9%        | 6.2%         |
|                               | Female (n=74)        | 39.2%        | 31.0%        | 23.0%        | 6.8%         |
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>51.0%</b> | <b>22.5%</b> | <b>20.1%</b> | <b>6.4%</b>  |
| Promoting political tolerance | Male (n=175)         | 53.1%        | 34.3         | 6.3%         | 6.3%         |
|                               | Female (n=74)        | 45.6%        | 38.2%        | 8.1%         | 8.1%         |
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>51.0%</b> | <b>36.0%</b> | <b>6.5%</b>  | <b>6.5%</b>  |
| Promoting freedom of movement | Male (n=175)         | 44.0%        | 22.3%        | 16.6%        | 17.1%        |
|                               | Female (n=74)        | 55.4%        | 31.1%        | 13.5%        | 0.0%         |
|                               | <b>Total (n=249)</b> | <b>47.4%</b> | <b>24.9%</b> | <b>15.7%</b> | <b>12.0%</b> |
| Source; Primary data          |                      |              |              |              |              |

Table 1 above shows that traditional institutions were not effective in resolving politically motivated disputes. From a gender perspective, more male than female indicated that traditional institutions were not effective. This could be a result of few or low participation of women in political issues. On violence, traditional institutions were not effective in stopping political violence. More males than female support this assertion. This could be so because more males than females do participate in brutalities as a result of conflict. Considering human security, traditional institutions were not effective. There were no noteworthy differences between male and female on human security. On social inclusion, more female than male indicated traditional institutions were not effective. This might be so because in rural set up, more women are custodians of the home and family, therefore they might have hands on experience than their male counterparts. Also, traditional institutions were not effective in delivering justice to their communities. There was no difference on justice between male and female. Community members indicated that traditional institutions were not effective in promoting political tolerance. More female than male indicated high levels of intolerance. This

could be because in any conflict, women suffer most. Traditional institutions were not effective in promoting freedom of movement. More males than females indicated this. This might be so because mostly, men usually move across the country in search of jobs, food and other necessities which are required by the family. Generally, these indicators support the assertion that traditional institutions were not effective in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Popular view through FGDs indicated that traditional institutions had little influence on political disputes which were prevailing at high levels in the community. On other disputes except political ones, all informants indicated that they were effective on such disputes. Some of the informants expressed their loyalty to the ruling party, thereby being intolerant to opposition members. One of the informants said “*vanhu vanopandukira ZANU PF zvinoreva kuzvidza chimurenga, Havana nzvimbo mudunhu mun, zvinotozikanwa izvozvo nemunhu wese*”. (People who do not support ZANU PF are a sign that they don’t value the gains of the liberation struggle. Everyone in this community knows that if you are against ruling party principles you don’t fit in this community).

The majority of KII informants indicated that traditional institutions were not all that effective in peacebuilding and conflict transformation issues. When probed further to provide indicators of ineffectiveness, the popular view indicates that political disputes are outside their jurisdiction. Key informants indicated that they were not active in stopping politically motivated disputes. However, some key informants indicated that due to fear for their own safety, they complied with demands made by ZANU PF. Examples of the demands included not to accommodate opposition members in their communities, inflicting fear to youngsters on defying ruling party principles and segregate opposition members on aid and other handouts given to the community members. Some key informants indicated that they do not have space to do what they are supposed to do because of political pressure, less recognition by the urban folks and limited financial resources and time deemed to be crucial resources needed in modern life. One key informant said “*If you can’t beat them, join them. When asked to jump just jump don’t ask how high. In so doing you save yourself from political scavengers*” (KII informant).

In complementing data indicated on Table 10 above, responses from both survey, FGDs and KIIs indicated that traditional institutions were not effective on dealing with politically motivated disputes in order to promote peacebuilding and conflict transformation issues. This is despite the fact that traditional institutions represent a crucial role in African history, cultural practices, political environment and community governance control systems. This remark points to the futility of African states in facilitating continuous socio-economic development as it overlooks traditional institutions as governance partners by noticing failures on restoring Africa’s own past (Davidson, 2004). Faller (1955) indicated that in some cases, traditional governance systems may delay or help in improving democratic principles given that they are not permanent; they go through continuous changes. In addition to this, there are high chances that political and economic improvements become flourishing when rooted extremely upon broadly shared structural and cultural principles (Fallers, 1955).

Kirby (2006) indicated that Western approaches of resolving conflict in Northern Ghana were ineffective. Several interested parties in conflict opted to use the judicial system through national courts, and foreign-funded NGOs, but this did not help to deal with the underlying root causes of the conflict. Good conflict resolution involves getting deeply rooted into cultural values at all stages and taking into consideration the ritual proportions associated with conflict resolution (Kirby, 2006). Conflict resolution in Africa is not only pinned on negotiation(s) between the warring parties. It also involves reconciliation between the warring parties and above all, everyone affected severely by the negative conflict effects, and reconciliation with ancestral world.

Historically, ineffectiveness of traditional institutions in Zimbabwe follows political governance style of local governance. Notable restrictions of traditional institutions by the colonialists essentially distorted chieftaincy into its middle administrative structures. In addition, the post-colonial state frequently absorbed chiefs to make it possible for the expansion of repressive management over its citizens. This appears recognisable with the situation in Zimbabwe with allegations of manipulation of traditional leaders by some ZANU PF politicians in government. This observation on the other hand distinguishes the reality that traditional institutions make up important resources that have the potential to encourage democratic governance and to assist access of rural communities to public services. As observed in this study, traditional institutions can lay the foundation on which to erect new varied community governance structures. This is because traditional institutions serve as custodians of the people and promote the interests of concerned community members within the wider political and governance structures. Also, in the African context, conflict resolution reduces the differences between conflicting parties. This is one of the strengths of traditional institutions in the area of local governance structures (Skalnik, 2004).

Basically, the extensive nature of contemporary conflicts might limit the level and proper application of traditional strategies in conflict transformation. Although most conflicts today are like those in those found in the past, such as; society centre for power and succession disputes among influential individuals and groups, the wide variety of actors and forces, including external ones, as well as the national and sometimes regional scope of the conflicts, render expedient traditional strategies insufficient. This to a degree explains why the traditional strategies used in northern Somalia had limited achievement. The same can be said for Liberia, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Angola, where the involvement of peacekeeping forces and other foreign interests has removed the primary responsibility for resolution from the domestic arena (Zartman, 2000).

#### **Period when Traditional Institutions were Effective**

The introduction of the ONHR set a peacebuilding and conflict transformation in Zimbabwe. The study wanted to make a comparison before ONHR between the period 2002-2008 and after ONHR during the period 2009-2013 to find out the effectiveness of traditional institutions. The following results on Table 2 were obtained:

Table 2 Effectiveness of Traditional Institutions

| Period    | Level of Effectiveness | Sex of Respondents |               | Total<br>100% (n=249) |
|-----------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------|-----------------------|
|           |                        | Male (n=175)       | Female (n=74) |                       |
| 2002-2008 | Effective              | 21.1%              | 29.7%         | 24.1%                 |
| 2009-2013 | Effective              | 68.6%              | 60.8%         | 83.5%                 |

Source: Primary data

FGDs indicated that the period 2002-2008 was marked by high political instability. 2009-2013 was somewhat peaceful. Also, informants reported that the role of traditional institutions does not focus on period specific issues but they do their business as usual without marking the calendar. The popular view indicated that they were effective always all the time while the minority indicated that the period 2009-2013 were more effective than 2002-2008.

Popular views by KIIs indicated that violence, insecurity, human rights abuses and torture were high during 2002-2008 than during 2009-2013. During these periods, social and land disputes were dealt with in the same

way for peaceful co-existence. A few of the key informants indicated that the period 2009-2013 they were effective than 2002-2008. When probed further on what could have caused the change on effectiveness, popular views indicated that the changes had no significant role played by traditional institutions but were due to the formation of government of national unity. Some informants indicated that from the period 2002-2008 going upwards, the government recognised the importance of traditional institutions, which was empowering them to be more effective than before.

### **Findings**

Effectiveness of traditional institutions for the periods 2002-2008 and 2009-2013 was not enough. The period after ONHR during the period 2009-2013 had some improvements than the period 2002-2008. Possible factors for the improvements are an increase in political tolerance facilitated by GNU. This in turn renders bias on the effectiveness of traditional institutions as far as co-existence of community members along political affiliation is concerned. This is because the improvements on effectiveness of traditional institutions were not solely as a result of the participation and involvement of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

### **Recommendations**

The ability of traditional institutions to deliver judgment in times of conflicts and social disputes played an essential role in reducing chances of wars and/or armed conflicts. This consequently meant traditional institutions must be impartial, fair and effective in their justice delivery systems for proper effectiveness if they aim to enforce community order.

As a way to furnish traditional institutions with appropriate powers they deserve for the effective and well-organised carrying out of their duties, it is very important that governments acknowledge traditional institutions as a lawful authority for their respective communities. This could be realised by incorporating the two systems of justice in a recognised way while considering the difficulties and prospects of the people within their communities.



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