

Attitudes of Local Government Counsellors towards Residents' Contributions on Local Government Issues; a Case of Bindura, Zimbabwe

Chigunwe Taurai *, Kudenga Mugove **, Chigunwe Giliet **

* Regional Coordinator, Civic Education Network Trust, Zimbabwe.

** D Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Zimbabwe Open University

Abstract- This study sought to find out the participation of residents of local authorities in local government issues between 2008 and 2013. This paper looks at the attitudes of local government counselors towards residents' contributions in local governance processes. The study was carried out against a background of a perception that during the last decade service delivery by local authorities in Zimbabwe has declined drastically. Although many factors could be attributed to this decline, it can be argued that residents' participation in the local governance processes has also reduced drastically resulting in misplaced priorities and corruption by the local authorities. The study adopted the survey research design that employed the mixed methodology approach focusing on Bindura Municipality as the study location, to investigate the level of participation of Bindura residents in local governance decisions. The study sample consisted of three counselors who were randomly selected from Bindura Municipal area. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. The findings of the study demonstrate that counselors' opinions on the participation of residents in local governance was affected by political interference, general lack of interest and lack of cooperation due to ignorance of local government processes. The study recommends that Resident associations should be actively involved in educating residents on local government processes and procedures so that they are able to participate with confidence. There is also need to conscientise political parties on the need to separate political activities from local government issues.

Index Terms- Attitudes, local government, counselors, resident's contributions, perceptions

I. INTRODUCTION

Involvement of residents in local governance issues is key in democratizing decision making and implementation of local policies. Local counselors as makers of local governance decisions rely heavily on willingness of residents in participating in local governance processes. If residents feel negatively about outcomes of invested time in participating in local governance they are reluctant in future to take part. On the other hand counselors may think involvement of residents in local government issues may stifle their aspirations of what they aim to achieve in their locality. This paper interrogates the attitudes

of local government counselors towards involvement of residents in local government issues.

II. RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the attitudes of councilors towards residents' contributions to local governance?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Local Governance

In recent years, Governments have progressively sought to engage citizens in the governance of their communities and neighbourhoods. Increasing participation at the community level, it is argued, is good for improving and targeting local service delivery, empowering communities, raising local accountability and developing cohesive communities in pursuit of citizen well-being and better governance (Rai, 2008)

Local government is a product of devolution as a dimension of decentralisation. Gomme (1987:1) defines local government as,

...that part of the whole government of a nation or state which is administered by authorities subordinate to state authority, but elected independently of control by the state authority, by qualified persons resident or having property in certain localities which have been formed by communities having a common interest and common history (Gomme, 1987 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

Meyer (1978:10) defines local government as,

...local democratic governing unity within the unitary democratic system of a country, which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled governmental powers and sources of income to render specific local services and develop, control and regulate the geographic, social and economic environment of defined local area (Meyer, 1978 in Chikerema, 2013:87).

One has to note that whilst local governments are actually not independent of central government control, they enjoy only relative autonomy due to the division of responsibilities for services between central and local government and it should be captured that the division of these responsibilities is a political or policy issue. According to Mawhood (1993:66) local government is the third tier or level of government deliberately created to bring government closer to the grassroots population and gives

these grassroots structures a sense of involvement in the political processes that control their daily lives. Chikerema (2013) asserts that the existence of local government has always been defended on the basis that it is a crucial aspect of the process of democratisation and intensification of mass participation in the decision making process. It is furthermore argued that no political system is considered to be complete and democratic if it does not have a system of local government.

In traditional representative democracy, elected representatives are the ones expected to make decisions on behalf of the people, who in turn hold them accountable at times of elections. Decisions and policies in turn are carried out by rational bureaucracies, occupied by specialists whose expertise is the basis of their legitimacy. In more participatory approaches, both the elected and the bureaucratic forms of representation and legitimacy are challenged, as communities and their leaders are invited into (or demand) more direct forms of engagement. Conflicts emerge over who speaks for whom, and with what authority, and about the appropriate relationship between the 'governors' and the 'governed' (Goventa, 2004). However, the principles of citizen engagement being advocated across government departments are increasingly being incorporated into local government and partnership strategies for local service delivery, community cohesion, race equality, neighbourhood renewal and devolving power at a local level (Rai, 2008).

Local Governance Legal Context in Zimbabwe

According to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment number 20 (2013) the three tiers of government are; the national government, provincial and metropolitan councils, and local authorities that is to say –

- a) Urban councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of the people in urban areas; and
- b) Rural councils, by whatever name called, to represent and manage the affairs of people in rural areas within the districts into which the provinces are divided (The Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Amendment No. 20 (2013:22)).

Basic values and principles governing public administration under the new constitution state that, "people's needs must be responded to within a reasonable time, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy-making. So many authorities have pointed out discrepancies almost always between what is written and the reality on the ground. It may also be argued that "a reasonable time" can be subjective and those in leadership can easily use the phrase to escape accountability.

In Zimbabwe, urban governance is the immediate responsibility of Urban Councils in co-governance with the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, which has an overall supervisory role. Chapter 29: 15 of the Urban Councils Act of 1995, revised in 1996, provides for the establishment of municipalities and towns and the administration of local boards, municipal and town councils. It confers functions and powers that impose duties upon municipal and town councils, as well as local boards (Mhlahlo, 2007). In Zimbabwe urban governance is not totally autonomous, the responsibilities and functions of urban governance are often shared and take place within a policy framework, which is both

set by national politicians and over which those same national politicians will want to exert influence and direction (ibid).

The functions of local authorities, according to the new Zimbabwe Constitution, Amendment No. 20 (2013) Section 276 (2a and b) states that an Act of Parliament may confer functions on local authorities, including –

- a) a power to make by-laws, regulations or rules for the effective administration of the areas for which they have been established;
- b) a power to levy rates and taxes and generally to raise sufficient revenue for them to carry out their objects and responsibilities (Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2013:126).

Goventa and Valderrama (1999:19) say, "If democracy lies in rule by the people, the promise of democratic decentralisation is to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive." This research sought to assess the attitudes of local government counselors towards residents' participation in local governance issues in which communities were involved in the development of local by-laws as well as budgetary processes among other things.

The Concept of Participation

The intention of this study is not to consider how much participation is required in political institutions in order for democracy to be said to exist. Rather, the concern is in the attitudes in which certain groups and individuals monopolize power and development resources at the local level. In examining the theory of participation focus will also be on major variables which inhibit participation at a local level.

According to Miller and Monge (1986) in Kasozi-Mulundwa (2013) three models of participation influence decision-making: cognitive, effective and contingency. The cognitive concept is premised on the thinking that participation improves the flow of information from bottom to top, leading to quality decision-making. The effective model reasons that participation enhances self-realisation, as advocated by McGregor's (1960) theory about motivation. The effective model thus concerns itself with the focuses on the passionate gains of participation. On the other hand, the contingency model assumes that the level and effectiveness of participation depend on circumstances. While the cognitive and effective models express the logic behind participation, it has been argued that the contingency model states that to be effective, certain conditions for participation must be in place, including: participants' attitudes, organisational context and the kind of decisions to be made (Kasozi-Mulundwa, 2013).

Participation typology according to Ganenta and Valderrama (1999) includes four strands of work around participation, especially in the development context. On the one hand, there are those approaches to participation which have focused on community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere or in which citizens have been beneficiaries of government programmes. On the other hand, there is the tradition of political participation, through which citizens have engaged in traditional forms of political involvement e.g. voting, political parties, and lobbying. Increasingly, in the context of democratic

decentralisation, these two traditions are being linked to a broader notion of participation as citizenship. Each of these approaches may draw upon a variety of participatory methodologies of planning, monitoring, research, education and action (Ganenta and Valderrama, 1999).

The concept of citizenship has long been a disputed and value-laden one in democratic theory. To some, citizenship has implied a set of individual rights, while to others it is seen as a broader set of social and civic responsibilities. More recently, some have argued for linking these two traditions, such that the right of participation in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life should be included in the nexus of basic human rights. Citizenship as participation can be seen as representing an expression of human agency in the political arena, broadly defined; citizenship as rights enables people to act as agents. (Lister 1998:228 in Goventa and Valderrama, 1999:32).

Participation is also viewed from the political point of view, whereby it is seen as part of democracy, that is, looked at in the context of citizens' rights to participate in matters that concern them. It has also been argued that participation enhances democratic values that are necessary for enhancing and improving service delivery in public organisations (Kasozi-Milindwa, 2013). Citizen engagement is about involving the community in the decision making process and is critical in the successful development of acceptable policies and decisions in government, the private sector and the community. In democratic societies, people's participation in decision making and local government processes are transparent and accountable. Because they are engaged, they feel empowered, that they have personal political efficacy and are in control of their destinies (Maribyrnong City Council, 2014)

The concept of accountability has political, social and financial dimensions. Transparency aims at enhancing accountability to all stakeholders, focusing on the financial, social and political dimensions (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013). The study will focus more on attitudes of local counselors in involving residents in participation in decision-making in the budgeting processes and policy formulation. It is believed that when developing countries involve their citizens in the budgeting process, accountability, transparency and efficiency are enhanced, as citizens are made aware of government operations and how resources are mobilised and utilised for the common good (Shah, 2007 in Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013). Shah (ibid) further states that tremendous achievements in terms of political, social and economic development have been made in those local governments of both developed and developing countries where citizens have been involved in the budgeting process. (Kasozi-Mulindwa, 2013)

Levels of Participation

According to Maribyrnong City Council (2014) citizen engagement can take many forms. Examples include:

- Volunteering time to be on decision-making committees and boards (at schools or community centres),
- Attending public meetings and consultations, and being involved in responding to local decisions and issues,

- Being a part of formal Council processes (for example, sitting on advisory committees and other structures), and
- Communicating with Councillors to convey concerns about matters that have a personal impact (Maribyrnong City Council, 2014:1)

Greater emphasis has to be on the importance of participation not only to hold others accountable, but also as a self-development process, starting with the articulation of grassroots needs and priorities, and building popular forms of organization (Goventa and Valderrama, 1999). Citizen participation in this sense involves direct ways in which citizens' influence and exercise control in governance, not only through the more traditional forms of indirect representation.

Hart (1992) cited by the Civic Education and Community Mobilization (CIVCOM) (2003) provides a typology of eight levels of participation as listed:

1. **Manipulation** – The individual does what those with authority/power suggest that they do, but they have no real understanding of the issues. The individuals are asked what they think and the person with authority listens to some of the ideas but they do not tell them what influence they have on the final outcome.
2. **Decoration** – The individual takes part in an event, but they really do not understand the issues.
3. **Tokenism** – The individuals are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
4. **Assigned but not informed** – Those with authority take the initiative to call in others, but the individual only decides whether to take part after being informed on the "how and why" of the project.
5. **Consulted and informed** – The individual works as a consultant in a project that is designed and run by those with authority, but the individual understands the process and their opinions are treated seriously.
6. **Authority-initiated, shared decisions with others** – Those with authority, involve others in a project, where important decisions require consensus between them.
7. **Initiated and directed by those with less authority** – Those with less initial authority conceive, organize, and direct a project themselves without interference from those with more power.
8. **Shared decisions** – Decisions shared by those with more and less initial power, is the final goal of genuine participation.

Source: Adapted from Hart (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF, *Innocent Essays in CIVCOM* (2003:28).

The researcher used Hart's "ladder of participation" in analyzing data on the levels of participation by residents.

Makumbe (1996) notes that participatory development can be represented as a continuum of participation levels from passive participation, where donor or government initiated ideas are promoted, to active participation where the recipients are

involved in all stages of a development project, including the evaluation. Makumbe (1996:61) concludes that, "local government structures in Zimbabwe, fail dismally to facilitate meaningful beneficiary participation in development". The United Nations publication as cited in Makumbe (1996) observed that active participation requires time to attend meetings, vote and inform oneself about issues. Active participation goes beyond mere choice making from predetermined alternatives. Passive participation largely pertains to such choice making and even manipulation of the masses by those who will have critical decisions in the first place. According to the United Nations (1967) in Chikerema (2013:87) if people are continuously expected to be passive recipients of government programs, policy and projects, they tend to shun participation and lose interests in the programmes which lead to failure and underdevelopment of local communities.

Rai (2008) asserts that participation is strongly influenced by the motivations, current circumstances and backgrounds of individuals, which determine whether governance opportunities are taken up. This assertion leads to the question of the nature of people who participate in local governance.

Who participates in Local Governance?

A study conducted by Rai (2008) in Birmingham, revealed that across all wards, descriptions of the types of people that were more likely to participate in formal governance structures included:

- people engaging in their professional capacity, e.g. local government officials, police officers, health professionals, teachers, etc.;
- those holding elected office, e.g. councillors, MPs;
- community workers and activists;
- the politically motivated, committed party supporters (Rai. 2008:88)

Along similar lines, previous research suggested that 'wealthy executives' and 'prosperous professionals' were more likely to engage in civic activities than those with no formal qualifications or in routine occupations. There were, however, also some negative undertones, with not infrequent references to individuals described as 'the usual suspects', 'do-gooders', 'busybodies' and 'those with axes to grind'.(DCLG, 2006c in Rai, 2008). It is those residents who have something to gain in participating in local government issues who participate. Counselors have a mandate to woo residents to participate so as to further democratize local governance and increase ownership of the whole process of local governance.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study used the mixed method approach that is both qualitative and quantitative. According to Fielding and Fielding (2006) the logic behind these two approaches is the same in that while quantitative research may be used to test theory, it can also be used to explore an area or generating hypothesis or a theory. On the other hand, qualitative research is presented as the most appropriate approach for theory generation - it can be used for

testing hypothesis and theories. The other advantage of using the approach is that simultaneous mixed method design may permit the transformation of the qualitative data to quantitative numerical data and incorporation into the quantitative data set.

The survey design was preferred for this study on the basis of its strengths and appropriateness to the nature of the study. The study required that original information needed be sought from mainly the intended beneficiaries, that is residents of Bindura who are most affected by service delivery in the town. In order to get reliable statistical results that could confidently be generalized, it was important to sample a fairly large number of respondents to make sure they were representative of the population.

The other reason for selecting the survey was the fact that they are suitable for studying characteristics, opinions, attitudes and experiences of a population gives them relevance to the nature of the study. .

The study sample consisted of three counselors. The study adopted random sampling technique. The research used questionnaires as research instruments. Questionnaires were chosen because they allow the respondents to answer questions at their own convenient times, are relatively easy to analyse and reduce bias through uniform presentation of questions. Simple descriptive statistics were used to present data.

V. RESULTS

VIEWS OF COUNCILORS ON RESIDENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Table 1: Views of councillors on residents' involvement in local governance. N=3

Clusters	Categories
Political polarisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political interference (3) • Political intimidation (1) • Politicisation of local governance (1)
Apathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of cooperation due to ignorance of the processes (2) • Lack of interest in participation (3) • Lack of trust (of the local authority) (1) • Lack of interest due to council dominance (1)

Table 1 reveals that 7 responses indicate that there was general apathy in the residents due to a number of factors that include lack of interest (3), and ignorance of the local governance processes (2). The table also shows that counsellors viewed a problem of political polarization as indicated by 5 responses. Political polarisation in this case is categorised into political interference (3), political intimidation (1), and politicization of local governance (1).

VI. DISCUSSION

The study findings reveal that respondents (counselors) largely blame residents' apathetic behaviour for low participation in local governance political interference, lack of interest in local governance issues and lack of cooperation due to ignorance of local government processes. This finding confirms (Rai, 2008:18),s findings that the lack of understanding of the systems and processes, awareness of 'who's who', the relative power and authority of those present, the background policy agendas and the jargon all contribute to a perception of 'them and us'. The ignorance in local government issues could be due to the fact that the residents are not aware of the way local government issues operate. There might be a question of lack of transparency where things are done without the residents being informed of fundamentals behind the operations. When residents do not know the importance of particular initiatives they see no reason of investing their time of things they think have no value. There is need to devise short term projects where the residents have tangible things to talk about on the products of their involvement in local governance issues. This calls for vibrant civic education campaigns on the part of counselors so that their residents see value in taking part in local government initiatives. It also calls for the counselors to always appraise residents on outcomes and importance of contributions that residents would have made in previous initiatives so that they have the motivation to participate in more initiatives.

This perhaps means that some residents' participation is limited by lack of capacity to engage. (Ellison and Ellison, 2006: 341) in Goventa (2002) profess that the lack of confidence to engage with the structures and the accompanying officialdom was considered to be a significant barrier preventing broader participation. Lack of such knowledge therefore was often seen to prevent individuals who had neither the time nor capacity to gather the information needed from attending governance meetings giving rise to the need for civic education.

However, while they blame the residents for failing to appreciate the importance of participation in local governance, they also hint on the causes of such apathy, for instance lack of trust in the local authority, lack of interest due to council dominance as well as political interference. One resident said, "Most, if not all (meetings) were political, so I do not want to be involved in politics" This can be interpreted to mean that while the individual may be interested in participating in the local governance processes, they lose interest due to politicization of the processes. In other words there is a causal relationship between the responses. The researchers would argue that experience causes change in attitudes, and change in attitudes causes change in behaviour.

The researcher would want to conclude that the sampled councillors generally view residents as generally apathetic and lacking appreciation of the importance of participation in local governance even though they appreciate the environment within which residents survive.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Systematic and regular consultation that takes into account residents input is a necessary democratic

complement to the electoral process. This implies that there is a need to review mechanisms in place for local governance participation by the Ministry of Local Government. Such policy reviews should also include the reduction of the Minister's powers to directly involve in local governance and granting residents more power to make binding decisions on budgetary matters.

- ii. Civic education is an instrument that can be used to empower powerless groups and individuals with knowledge and skills which are indispensable if citizens are to effectively participate in the budgeting and other local governance processes.
- iii. Local governance policies should include a structure of residents with the necessary technical capacity to monitor the policy implementation and financial function of local authorities in order to improve accountability and adherence to agreed priorities.
- iv. There is need to plan short term projects where residents' contributions are visibly implemented so that residents actually point at the importance of their contribution.

REFERENCES

- [1] Awa, E. (1991). Democracy and Good Governance in Africa. Online – Accessed on 03/04/13
- [2] Bless, C., and Higson-Smith, C. (1995) Social Research Methods: An African Perspective. Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd.
- [3] Chikerema, A. F. (2013). Citizen Participation and Local Democracy in Zimbabwe Local Government System. Website: internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Chikerema-Citizen-Participation-in-Zimbabwe.pdf - Accessed on 03/03/14
- [4] Civic Education and Community Mobilization (2003). Train the Trainer Manual: Participation: The Netherlands Institute for Southern Africa (NIZA).
- [5] Cliff's Notes.com (2013) Sociological Research: Designs, Methods. Website: http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957 - Accessed on 12/04/14
- [6] Coetzee, J. K., Graaf, J., Hendricks, F., and Wood, G. (Ed.) (2001) Development: Theory, Policy and Practice. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [7] Gaventa, J., and Valderrama, C. (1999). Participation, Citizenship and Local Governance. Website: www.pria-academy.org/pdf/M4_AR2_Participation_Citizenship_04/02/14 - Accessed on 04/02/14
- [8] Gill, M. (2009). Seven Pillar of Democratic Governance. Website: <http://charitychannel.com/Articles/tibid/384> - Accessed on 07/04/13
- [9] Goventa, J. (2004). Representation, Community Leadership and Participation: Citizen Involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Governance. Website: r4d.dfid.gov.uk/pdf/outputs/centreoncitizenship/jgnru.pdf - Accessed on 23/02/14
- [10] Holmes, B. (2011). Citizen Engagement in Policymaking and the Design of Public Services. Website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/publications> - Accessed on 01/03/14
- [11] Kasozi-Mulindwa, S. (2013). The Process and Outcomes of Participatory Budgeting in a Decentralized Local Government Framework: A Case in Uganda. University of Birmingham. Website: www.etheses.bhm.ac.uk/4517/1/Kasozi-Mulindwa - Accessed on 21/02/14
- [12] Maconis, J. J., and Plummer, K. (2002) Sociology: A Global Introduction. Essex: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- [13] Madzivanyika, L. (2011). The Impact of Weaknesses in the Urban Councils Act on Efficient and Effective Service Delivery in Urban Local Councils in Zimbabwe. Website: etd.uwe.ac.za/userfiles/modules/etd/docs - Accessed on 03/03/14

- [14] Makumbe, J. (1996). Participatory Development: The Case of Zimbabwe. Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications.
- [15] Maribyrnong City Council (2014). Participation and Local Governance. Website: www.maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/Page/Page.95px?Page_id=5644 - Accessed on 20/02/14
- [16] Mhlahlo, S. R. (2007). Assessment of Urban Governance in Zimbabwe: Case of the City of Gweru. Website: www.ajol.info/index.php/eassrr/article/view/22742 - Accessed on 16/03/14
- [17] Ministry of Local Government (Uganda) (2013). Functions and Mandate of the Ministry of Local Government, Uganda. Website: www.molg.go.ug/index.php?option - Accessed on 14/03/14
- [18] Muchengetwa, S., Chakuchichi, D. D., and Badza, A. M. (2010) Introduction to Advanced Research Methods and Statistics. Module MSSE 605/MSCC502, Zimbabwe Open University.
- [19] Pieterse, E. (1998). Does Development Have to be Democratic?: Community Accountability and the Voluntary Sector in South Africa. Development Update: Quarterly Journal of the South African National NGO Coalition and INTERFUND
- [20] Rai, S. (2008). Routes and Barriers to Citizen Governance. Website: www.jrf.org.uk - Accessed on 20/02/14
- [21] Robson, C. (1997) Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner Researchers. Oxford, Blackwell.
- [22] Ssekandi, F. M. (Undated) Good Governance, the Way Forward (Online) – Accessed on 26/02/13

Websites:

- [1] <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Residents> - Accessed on 10/12/13
- [2] <http://www.Idoconline.com/dictionary/local-authority> - Accessed on 10/12/13
- [3] <http://statpac.com> - Accessed on 06/01/14
- [4] <http://www.geohive.com/Zimstat/2012> - Accessed on 28/01/14

AUTHORS

First Author – Chigunwe Taurai. Regional Coordinator, Civic Education Network Trust, Zimbabwe.

Second Author – Kudenga Mugove, Lecturer, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Zimbabwe Open University

Third Author – Chigunwe Giliet, Senior Lecturer, Department of Disability Studies, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Zimbabwe Open University