

Tackling Intolerance and Abuse in the Peri-urban Areas of Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

Although the 2018 harmonized elections in Zimbabwe were generally peaceful, August 1, 2018 witnessed a resurgence of violence as the protest against the delay in the announcement of elections culminated in the death of six civilians, when the military joined the police in quelling the disturbances. In order to attain sustainable peace and reconciliation, it is critical that Zimbabwe address all underlying tensions that have historically spurred violence, including residual pockets of subtle violence against women and youths in places such as Epworth, Chitungwiza, and Mbare. Important progress has been made. The enactment of a progressive Constitution in 2013 and the establishment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) as well as the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) were milestones in the modern history of Zimbabwe. The Constitution has a well-developed Bill of rights with far-reaching safeguards for human rights including those of marginalized groups-women and youth strengthening their position and safeguarding them from violence, marginalization and discrimination.

This policy brief analyses the peri-urban settlement set up proclivity to intolerance and poverty that often trigger abuse of women and youth using specifically the case of previous electoral violence hot-spots of Epworth, Chitungwiza, and Mbare. The policy brief uses this to illuminate new conflict trends that have emerged and evaluates the level of cooperation between various actors and recommends what could possibly be done to remove the drivers of conflict and enhance joint work among the various actors. The abuse of women and youth in these locations are examples of residual pockets of violence and conflict in Zimbabwe. These challenges throw spanners into the several peace initiatives by the Centre for Conflict Management Trust (CCMT) and other peace building organizations to build a socially cohesive, integrated and democratic nation. The conflicts and violence in these areas are highly complex and multi-layered, although they may appear limited and localized, they may be fuelled by drivers institutional, political-economic and social spheres operating at national level. Most individuals look to friends and families to address their grievances, but in the absence of non-violent alternatives from these sources, they resort to violence.

2. Contextual analysis

Some of the intolerance in Epworth, Chitungwiza, and Mbare are fuelled by historical tensions between the poor communities and exacerbated by political manipulation. The three sites are known to be prone to intolerance and violence, especially during and after elections. As the Research Advocacy Unit (RAU, 2018) notes, the perpetrators of violence have mainly been party youths, while other youths and women are victims and the most abused in these areas¹. Party youths are at the heart of election-related violence because of their vulnerability due to low level of economic status, ignorance and illiteracy among others. The enormous implication is that party youths living in these situations are easily targeted, separated from their families and rational minds, and recruited or trained to engage in carrying out the related violence. In past national elections of 2000, 2002, 2005,

¹ RAU (2018) Zimbabwe – Political Violence and Elections. Harare: Research & Advocacy Unit. See http://kubatana.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/rau_zimbabwe_political_violence_elections_180404.pdf

2008 and 2013, the violent experiences have led to tensions and suspicion, causing most citizens, especially women and other youths to shun political processes².

“To complicate matters, women who run for public office typically gain additional, unnecessary attention and are seen as being loose and immoral. Their private lives are put under the spotlight,”³ Political violence and negative political messaging cause many women and girls to approach elections and government initiatives with caution and suspicion. Gender inequality within families, inequitable division of labour within households and cultural attitudes about gender roles further subjugate women and serve to limit their representation in public life⁴

Following the August 1 event, most opposition leaders and activists went into hiding fearing state reprisals for the quelled protests. Some Opposition, Movement for Democratic Change councillors that won elections in wards that were once ZANU PF strongholds have found it difficult to stamp their authority as youths in some of the areas resisted their leadership. The fight by the ZANU PF members is to still hold on to privileges such as residential stands they ‘illegally’ got under their losing candidate, whom in most cases is known as a ‘Shadow councillor’⁵. In the past, ZANU PF Local Government ministers are known to have suspended urban council officials and replacing them with commissions. In Chitungwiza, ZANU PF councillors boycotted the 5th September 2018 mayoral election bringing in some supporters to cause chaos and disrupt the process.⁶ The melee was organized and coordinated by losing candidates from ZANU PF aimed at resisting leadership from the opposition, failing to democratically embrace the new leadership changes and also to fan political violence and intolerance. Such intolerant behaviour has been fuelling conflict which end up victimising women and youths, setting them on a collision course with their counterparts in the opposition parties.

There are various ways that intolerance is experienced in peri-urban areas. In Mbare there are instances of intolerance exhibited by ZANU PF youths imposing an economic embargo against members of other political parties in Mbare⁷. ZANU PF youths often carry out these activities with impunity as the police seem reluctant to deal with the known perpetrators. The group of ZANU PF youths from Mbare (Harare Province) who are known as Chipangano have been consistently reported as perpetrating organised violence and torture. However, no arrests or prosecution of the members of this group are on record as having taking place. Chipangano is alleged to have been involved in several incidents of political violence, including intimidation, assault, forced displacement and property damage. Conflict in most peri urban areas is a complex web of challenges that include poor service delivery, corruption, poverty, unemployment, poor economic performance, policy inconsistency, human rights abuse, lack of civic education, reduced voter confidence and issues with the credibility of elections. IFES (2018) notes that women engaging in Zimbabwe’s elections as candidates, voters and journalists experience devastating sexual extortion, physical violence,

² VOA, 2015. Survey: Most Zimbabwe Youth Not Interested in Elections. <https://www.voazimbabwe.com/a/Zimbabwe-mass-public-opinion-survey/2779693.html> (Accessed 10 October 2017).

³ Clayton Masekesa, Violence Impedes Women Participation in Politics, January 30, 2018, Newsday, <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/01/violence-impedes-women-participation-politics/>

⁴ Newsday, Women bear brunt of political violence, June 18, 2018. See <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/06/women-bear-brunt-of-political-violence/>

⁵ Newsday, ZANU PF Activists Attack MDC councillor, October 10, 2018. See <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/10/zanu-pf-activists-attack-mdc-councillor/>

⁶ Xolisani Ncube, ZANU PF Councillors Boycott Chitown Mayoral Polls, September 5, 2018. <https://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zanu-pf-councillors-boycott-chitown-mayoral-polls/>

⁷ Newsday, Political violence resurfaces in Mbare. <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2017/03/political-violence-resurfaces-mbare/>

harassment and intimidation from their bosses, colleagues, religious leaders and domestic partners. This deeply impedes their free and fair participation in the process. One of the causes of such intolerance is the lack of legislation to compel political parties to comply with constitutional provisions and to ensure implementation of the parity principle for promotion of equal access to leadership and decision making by women⁸.

3. Opportunities for Tackling Violence at National Level

Zimbabwe's legal framework to prevent all forms of abuse and violence in the public and the private sphere includes the Domestic Violence Act, the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act, the Criminal Evidence and Procedure Act, among many others, which calls for a multi-sectoral, effective and coordinated response. However, the shortfall is in the laxity by law enforcement agents to apply these when required, selective justice based on partisan lines, the absence of well-resourced legal aid programmes; low legal literacy among women and youth, a weak referral system between the police, legal aid providers and justice delivery structures; and entrenched patriarchal values are among the key challenges to ending violence against women in the country.

Despite a precarious operating environment, Zimbabwe has a vibrant range of civil society organisations (faith based groups, youth networks, legal associations, and many others ranging) including the CCMT working on all violence and conflict related issues. A number of opportunities can be taken advantage of to forge synergies, build a strong team to combat intolerance and violence at all levels. A number of opportunities could be capitalized on. First, President Mnangagwa has set an encouraging tone, focusing on the need to resuscitate the economy and open the political system in his State of the Nation Address (SONA).⁹ Key to doing this is his promise to guarantee the constitutional rights of every Zimbabwean-including the freedom of speech, free assembly and association without being subjected to intimidation and violence. Civic groups need to hold his government accountable for this. Second, the Constitution of Zimbabwe did put in place mechanisms for supporting and entrenching human rights, peace and democracy, promoting constitutionalism, protecting the sovereignty and interests of the people, securing and ensuring the observance of democratic values by the State and all institutions and agencies of government, and ensuring that all injustices are remedied. It also established a number of institutions to help ensure the protection of the rights enshrined therein.

Third, the Chapter 12 institutions, and in this case the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), The Zimbabwe Gender Commission (ZGC) and the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC). The strengthening of the NPRC, the ZGC and the ZHRC as independent bodies is critical to fostering and enshrining a culture of peace and tolerance in the communities. Their independence and effectiveness needs to be guaranteed.¹⁰ The NPRC mandate needs to enable it to deal with past government abuses. Government needs to invest in conflict resolution mechanisms and early warning systems to ensure that peace, tolerance and respect of human rights are upheld in Zimbabwe. Organizations such as CCMT need to place on its lobby and advocacy agenda, the success of these institutions. It is therefore crucial that efforts should be made to make the ZHRC, the ZGC and NPRC

⁸ IFES (2018) Violence Against Women in Elections in Zimbabwe: An IFES Assessment .see http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/vawie_in_zimbabwe_july_2018.pdf

⁹Full Text: Mnangagwa's State of the Nation (Sona) Address. see <https://news.pindula.co.zw/2018/09/19/full-text-mnangagwas-state-of-the-nation-sona-address/>

¹⁰ Nqobani Ndlovu and Veneranda Langa, **Strengthen NPRC, ZHRC to foster culture of peace**, Newsday, September 24, 2018

accessible and such efforts should ensure that their work is spread across the country.¹¹ There is need to ensure that both the NPRC and ZHRC are resourced financially, and materially to enable them to discharge their constitutional obligations without any hindrance.

In dealing with high levels of intolerance and poverty in places such as Epworth, Chitungwiza, and Mbare, CCMT needs to engage ZGC. ZGC has a critical role to play in supporting gender equality in electoral processes, using its mandate to support the implementation of gender provisions in the Constitution. Key provisions include Section 17 which provides that the State must promote gender balance to ensure that women fully participate in all the various spheres of the Zimbabwean society. ZGC is key to receiving and considering complaints, as well as in securing appropriate redress where rights relating to gender have been violated; and to do everything necessary to promote gender equality. Another strategic partner for CCMT partnership is the Women Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ). WCoZ has been working with the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) on “Strengthening Police Responsiveness to Violence Against Women and Girls Community Dialogues”. The ZRP has also confirmed its readiness to deal decisively with all forms of violence which include threats, intimidation, or assault as long as it is reported to any police station or at their National Complaints Desk¹². Facilitating community dialogues with the ZRP give citizens an opportunity to have a one on one talk with ZRP on the negligence in assisting survivors of violence and breaks the myth that surrounds communities that the police is unreachable. Both CCMT and WCoZ can jointly push for the practical fulfilment of this commitment by strategically engaging the ZRP with reference to areas still experiencing remnants of polarisation and victimization that continue to flare.

Given chances of media reforms in the offing, there is an opportunity of working through community radio stations-for civil awareness- to educate the citizens on their rights, the process of how to claim them and building their confidence. Government has expressed its keenness to work with the media to ensure “a professional, responsible, ethical and above all, profitable media fraternity”.¹³ Stakeholders in the media fraternity are currently pushing for the amendment of draconian laws such as the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Commercialisation Act, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Broadcasting Services Act. The amendment will open opportunities for more radio stations and especially community radios that the vulnerable women and youth can benefit from in terms of rights awareness and empowerment.

4. Strategies and possible CMT Role

On legislation, at national level, CCMT can leverage its partnership with the NPRC and lead an advocacy campaign on behalf of partner CSOs group, to have parliament through the NPRC develop and legislate a *National Policy on Peace Building and Conflict Management*. The policy will lay out clear measures for peaceful co-existence and human security that is key for both political stability and sustainable development in the country. A lot of work on peace and conflict resolution is being done on a piecemeal approach without national coordination and harmonization among CSOs, churches, government and private institutions. The national policy will need to consolidate all peace work and be supported by a *National Peace Building Steering Committee(NPBSC)* within the NPRC comprising government, ZRP, CSOs and private sector members. The National Peace Building Steering Committee will need to

¹¹ **Chiduzo, L. (2015)** The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission: Prospects and challenges for the Protection of Human Rights in **Law, Democracy, and Development**, vol.19, Bellville, Cape Town

¹² Faith Zvorufura, We Are Ready for Elections: ZRP, July 18 2018. See <https://263chat.com/we-are-ready-for-elections-zrp/>

¹³ Newsday, Mutsvangwa rings media law reforms, 8 December 2018 see <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/12/mutsvangwa-rings-media-law-reforms/>

be supported by *District Peace committees(DPCs)*, who in turn work together with *Local Community Peace Committees(LPCs)*. The NPBSC will be responsible for coordinating all peace efforts in the country as well as serve as an early warning early response mechanism. These are crucial to tackling the on-going conflict and insecurity. Women, youth and the elderly should not be excluded from peace committees and other peace building activities. It is also important for CCMT to show the youth that it is not just interested in them participating in some peace building activities but that **CCMT is keen to help them connect with existing services including small business opportunities to better their livelihoods**. Creating new relationships and networks linked to and reinforced by economic opportunity such as connection to markets for agricultural produce and services is an essential incentive.

A more multi-layered and multi-sectoral approach is necessary at all levels-community, district, regional and national. Equal emphasis need to be put on both the state and political leadership, and the abilities of communities to use traditional means of dialogue and negotiation. There is need to embed conflict sensitivity into development or investment planning as the prevalence of conflict in peri-urban areas are subject to levels of poverty, and the significant threat of this inequality to national cohesion. *A number of issues could be tackled through the NPBSC*. For instance, it has been observed that women are harassed by touts who shout very filthy remarks about their dressing when boarding public transport. This violence perpetrated by touts on women happens mostly while police officers looked on.¹⁴ The 2018 16 days of activism against gender based violence (GBV) has recommended that police must be capacitated to deal with the touts. *CCMT advocacy needs to centre around reminding government that the core function of government is to provide safety and security for its citizens, and that insecurity is a major impediment to sustainable development of the nation*.

CCMT and its network need to look into the *training of police officers in peace building and conflict resolution*, while government looks into their resourcing. Many at times, police officers do not respond to cases of abuse and violence because they are not skilled to handle such cases or there are not adequately equipped to do so. Both the police and the *LPCs need to be capacitated to the extent of appreciating the role of other in the area of maintaining security and justice within the community. Without full-fledged police reforms, it may be impossible to find some police support for peacebuilding and community policing programs. Deepening this collaboration at local levels, especially in peri urban areas is another key but difficult issue*. CCMT could also take up the role of *convening some country peace fora*, which brings together civil society, government actors, and private sector to address systematic drivers of conflict and enhance country collaboration and coordination around developmental planning and security issues. The fora will provide a model for participatory and transparent governance where local citizens play a more active role in resolution of conflict with support from the state. The evaluation of past peace building efforts can take place within such for a with the aim of encouraging more strategic learning and more accountability.

5. Conclusion

Zimbabwe, though it finds itself at crossroads, is well positioned to move forward with a new, concerted effort in addressing the continuing challenge of conflict and insecurity, through the provisions within the Constitution and the various existing national institutional and policy frameworks and guidelines. Additional policies and institutional arrangements may be required but all

¹⁴ Veneranda Langa, MPs rail against rowdy touts, 8 December 2018, See <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2018/12/mps-rail-against-rowdy-touts/>

must be undertaken within the confines of the Constitution, and through national and community agreed lawful processes. To better understand the local context, interventions must be based on continuous monitoring and solid information about concrete concerns and grievances such as historical injustices and election practices that keep people divided. Overall, peacebuilding cannot be divorced from broader issues of reform of state institutions to make them impartial in service delivery and more effective to local functions.

6. Recommendations

CCMT and other CSOs need to continue their work of bringing the gap between government and communities. Below is a number of advocacy issues that need attention by the following key stakeholders that CCMT can push for.

Government related engagement issues

- It is important to have a **national peace policy** where targets are set and achieved. The policy will take care of new development priorities that are emerging at global and regional levels and also be in sync with the social, political and economic landscape in Zimbabwe.
- There is need for Zimbabwe as a nation to have a peaceful, clear and **uncontested pathway to free, fair and credible elections** premised on proper constitutionally aligned electoral laws, an effective electoral administrative arrangement through ZEC and a political environment that allows citizens to make free and informed choices. Electoral laws must not be piecemeal, selective and inadequate to ensure peaceful, democratic and credible elections.
- **Well-coordinated and collaborated peace and security approaches** are needs for national development. Current responses to conflict, which are ad hoc and reactive are not sustainable and have little impact on development and governance issues.
- The calls for devolution by government could be useful if a **stronger state/citizen cooperation** provide a channel through which grievances can be peacefully aired, perceived inequalities can be dealt with without resorting to violence. Information provided by communities should be acted on quickly and highlight the benefits of working together
- Government needs to develop programs aimed at discouraging divisive political messaging, but rather **share reliable information that help build trust, collective responsibility, community building, and** building a desire within vulnerable communities to work with government for national transformation.

Political Parties

There is need for the following:

- Enactment of legislation to compel political parties to ensure **equal representation of men and women in politics**, which is key to ending all conflicts related to gender and development.
- To have meaningful **sanctions for human rights violations and an enforceable code of conduct for political parties**. This will ensure peace and give citizens confidence to participate freely in electoral processes in Zimbabwe, especially in political hot spots like Epworth, Chitungwiza, and Mbare.

Women specific

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- All political parties, supporters and the **public should desist from gender based violence** inflicted through hate speech, inflammatory language and cyber bullying.
- All stakeholders should collaborate to explore and **adopt measures to increase participation of women as candidates in future elections**. This also includes incrementally raising the number of women in leadership and decision making positions through appointment at other levels.

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