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A PEEP INTO THE SOURCES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION INERTIA IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF THE MATABELELAND ZAMBEZI WATER PROJECT (MZWP) IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

A century has passed since the idea of solving the chronic water woes of Bulawayo and Matabeleland region by constructing a 450km water pipeline from the Zambezi River to Bulawayo was initiated in 1912. The Project, when conceptualized, was expected to spur socioeconomic growth by creating a green belt of agricultural projects in the region. To date, the Project is yet to come to fruition. This study sought to unravel factors accounting for this policy inaction, drawing from implementing experiences in Africa and across the world. The study revealed a series of interlocking factors relating to the nature of the project, legal hitches, fiscal incapacity, and regionalization of the Project, among others. The bilateral route recently adopted by Government should be vigorously pursued. Government should also mobilize local funds through local public-private sector arrangements

Keywords: Matabeleland Zambezi water project, Policy implementation, Policy inaction, Implementation models

INTRODUCTION

Policies are not self-enforcing. Once a policy has been adopted, appropriate structures, processes, resources and attitudes should be marshaled to ensure speedy translation of adopted decisions into tangible deliverables. Policy implementation acts as the vehicle through which the allocation, distribution and stabilization functions of the state are executed. It directly impacts on socioeconomic growth and public welfare. It is thus an integral component of socioeconomic

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development. Policy implementation is inextricably linked to state politics. It takes place within a specific political milieu (Bryce, 2012; Kalu, 2004; Cleaves, 1980). It rests on power and interests and is in turn influenced by state politics. The play of politics in a polity can induce behavioral and decisional practices that are detrimental to effective policy implementation. Policy implementing agencies have to contend with forces emanating from their constituencies. The nature of an agency's constituency affects its power and capacity to implement policy decisions. Implied here is that policy implementing agencies need the cooperation and political support of their constituencies in order to effectively execute their mandates. Powerful social and political groupings can forge synergies to skew policy implementation to their advantage. Policy implementation also goes to the heart of who governs. Policies are implemented by state institutions. It is directly influenced by national leadership and governance practices. Implementation progress is a function of the political will of the national leadership to commit supportive infrastructure. Where the national leadership lacks a common shared vision, this communicates conflicting and confusing signals to policy implementers at all levels of government leading to policy stagnation.

Policy implementation has to be analyzed within specific institutional contexts. Public policies derive their source in the state domain. Policies are adopted and enforced by governments operating as institutional systems of the legislature, executive and judiciary. Once a policy has been adopted, the responsibility to implement it falls under a designated state agency. That agency has direct jurisdiction of the implementation of that policy. It logically follows that how that responsible agency is constituted in terms of structure, operating style, political support, financial reserves and organizational capacity, will invariably influence the way it implements that policy. Implementation of national policies should also be analyzed within the context of global dynamics. Unfolding global dynamics in the form of globalization, global terrorism, global warming, human trafficking, liberalization reforms, Third Way Politics, gender mainstreaming debates, the democratization wave, the HIV/ AIDs pandemic, Gun Control debates, death penalty debate, ITs, among others; have in many ways changed the terrain of policy implementation and enforcement across the world. Unfolding global dynamics have forced governments to adopt policy instruments and strategies that are deemed compliant with international conventions and practices.

Following the adoption of Liberalization and Economic Structural Adjustment Programmers (ESAPs), international bodied such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have become direct players in national fiscal and economic reform decision making and implementation (IMF, 2011, WB, 2012). They are directly involvement in programs aimed at strengthening tax systems, audit systems, and debt management systems, among others. They are directly involved in the enforcing of civil service and public enterprise sector reforms. The bombing of the Pentagon and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001 saw governments across the world enforcing stringent anti-terrorism policies. The democratization wave forced governments to prioritize and enforce best practices of good

governance, accountability, inclusiveness, transparency, independence and fairness in national policy systems. In the wake of the global gender discourse, gender mainstreaming mechanisms have been adopted and enforced in executive, legislative and judiciary structures of governments. Policies and Commissions specifically directed at enforcing and monitoring compliance with gender issues have also been adopted in most countries. The proposed new constitution of Zimbabwe (to be ratified at the Referendum scheduled for March 2013) has provision for the setting up of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (Government of Zimbabwe, The Final Draft of the Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe, 2013, 112).

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

Policy implementation is a post decision process. It follows after the adoption of a policy and is carried out on the basis of defined authority. The term policy implementation literally denotes executing, carrying out or accomplishing a task. Dunn, (1981) defines policy implementation as that “practical activity that brings the connection between the expression of governmental intention and actual result”. Within this conceptual framework, policy implementation serves as the bridge between policy espousal and policy delivery, translating policy intents into policy outcomes. This is echoed in Cloete *et al.* (2006) who define policy implementation as “the conversion of mainly physical and financial resources into concrete service delivery outputs in the form of facilities and services”. Quade, (1982) highlights the change dimension of policy implementation, defining it as “directed change that follows a policy mandate, the process of rearranging patterns of conduct so as to honor the prescriptions set forth in the decision”. Policy implementation entails behavioral changes. The changes are at the level of the targeted group and implementing agencies. A more embracing definition is provided by Edwards, (1980) cited in Makinde, (2005) who characterize policy implementation in terms of specific activities such as issuing and enforcing directives, disbursing funds, disseminating information, assigning and hiring personnel, creating organizational units, negotiating with private citizens, businesses, interest groups, legislative communities, bureaucratic units and even other countries. Policy implementation is cast as a complex process in which multiple public actors are involved in extensive negotiations with clients in the private sectors (Warwick, 1982). This conception reflects an inclusive view of policy implementation. The policy implementation frontier goes outside the traditional bureaucratic enclave.

These definitions point to a metamorphosis in the conception of policy implementation. Early conceptions reflect interventionist conceptions of policy implementation. Policy implementation was presumed to be the sole preserve of designated administrative agencies, largely entailing administrative choices. It was policy implementation within the bureaucratic enclave. It was the preserve of administrative authorities. The consensus then was that once a policy has been adopted, implementation would automatically follow. Policy implementation was supposedly frictionless.

This thinking was intellectually rooted in interventionist top-down models in which policy implementation and execution are projected as series of chains of commands in which political leaders articulate clear policy preferences which are then carried out by implementing officials as directly specified (Van and Van, 1975). Emphasis was on rigid compliance with set procedures and rules. Later generational definitions reflect an open systems and service delivery-view of policy implementation in which responsible implementing agencies directly liaise with diverse stakeholders in the proximate and global environment (O'Toole, 2000; Hagel and Brown, 2008; Bryce, 2012; deLeon and deLeon, 2002). Policy implementation processes are viewed as highly interactive and therefore inherently conflict-laden. There is emphasis on looking at policy implementation from the view of the target populations and the service deliverers. These conceptions animate espousals in bottom-up models. As explained by Howlett and Ramesh, (1995):

“the bottom-up approach starts with all the public and private actors involved in implementing programmes and examines their personal and organizational goals, their strategies and the network of contacts they have built, it then works its way upward to discover the goals, strategies and contacts of those involved in designing, financing and executing of programmers”.

This description is rooted in Smith's (1973) model which presents policy implementation as comprising four critical interlocking components: the idealized policy (the envisaged policy interactions), the target group (those directly affected by the policy and are expected to adopt new behavioral patterns), the implementation organization (the department/ministry responsible for policy implementation) and the environmental factors (the forces in the environment that influence or are influenced by the policy environment). Each variable is a potential zone of resistance or support. The model also argues that each policy has its own unique cultural, social, political and economic contexts. Policy implementation contexts serve as tension-generating forces in society. These tensions and conflicts are experienced by those who are implementing the policy and by those affected by the policy. Policy implementers have to contend with threats and opportunities arising from each of the four elements. Additional insights on policy implementation can also be gleaned in ambiguity/conflict models. As argued in these models, policy ambiguity is most certain where implementing strategies are uncertain about what roles various organizations play and when the environment makes it difficult to know which tools to use, how to use them and what their effects will be (Jones, 1975). Unpredictable socioeconomic environments complicate policy implementation. For instance, under the socioeconomic meltdown that engulfed Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2008, it was difficult to plan and implement decisions adopted in national budgets. The value of the dollar was declining by day which in turn led to changes in prices of goods and services. The political climate was also highly polarized that one could hardly predict what decisions would be adopted by the three arms of government. Under such conditions, decision makers rarely have time to consider the feasibility of policy implementation. The risk of policy implementation ambiguity is also high where there is a breakdown in rule of law. This is where

formal authority structures are ignored with impunity. These include constitutional provisions, legislative approvals and court decisions.

REVIEW OF GLOBAL EXPERIENCES

This section presents a synoptic review of implementation experiences in selected countries, the long range goal, being to sniff out structural and practical problems associated with policy implementation. Works by Makinde (2005), Ogolo (1997), Kalu (2004) and Zhou (2009) among others; throw useful insights into the trajectory of policy implementation in Africa. Makinde, (2005) shows how the interplay of politics and change of governments under coup circumstances impacted on the implementation of national programs in Nigeria. Noble programmes initiated under one regime were either abandoned midstream or changed by incoming governments in their bid to delink with previous governments. The Better Life Programme which was initiated by the First Lady during the Babangida regime was later changed to the Family Support Programme, following the ousting of Babangida in 1993 by General Sani Abacha.

In America, The No Child Left behind Act (NCLBA) was implemented to pressure the states and their public schools to improve the quality of public education and accountability in the use of federal funds by requiring an extensive testing program (Anderson, 2006). The testing was intended to ensure that by 2014 all students reach a level of academic proficiency set by their state. However, as observed by the author, despite a noticeable increase in the testing of public school students, programme impact on the quality of education was difficult to pin point. The project is at risk of being abandoned mid-stream because target beneficiaries as well as local and state officials were not consulted by the Department of Education in the implementation of regulations (Ibid: 214). There was also insufficient funding to cover the costs of expanded testing. The author refers to another American project, the Nuclear Waste Disposal Act (NWDA) which was enacted in a bid to handle the disposal of high level radioactive nuclear waste arising from the development of the commercial nuclear power industry. In 1987, the Congress unprocedurally passed legislation to make Yucca Mountain the waste disposal site. The project was approved by President George W Bush in 2002 that saw it as critical in expanding the nuclear power industry. As further explained by Anderson, President Barack Obama who had been critical of nuclear power during 2008 presidential campaign, moved in March 2009 to cut off most of the funding for the Yucca Mountain. In this scenario, change of leadership led to the reduction in funding which therefore impeded upon the successful implementation of the policy.

In South Africa, following the 1994 democratic elections in SA the reigning party African National Congress (ANC) identified language as an area in need of planning for post apartheid SA which was undergoing a transformation. Beukes, (2004) noted that policies were generated in aid of the government's reconstruction and development project, aimed at effecting radical social redress,

securing economic development and building a united nation. In 1993 there was the watershed Witwatersrand Conference on language planning for the future and it served as the bedrock for the enactment of language-related pieces of legislation such as the Pan South Africa Language Board Act 59 of 1995, the National Language Policy Framework of 2003, the Language in Education Policy-Government Notice No. 383 Vol 17997 and the Language Policy for Higher Education of 2002. Despite the language diversity in SA, governmental work (including Parliamentary deliberations) were conducted virtually entirely in English resulting in dwindling usage of indigenous languages by top political figures as well as academic institutions (Sunday Times, April 2004). As such, gaps between effective policy formulation and execution/ or delivery remained conspicuous. As argued by Beukes, 12 years after the publication of the final Langtan Report and five years after Cabinet approved the long awaited National Language Policy Framework (NLPF), it was evident that democratic language policy and planning had not realized its intended purposes. Policy implementation lagged behind policy espousal. Authorities paid token attention to the indigenous language issue. The language offices are under-funded and under-staffed thus militating against the proper implementation of the language policy in South Africa.

Another case in point was the adoption of the Inclusive Education Policy in South Africa. The apartheid regime in South Africa was exclusionary, racist, sexist, dogmatic, authoritarian, teacher-based, and perpetuating the status quo (Heugh, 1995). There was an asymmetrical distribution of opportunities between the black and the white communities, with the best opportunities being skewed towards the white race. Education was the preserve of the whites. The advent of a democracy in SA therefore ushered in refreshing changes within the SA context (Naicker, 2006). New policy interventions were introduced to address these apartheid hegemonies in the education sectors as in other sectors in that country. The Inclusive Education Policy was adopted to create a single education system for all learners. This was buttressed by the publication of the policy document Education White Paper 6 on Special Needs Education in 2001. The core thrust of the post apartheid education policy was to build an inclusive education and training system that was interventionist, adaptive, dynamic, creative, reflective and content specific. However, as argued by Naicker (2006), four years after the launch, several challenges and possibilities associated with the implementation of Inclusive Education in SA emerged. It was noted that bureaucrats and government officials paid scant attention to this policy thereby leading to crevices in the implementation thereof. There is still the perpetuation of some traces of the colonial medical model (which focused on the individual deficit theory that viewed the person as a helpless being and largely shaped and influenced by exclusive practices in the field of education).

OBSERVED SOURCES OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION INERTIA

A recurring issue in most literature is that policy implementation should not be taken for granted (Lindblom, 1988; Bardach, 1977; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973). They can be more problem-

generating than problem-solving. As argued by cited in Makinde, (2005), “policy implementation can be the graveyard of policy where the intentions of the designer of policies are often undermined by the constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration”. Underlined here is that the bureaucracy has discretionary space to maim policy implementation. The bureaucracy is not a neutral play. It has its own embedded interests, which do not necessarily coincide with those of the political executive. Policy implementation is further complicated by the fact those who implement policies are not necessarily those originally involved in their crafting and determination. Bardach, (1977) also adds that “it is hard to implement them in a way that pleases anyone at all including the supposed beneficiaries”. In practice, there is always lack of consensus on what constitutes successful implementation and what constitute decisive success variables.

Cleaves, (1980) uses the term “policy problematique” to characterize the complexities of policy implementation. These complexities are policy specific. They vary from policy to policy. They depend on the nature of the policy. As argued by Edwards (p:1), “if a policy is inappropriate, if it cannot alleviate the problem for which it was designed, it will probably be a failure no matter how well it is implemented”. Pressman and Wildavsky, (1973) identifies six elements that animate the policy problematique They include the technicality of the policy, the degree of changes required, size of the target group, the nature of goals and the duration of policy implementation. Policies that are technically simple, that require marginal changes, that have few clearly delineated goals and targets and are implemented within short durations tend to be less problematic as the risk of error and policy resistance is low note. Long time frames raise the risk of change in goals, actors, management and operational variables (Bunker, 1973). Policies that involve new institutional arrangements, new technology, non incremental in nature and involve larger and more diverse targeted groups are more difficult to coordinate. For Bardach, (1977) cited in Quade, (1982), the challenges are even worse where implementation processes are dominated “by many actors all maneuvering with and against each other both for end results and strategic advantages”. Such maneuverings usually lead to resource diversion and deflection of goals, deviations in implementation paths, inconsistencies in policy communication and disagreements among implementing agencies (Honig, 2011; Roos, 1974; Edwards, 1980).

Policies that call for political, security and human rights reforms tend to be more intractable. They usually court the resistance of those benefitting from the status quo. So are policies that seek to enforce changes in ownership patterns. Zhou, (2011) details the intractability of enforcing issues of broadening shareholding in public sector institutions. Such policies are even more intractable when they involve the indigenization of foreign owned property holdings. The controversy currently dogging the implementation of the land reforms and the indigenous economic empowerment policies in Zimbabwe should be understood within these contexts. Policies that have over-ambitious goals and targets are also more difficult to implement because they impose financial demands that are beyond the fiscal capacity of governments. This was witnessed in Zimbabwe

when Government introduced the Basic Commodity Supply-Side Intervention (BACOSSI) programme which was aimed at providing the citizenry with basic commodities at highly subsidized prices. The issue of over ambitious goals and targets also led to the abandonment of the Health for All by 2000, Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) (1991-1995), the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) 1996-2000, Education-for-All, just to mention a few. Policies that are hastily crafted to meet externally prescribed targets, crafted at independence to redress colonially-induced imbalances, or formulated under highly polarized political environments, tend to have ambitious flares.

Edwards, (1980) cited in Makinde, (2005) explains the policy implementation conundrum within the context of “critical factors”, cited as communication, resources, dispositions or attitudes, bureaucratic structure and changes in governments. Clear communication of information and directives are seen as critical ingredients for effective policy implementation while inconsistent dissemination of information sends conflicting and confusing signals to policy implementers. Zhou, (2012) observed that conflicting and confusing directives stifled, delayed and even distorted policy implementation in the inclusive government of Zimbabwe from 2009-2013. Embezzlement and swindling of funds targeted towards policy implementation (Venter and Johnston, 1991) also debilitates policy implementation. Huge amounts earmarked for particular projects may disappear under unclear and often untraceable circumstances. Bureaucratic structures also have a direct bearing on policy implementation. Large and often cumbersome bureaucracies characterized by red tapism might lead to delays in the transmission of implementation directives. Quade, (1982) aptly captures the challenges thus:

The implementation process may be modified by the organization responsible for carrying it out, pressured by rival agencies, constrained by the courts, repudiated by the public, resisted by those who must change their patterns of behavior, or otherwise frustrated that it does not accomplish what was intended. It should also be noted that at the implementation fronts, policy constellations rarely unfold as anticipated.

THE CASE STUDY: THE MATABELELAND ZAMBEZI WATER PROJECT IN ZIMBABWE

Background

The Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (MZWP) is a national project whose origin can be traced as far back as 1912, that is during the colonial era. The project entails constructing a 450km water pipeline from the Zambezi River Basin to the city of Bulawayo. The idea was taken over by the new Black Zimbabwean government in 1980 and has over the three decades been a visible policy agenda item attracting animated debates across the national divide. Matabeleland region is one of the semi-arid and drought-prone regions of Zimbabwe. It is geographically located in national

regions 4 and 5. It comprises three provinces, namely, the Matabeleland South, the Matabeleland North and the Bulawayo Metropolitan. The region faces perennial problems of water shortage-circumstances that blighted and stunted investment and industrial growth in Bulawayo and the region over the decades. Companies have also been relocating from the Bulawayo to Harare and other cities. Bulawayo has been home to water rationing dating as far back as 1938. According to), the growth in population, mining activities and agricultural activities worsened water shortages in the city of Bulawayo. Feasibility studies on the use of water from the Zambezi were carried out in 1955, 1966, and 1980 (Report by the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources Development, 1987). The 1966 studies resulted in the plan to pump water from Katombora rapids onto the watershed between the Zambezi and Matetsi River, several kilometers north of Tsholotsho. The idea of the MZWP therefore arose from the need to find long lasting solutions to the chronic water problems of Bulawayo (the second capital city of Zimbabwe) and Matabeleland region as a whole. The project is therefore at the core of national development in Zimbabwe. It is of historical, economic and political significance to the nation. If successfully implemented, it is envisaged to spur socioeconomic growth by creating a green belt of agricultural projects in the region.

Implementation framework

Its implementation plan envisages the building of the Gwayi-Shangani Dam as the first stage of the project. Construction of the dam (which is expected to serve as the project reservoir), rolled out in 2004 and is currently half-way under construction. The dam is expected to supply water to nearby communities, supply water to Bulawayo and also provide opportunities for irrigation along the route. This should be followed by connecting a pipeline from the Zambezi River to Gwayi-Shangani Dam in a bid to expand dam water volume. The last stage of the project entails drawing water from Bulawayo through a pipeline or a canal to Beitbridge. The project, upon completion, should also be able to have pipelines servicing areas that include Kadoma, Kwekwe, Gweru and Plumtree. In this way, although the project, by name designation appears to be confined to Matabeleland region, benefit streams flow to areas beyond the region.

The implementation trajectory

Although the MZWP is yet to make meaningful progress, this should not be taken to mean that there were no other efforts directed towards alleviating the water problem in the region. Insiza dam, built in 1976, had its wall level increased in 1991. In 1992, the Nyamandlovu Acquifer pipeline and 50 boreholes were sunk in Nyamandhlovu area to augment existing water supplies in Bulawayo. Several feasibility studies were also undertaken to determine cost effective means of solving the water problems of the region. In the 1990s, the University of Zimbabwe in liaison with two universities in Norway, undertook feasibility investigations directed at recharging the Nyamandlovu Aquifers. The Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) also undertook water resources assessments that sought to find feasible options for addressing prioritized options for the Zambezi River Water Basin (ZRA Annual Report, 2007). Attempts were also made at

strengthening the institutional framework of the Project. The Zambezi River Authority (ZRA) was formed in 1987 through a parallel legislation in the parliaments of Zambia and Zimbabwe (Annual Report of the Zambezi River Authority, 1995). The aim was to achieve the greatest possible benefit from the efficient utilization of the abundant waters of the Zambezi River.

Advocacy for the Project has expanded over the years to include stakeholders such as the Matabeleland Action Group, all local councils in Matabeleland North, the Matabeleland South and Bulawayo Province, the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce, the Zimbabwe Farmers Union and Commercial Farmers Union. There is a Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project Trust (MZWPT), chaired by Dumiso Dabengwa, a high profile politician and former government minister. However, the fact that the Trust is headed by a man who is outside government and the ruling political party structures may also act as its undoing. Dumiso Davengwa is the president of ZAPU, a breakaway political party from ZANU PF (a party formed out of the union between former ZANU PF and ZAPU PF).

Financial constraints

The MZWP was dogged by financial constraints since inception. Review of experiences before and after independence suggest that while other intervening factors may have been at play, the issue of financial constraints was the most decisive. In the colonial era, the then Administrator of Southern Rhodesia had rejected the proposal on the ground that the estimated cost of £6 000 was far beyond the county's fiscal capacity. Another proposal presented in 1932 during the reign of Prime Minister Godfrey Huggins (known as Lord Malvern) was also rejected on the basis that financial costs (which had increased to £60 000 from £6 000) were unsustainable. In the 1950s, Prime Minister Edward Whitehead had also rejected the Project on the basis that the estimated cost of £600 000 was not be justifiable. After independence, pressure mounted from the local councils of Matabeleland Region to implement the MZWP whose financial costs stood around ZW \$60 million . A Swedish Report of 1995 cited by the *Business Chronicle* of 11 January 1995 estimated that around ZW \$6.5 billion was needed for the completion of the project. By 2000, as argued by in an article published in the *Daily News* of 18 December 2001, the costs were estimated to be around ZW \$20 billion. By 2001, the estimated costs of the project had escalated to ZW \$27.5 billion (*Daily News*, 26 July 2001). Dube, (2004) in the article, "Government sidelines Trust, Takes Charge of Water Project," published in the *Zimbabwe Independent* of 26 March of 2004, indicated that the costs of the project at that time were ZW \$30 billion. In 2007 the estimated cost of the project was US\$600 million and by 2009, project costs were estimated to be around US\$1.2 billion.

The impression is that while the Project has been receiving some funding under the Government Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), has generally been intermittent and way below expected support. The Project has not received any visible prioritized over other national water projects. It has had to compete for funding with other national water projects such as the Kunzwi

and Mukorsi dams. In some cases, the later projects enjoying more media coverage than the MZWP. Budgetary support for the Project worsened during the socioeconomic meltdown between 2004 and 2008. The post 2009 saw some visible efforts towards rolling out the stalled project, despite severe fiscal space limitations. The 2010 National Budget allocated US 7 million for the construction of the Mutshabezi pipeline. The 2012 National Budget allocated \$8 million to Gwayi-Shangani Dam (p: 138). In 2012 The Mtshabezi Water Project started pumping water to Bulawayo. The construction of a water treatment plant at Bubi-Lupane is nearing completion (<http://www.chronicle.co.zw>). The Look East Policy adopted by Government in early 2000 has also generated some windfall for the MZWP. In 2003, the Gwayi-Shangani Dam was allocated US\$500 by the Government under the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). A contract under the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) was signed with a Chinese company. In 2012, Government secured US\$1.2 billion funding for the Project from the Chinese government. by January 2013, the contractor for the project, China International Water and Electric, had moved on site, clearing the access roads, paving the way for the actual construction of the dam wall. The project is expected to be completed in 36 months (3 years) (<http://www.chronicle.co.zw>).

Legal constraints

Project implementation also faces legal hurdles. The Zambezi River Basin is shared by Zimbabwe and Zambia and other SADC countries such as Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia. Zimbabwe has to seek water drawing rights from six of these riparian states. This entails signing and ratifying the Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM) Protocol. Four of these countries have already signed and ratified the Protocol while three only signed and are yet to ratify. Zambia is yet to either sign or ratify the Protocol. Zambia argues that since seventy five per cent (75%) of the Basin lies in Zambia, Zimbabwe is obliged (in terms of the interstate Agreement with Zambia signed in 1987), to inform Zambia of any proposals to extract water from the Zambezi or any of its tributaries. Zimbabwe also has to comply with international agreements such as the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources and the United Nations Conventions on Human Environment.

State Politics

Issues of politics also feature prominently in the NMZWP project discourse. There is a strong view that delays in its implementation are due to the politicization of the project. The Project is a political trump card to those in the region and those in government. in an article published in the 11 February 2002 *Zimbabwe_Independent* refers to MZWP authorities accusing politicians of hijacking the project for political pursuits. The article quotes a senior authority saying “The problem bedeviling the MZWP is that it has been politicized and politicians are always raising people’s hopes to no avail. People should expect more false promises as we approach another election.” The impression, as gleaned from this statement, is that there is more of policy rhetoric than policy action. The project remains on the national agenda, not because there is felt need to

implement it, but for political expediency. For those who subscribe to this thinking, the project talk is conveniently resuscitated around election times. These see delays in project implementation as part of a political conspiracy to bleed the Matabeleland region.

Regionalization of the Project

The discourse around the implementation of this Project has been mired in tribal/regional politics. Those who subscribe to these views argue that the problems which have dogged this Project lie embedded in the name of the Project. The name MZWP conveys an unfortunate regional bias. The name is very vulnerable to tribal or ethnic abuse. It sends the unfortunate impression that it is regional project whose implementation is the responsibility of the residents of the region when in actual fact it is a national project whose successful implementation largely hinges on support from the government. These views may not be far off the mark given the recent change of the name to National Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project. The name of the Trust (Matabeleland Zambezi Water Trust) should also be cleansed of the said vulnerabilities. It should be reconstituted into a national Trust-run by a body appointed by the State. The Trust should not be seen to be linked to any political party. These subtle and soft matters, though often not openly expressed, are in practice very decisive in influencing the attitudes and decisions of the political leadership. Perceptions do matter in both politics and public decision making. The issues discussed above may also account for the perceived lack of 'political will' at the government level. Regional based political parties, civic organizations and pressure groups have been more than government structures in calling for the speedy implementation of the project. Views expressed by these groups generally gravitate around claims of marginalization of the region.

The nature of the project

Policy implementation is also affected by the way the policy itself is constituted in terms goals and targets. The MZWP is a highly ambitious project. It is a highly capital intensive project whose budgetary requirements proved beyond the capacity of both pre and post colonial governments. It entails constructing a 450 km pipeline from the Zambezi River Basin to Bulawayo, an undertaking which critics liken to a 'belief that oil can ooze from a rock' (<http://www.bulawayo24.com>). The solution to the water woes of the Matabeleland region does not necessarily lie in drawing water from the Zambezi but in accessing water sources that lie within the fiscal capacity of the nation. It should also be borne in mind that drawing water from the Zambezi River Basin means high water charge rates for the consumers because the source will be 450 km away. These call for a shift to other feasible sources of water, adding that the central issue is water rather than where it is coming from. Among the cited possible feasible sources of water is Manyuchi dam (third largest in ranking). This dam by virtue of being 196 km from Bulawayo will prove a more cost effective source of water than the Zambezi River Basin, which is 450 km from Bulawayo. Other feasible alternative sources include drilling more boreholes, renovation of the 56 km pipeline from Mtshabezi Dam, building dams at Gwayi-Umguza or Gwayi- Khami confluence which are nearer

to Matabeleland. These views, though not publicly acknowledged, may in practice, be enjoying some audience within government circles.

Closely related to the above is the seemingly lack of nationally shared on the way forward regarding this Project. Project objectives have been clearly articulated and sufficiently sold to the nation. There is lack of clear set time frames. Clear time frames on the completion of the project help in instilling discipline and commitment to the integral objectives of the project. There is also a perception that politics is stifling project implementation. According to this thread of reasoning, the Project idea has remained on the national agenda without visible implementation progress for political expediency. The Project is a political good that can be conveniently resuscitated during elections. The plan, according to these arguments, is to keep the people pipeline dream burning through policy rhetoric. Politicians seize the opportunity to canvass for votes under the guise of bringing water to the region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

The idea of harnessing water from the Zambezi River Basin as a permanent solution to the chronic water shortages of Bulawayo and the Matabeleland region can be traced as far back as 1912. The idea received government support after independence. The MZWP envisages constructing a 450 km water pipeline from the Zambezi River Basin to Bulawayo. It is a beneficial project which is set to benefit the whole nation through employment creation, farming, fishing and tourism. It is indeed a noble idea given the blight in investment and industrial growth experienced in Bulawayo and the region since independence in 1980. Notwithstanding these potential benefit streams, the Project is yet to make a visible take off. It has been dogged by inaction. Interlocking factors are at play, with fiscal incapacity among the most decisive factors both during and after the colonial era. The Project is also stalled by legal hurdles. The Zambezi River Basin is shared by Zimbabwe and Zambia and other SADC countries such as Namibia, Angola, Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia. Zimbabwe has to seek water drawing rights from six of these riparian states by signing and ratifying the Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM) Protocol. While other countries have either signed or simply ratified this Protocol, Zambia is yet to either sign or ratify this Protocol. Zambia's signature and ratification is critical because 75 % of the River Basin falls within its territory.

The Project was also caught up in the regional and tribal politics of the nation. It has been politicized and has become a trump card for political gladiators within and outside the region. There is a perception within some elements of the political leadership in Matabeleland region that the Project is a regional issue. Those who subscribe to this view have tended to view direct involvement government as intrusive. The Project is their political card for marketing the regional

marginalization conspiracy. For some politicians from outside the region, the Project is a political good which they conveniently resuscitate around election times. This, it may be argued, accounts for more of the policy rhetoric than policy action that has characterized the Project. There is also lack of national consensus on the way forward. There is a perception within and outside government circles that the Project is not feasible and that more effort and resources should be channeled towards other cost effective means of solving the water woes of Bulawayo and the region.

Recommendations

Perceptions and attitudes matter in politics and project implementation. All efforts directed towards this Project should reflect a national face. This national focus should be reflected in the name of the Project as well as the Trust (Board) that is responsible for the mobilization of funds. The change in the name of the Project from Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (MZWP) to National Matabeleland Water Project is development in the right direction. It has given a national face to the Project, while critics may dismiss it as inconsequential, is indeed critical in harnessing the national conscience towards the Project. The Project has been struggling to justify its national claims. This development should be concretized by involving all relevant government institutions and stakeholders, within and outside Matabeleland region.

The study established that the Project is a highly capital intensive project whose financial demands are well beyond the fiscal capacity of a single state. Although the Project was mooted way back in 1912, both pre and post governments have failed to finance its implementation. It is recommended that government take the bilateral route. It should seek funding from the international community. The bilateral arrangement entered between the Government and Chinese Exim Bank which pledged US\$1.2 billion to sponsor the first of the three projects is indeed a positive development. This would have gone a long way in reducing fiscal stress. Had this stance been taken in the early years of independence or during the colonial era, significant progress could have been registered by now. Government should also engage local Public-Private Partnerships in other smaller projects like the revival of the Mtshabezi pipeline, drawing water from Manyuchi dam (which is 190 km away from Bulawayo), drilling of boreholes in the Nyamandlovu Aquifers, among others. This supplementary route is critical in case the bilateral route flounders. There is also need to reconstitute the organizational machinery for executing this Project. It should be run by a government- run Trust, working closely with relevant government ministries and agencies. The NMWP is well beyond the institutional capacity of the ZINWA.

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