



POLITICISATION OF DEVELOPMENT BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS: A CASE OF ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) are by nature very strong networks that seek to represent the interests of their members till they either win or compromise. These organisations have no defined life-span and can exist for as long as their grievance exists. Because of the influence that these organisations wield in society, they tend to spearhead most of the developmental programmes in society. However, most of them have also chosen either deliberately or otherwise to manipulate the original mandate of impartially and objectively serving the people in times of need. Civil Society Organisations have politicised development and related programmes for various reasons; to discredit the government in power, show of strength resource-wise, vote buying and undermining the constitution but all, for political mileage. As result, while development fails to reach its desired expectations, the intended beneficiaries also lose out. It is therefore the intention of this paper to look at the politicisation of development in Zimbabwe by the CSO community. (160 Words)

Key Words: Civil society organisations, Politicisation, Development

INTRODUCTION

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) are groupings of people with common desires and in common settings who wish to fulfil a common agenda independent of the state. Shaw (1996) defines civil society as a sphere of association in society independent of the state, involving a network of institutions through which society and groups represent themselves in cultural, ideological and political senses. These could include amongst others the following; mass-based membership organizations, social movements, volunteer organisations, non-governmental organizations, indigenous peoples' organisations, and community-based organisations, including communities and

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individuals or collective citizens, rural, agricultural, and faith-based or human rights movements. CSOs are all over the world regardless of the level of development in a given community. In some instances, CSOs are established to campaign for the protection of wealth and properties by a small section of the community while the majority might be organising another CSO to fight the selfishness of the minority class. Typical cases could be those of the residential areas' Neighbourhood Watch Committees that are meant to police the areas against criminal activities purportedly by those of the lower class who might have their own Neighbourhood Development Committees meant to improve their welfare.

The existence of civil society organisations in Zimbabwe has been guided by legislation since the colonial era. During the colonial era the Welfare Organisations Act (WOA) of 1967 was aimed at controlling the operations of organisations suspected to be linked to the liberation movement and campaigning for human rights in the then Rhodesia now Zimbabwe (Saki, 2010). The WOA has since been repealed to Private Voluntary Organisations Act of 2002. CSOs are mainly defined by the fact that they are often a result of grass-roots initiatives seeking to bring social changes. However, there are instances when these CSOs divert from their agenda and meddle in politics so much so that their development cause loses meaning. It is this politicisation of development agenda that this paper endeavours to discuss with a view to establishing the eventual consequences both to the intended recipients and the CSO themselves. The discussion is informed by the Politicisation of Growth theory which looks at the influence of politics, policy and institutional arrangements on entrepreneurship, innovation, investment and community development.

There are various types of CSOs that operate in Zimbabwe in the area of development and their objectives depend on the reason for their formation and their *modus operandi*. This discussion will narrow down to those organisations that were into food distribution both in the urban and rural areas between year 2000 and 2010³. The discussion precisely focused on CSOs⁴ that are not-for-profit and are grass-root-initiated contrary to those NGOs that splash around resources courtesy of their financiers' liberalism. This clarification follows Hutter and O'Mahony (2004) who defined Civil Society as broad and inclusive of NGOs, charities, Trusts Foundations, advocacy groups, national and international non-state associations, which are all particular types of organisations within civil society. Food distribution in this paper will also cover those organisations that were into the provision of agricultural inputs like seed since it also falls within the food bracket.

BACKGROUND

Since Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980, there has been an additional hand in the provision of food to the needy people. This practice had been entrenched into the system by the donor community as a way of amicably resettling and reintegrating all demobilised former liberation combatants. Besides, Zimbabwe as a third world country deserved that support till it attained some level of development. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

The donor and civil society community have always been there for the people especially during severe droughts experienced in 1982, 1992 and 2002. Various organisations had become traditional free food suppliers to the needy especially in the rural communities averting hunger, starvation and potential conflicts. However, the 1999 Land Reform programme brought problems over employment, food and the general insecurity owing to political, economic and social polarisation that had been created by a stand-off between the majority government and the minority white capitalists. Resultantly, over three million Zimbabweans crossed into South Africa in search of descent lives and food; the majority of the remaining population faced serious starvation; maternal mortality tripled; cholera epidemic infected over 90,000 people, killing over 4,000; one in five adults were HIV positive, and one person dies every four minutes from AIDS and 94% of the population is officially unemployed (Fournier and Whittall, 2009). Most suburbs of Harare such as Budiriro and Mufakose which were the epicentre of the 2008/09 cholera outbreak and others; Glen Norah, Gunhill, Ruwa, Highlands, Mandara, Chisipite, Waterfalls, Borrowdale, Greendale and Hatcliffe, Mabvuku and Tafara last had consistent running water in 2006. Residents have since resorted to shallow and unprotected wells for domestic water while United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF) had to establish boreholes, water tanks and mobile water facilities in most of these residential areas.

Poverty on the part of the government forced it to allow too many organisations to move in with the intention to help with food hand-outs. These NGOs have taken advantage of a flexible and allowing legislation and people's desperation to manipulate the people's minds and way of living. CSOs expected to act as watchdogs have also diverted from their original and noble agenda and have tended to side with the international NGOs and their financiers. It must be noted that the various types of CSOs are distinguishable between urban-based, urban interest organizations and rural-based, rural interest organizations, the concerns and strategies of these associations and organisations are the same; provision of some basic services or facilities, engaging in other wider fund-raising activities, or lobbying politicians and governments to provide these.

Contemporary civil society is urban based but not necessarily restricted to urban issues. Its effectiveness today is tied up with the nature of the issues with which it is concerned; thus wider social justice or democratization issues have broader constituencies and tends to have a larger impact than narrower, spatially specific urban management issues. This larger impact has been experienced in the struggle for democratization and multi-partyism in a wide range of countries; Malawi, Togo, Benin, Kenya, Mali, Zambia, and Tanzania. Other determinants of the effectiveness of activities of civil societies include the role of leaders, their linkages with both the grass roots and the elite, the extent of the threat they pose to established interests, their links with effective power blocs both locally and internationally, and their capacity to manage and sustain protests

It has been observed that amongst some of the reasons for politicisation of programmes, top on the list is the presence of a repressive government under which Chabal and Daloz (1999) cite Uganda, Ethiopia, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Eritrea and Zimbabwe. These, employ the following strategies to frustrate CSOs; making registration expensive or burdensome; discretion over registration; delaying registration decisions; and requiring continuous registration, creating a leeway for the government to determine which CSO comes back on board (*ibid*). However, Libya did not, during the late and former President Muammar Gaddafi's era allow any CSO to operate.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement with civil society organisations is important for democratic governance, national ownership of development processes, and the quality and relevance of official development projects and agenda. This is in view of the fact that Civil Society Organisations at national level have developed capacity, efficiency and influence in a range of development areas. According to Dodo⁵, their effectiveness is evidenced by the fact that CSOs are less bound by rules, traditions, interests and procedures than government departments. CSOs can also go against public opinion, as they are not bound by constituencies like how politicians are. They are single-issue organizations thus affording them time and resources to concentrate on a single issue without compromise. CSOs also become effective by virtue of their independence from business interests and government influence. According to United Nations Development Programme (2010), this affords them moral and professional authority. In developing areas CSOs can be valuable partners for government and business agencies. They can provide vital linkages between local communities and funding agencies because both partners trust CSOs (*ibid*). Similarly, these organisations' ability to provide with feedback and their accessibility to information and the capacity to store, manage and disseminate information, makes them more effective. Mobility and swiftness are crucial resources for CSOs in positioning themselves in the area of development. Unlike public officials, CSOs are not accountable to an electorate; this kind of independence gives them freedom, flexibility and space, which is a comparative advantage in community development, (Robinson and Friedman, 2005). Therefore, partnering with them helps contribute to the effectiveness of development interventions, to marginalized and vulnerable groups.

CSOs are strong advocates of change in the way donors provide development assistance, and are active partners around issues related to the United Nations' Paris Declaration of 2005 and the Accra Agenda for Action of 2008. The former provides for a practical, action-centred roadmap to improve the quality of aid and its impact on development through; ownership harmonisation and alignment of the programmes, mutual accountability and development with results. The latter accounts for progress and sets the agenda for enhanced advancement towards the Paris targets through; ownership of programmes, inclusive partnership by all stakeholders and delivering programmes with results, (Brown and Jagadananda, 2007). They also facilitate the participation of the poor and vulnerable populations in the design and implementation of development policies and

programmes, and enhance the delivery of basic social services, such as health and education and play a watchdog role in public life. CSOs have a proven capacity for broad-based mobilization and creation of a bottom-up demand that fosters responsive governance. The 2011 'Wind of Change' in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Malawi and Swaziland are clear real life examples of the power within CSOs.

POLITICISED CASES

Inspiration is derived from events that have happened on the ground in various provinces in Zimbabwe pertaining CSOs that deliberately or otherwise chose to politicise developmental projects and programs at the expense of the intended beneficiaries. This was achieved through misinterpreting either government or CSO's policy regarding the provision of service or deliberately aligning with one political ideology in a community with mixed political beliefs. This, at the end of the day disadvantaged those of a weaker or minority political ideology. The drought that hit Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2002 had provided the CSOs and their international handlers an opportunity to influence voters to shift their political allegiance, (Chigodo, 2002). However, according to Chigodo, this backfired in Insiza district when ruling ZANU-PF youths allegedly confiscated some of the food aid and distributed it themselves forcing the civil society organisations that were involved in the programme to suspend their operations in that area.

In 2002, though investigations by the European Union and the United Nations on the politicisation of food aid failed to come up with a single case of food politicisation, several reports have been cited through-out the country especially in the rural areas where people needed food the most. Some CSOs have been using aid to influence political events in the country forcing the Government to censure voluntary movements operating in the country. Young Men Christian Association and Young Women's Christian Association (YMCA and YWCA), were some of the most prominent CSOs that believed that whatever programme that they had needed to be associated with politics as a way of discriminating against the other groups in society, (Sanvee⁶, 2008). In some low-income residential areas of Harare, the two associations would allegedly distribute clothing wares and food to some classes of the society mainly based on their political affiliation, (ibid). During the 2000 Zimbabwe Parliamentary election, the 2002 Presidential election, 2002 Local Government elections, 2005 Senatorial elections and the 2006 Parliamentary elections, YWCA hostels in Westwood were, according to Sanvee (2008), used to accommodate either activists of the opposition political parties or victims of the ZANU PF perpetrated political violence. In cases when state security agencies moved in to enquire, the associations would cry foul and allege that the government was interfering with charity cause. In most cases, this would leave the government between hard rocks but that would not deter members of the hard power from persecuting innocent and defenceless citizens.

In Matebeleland provinces, during the 2000 Referendum through to the 2002 Presidential plebiscite, an organisation called Organisation of Rural Associations for Progress⁷ had started to

discriminate against members of the ruling ZANU PF party. Apparently the province is dominated by the opposition parties; Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)- Morgan Tsvangirai and Welshman Ncube factions respectively. The CSOs in the area have been quite and seemed happy about it contrary to the people's expectations.

Elsewhere, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) has also failed to deliver justice on the ground by either failing to stand for the desires of all citizens or deliberately discriminating in the conduct of its workshops and seminars on household food management. It was quite noticeable during the implementation of its household food management programme, that some provinces allegedly aligned to some political ideology were being isolated. Cases in point are Mashonaland Central and East provinces did not benefit while Midlands and the Matebeleland provinces benefited. Apparently, the Mashonaland provinces are known to be ZANU PF strongholds while the latter two provinces are pro-opposition.

Children of War Veterans Association (CWVA), an off-shoot from the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) and mainly active in Harare and Bulawayo has championed the provision of food aid to destitute dependants of the deceased ZNLWVA members in the two cities. Bulawayo and Harare cities are polarised politically so much so that there are areas that are known to be no-go zones for other political followers. Therefore attempting to mobilise all needy citizens regardless of their political allegiance to such no-go zones like the ZANU PF headquarters in Harare or the Davies Hall in Bulawayo may be the most polite way of discriminating against those of a different belief. This has been CWVA's modus operandi. Resultantly, according to the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare (MHCW) officials⁸, cases of malnutrition in the cities did not really go down as expected given the food hand-outs that would have been availed. Similarly, cases of school children absenteeism owing to hunger and illnesses did not also improve despite reports of food distribution to the need in the cities. This was revealed by officials in the Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture⁹ who indicated that dependants of some prominent figures in the opposition politics were deliberately left out despite their needy status.

The Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA) is also on record for politicising its programmes meant to avail food and other social amenities to the people in Harare. Since the coming on board of the MDC in 1999, CHRA has acted as an appendage of the former. This position has compromised its objectivity so much so that it has by all means possible tried to isolate non-MDC sympathisers from benefiting from its programmes. Such programmes include the provision of safe water and food hand-outs to residents especially in the low income suburbs. Harare Residents Trust has remained mum with the local authorities following severe water shortages in Harare stretching way back to 2006. While the Trust could have voiced and possibly sued the city fathers over non-provision of water as a basic requirement, it chose to remain quite solely to expose some stakeholders and authorities. Apparently, Harare City Council is under the

administration of the opposition political party (MDC-T) and according to www.insiderzim.com, the ruling party (ZANU PF) would want the systems to go to the dogs for electioneering purposes. On the other hand, MDC-T officials would also want the City to sink so that the government could be blamed ahead of an election. All the stakeholders do not seem to remember the 2008/09 cholera outbreak and its downstream effects.

Organisations called Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe (FCTZ) and Farm Orphanage Support Trust (FOST) had their officials operating in Mashonaland Central province sanctioned following cases where they were availing financial and material support to Community Based Organisations (CBO) that they deemed to be anti-government. Through local authorities in Mazowe, Bindura, Mt Darwin, Rushinga, Shamva and Guruve Rural District Councils (RDC), women and youths were urged to come up with small to medium income-generating projects for possible funding. Those groups vetted to be 'ideal' qualified for food and other material support.

In Bulawayo and Harare Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) and Men of Zimbabwe Arise (MOZA) organisations that are known to be pro-opposition politics have also deliberately discriminated against sympathisers of the ruling regime in their programmes. According to Ncube (2008), these groupings have always mobilised their manpower or resource beneficiaries from a database that they drew up during their initial anti-government programmes. Therefore, any needy person who would not have participated in their anti-regime protests does not qualify for aid.

The Zimbabwe Farmers' Union (ZFU), whose agenda is to spearhead the interests of indigenous farmers has also been leading in the politicisation of development programmes in the rural and newly created farming settlements¹⁰, (Sachikonye, 2004). ZFU largely made up of pro-land reformers who happen to be pro-government supporters has campaigned for the development of these newly created farming settlements ahead of the old ones where public information has it that most anti-land reformers are settled. The Union has ensured that the distribution of agricultural inputs is biased towards those pro-government. In most rural districts, qualification for these resources is simply the production of a political party membership card. What has then happened in other situations is that those pro-government might be ill-resourced in terms of machinery and know-how and may not be as productive as those who are anti-government. This has adversely affected agricultural programmes and its productivity. Closely akin to ZFU politicisation is the Zimbabwe Commercial Farmers' Union (ZCFU), whose mandate is to represent the interests of commercial farmers within the rural and the newly created farming zones. ZCFU has also campaigned for the development of infrastructure like roads, dams, boreholes, service centres and schools in these new settlements ahead of the old settlements. ZCFU has always argued that the new farmers need to be empowered just as much as the old settlements were empowered for the past 20 years after 1980's independence. Besides, they also argue that the main reason for waging a struggle for liberation was to reclaim land from the colonialists hence the need to prioritise these new settlements development-wise. This is in spite of the fact that most new farmers are pro-government and it is one of the several ways of paying back for the votes that they extend to

ZANU PF. It is important to highlight the fact that most resettlement areas are ZANU PF strongholds given that one's qualification for land was membership to ZANU PF. By and large, it is safe to conclude that food production and provision and infrastructure development have been highly politicised.

According to some political analysts¹¹, politicisation of development and other programmes by the CSOs was a direct response to political youth violence against both members of the CSOs and members of the society. During the previous Zimbabwe election campaign periods of 2000 Parliamentary, 2002 Presidential, 2005 Senatorial, 2006 Parliamentary and the 2008 Harmonised elections, the environment was characterised by extreme polarisation so much so that CSO programmes were temporarily suspended despite time-frames to be adhered to. That situation then drove the CSOs to politicise their programmes, to some degree as a retaliatory measure. Such incidents were witnessed in 2008 in Shamva, Mt Darwin, Buhera and Harare areas.

De-politicisation of Development

The Zimbabwe government has always claimed that most CSO activities, especially in the area of good governance and democracy, appear not to be in the economic interests of the state, public order and public safety. Therefore, it has put in place these security laws; Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Criminal Law Reform and Codification Act (the Code). The government has repeatedly urged the CSOs to refrain from unethical behaviours in the discharge of their duties. To some extent, this is being enforced through the legislation cited above which attracts various penalties like de-registration, imprisonment, fine, or suspension.

On the other hand, the CSOs have also blamed the government for politicising development for ulterior motives. Through workshops, seminars and dialogue with government officials, the CSOs have tried to convince the government to realise that it is some of its agencies and officials who have repeatedly politicised development and related programmes. It has been observed in various instances that stakeholders would want to derive mileage out of programmes that are supposed to be charity work. It is this mileage that has motivated various players to want to politicise development. To attend to this scourge, it may be important that organisations believe in collectivism as a cornerstone for development and success.

Strategies for Development

Whilst we have noted that both CSOs and the government have been on each other's toes trying to win the people's hearts and minds, it is important at this juncture to look at some of the ways of supporting and promoting development both rural and urban. Various development practitioners have proffered varying means through which impartial, long-lasting and sustainable development can be implemented. Stakeholders (CSO/government) can support capacity development of the organisations concerned after which their efficiency and effectiveness will be undoubted. Capacity development is amongst others, achieved through allowing these organisations space for own

forums like workshops and seminars where they can share knowledge and peer review themselves. Organisations are also expected to promote mutual understanding processes either within or with the government. These processes will to some extent clear any grains of doubt and suspicions and will also allow practitioners to share technical experiences and strategies.

Another of the several strategies of development is facilitating citizens' active engagement in development processes. Citizens can only be included into development processes by making them aware of their rights and roles in development. They must be consulted whenever a programme is to be embarked on and be allowed to be actively participating and making decisions without coercion or manipulation. Implementing agencies should refrain from labelling programmes or projects as belonging to a specific organisation in a manner that seeks to demean other stakeholders or give mileage to others. There are also cases when an implementing agency provides food hand-outs packaged in a way that markets the donor. It is some of these strategies that breed hatred and animosity within communities as people will be identifying with certain implementing agencies or donors. United States Agency for International Development¹² is one organisation that boldly labels its food packages in a manner that portrays an impression that the local authorities have literally failed. This breeds hatred and competition. Implementing agencies can also seek to strengthen the citizens' capacity to take action through offering training programmes on literacy and human rights amongst others. The private sector can also make an important contribution to development by fostering innovation, providing funding and promoting entrepreneurship in rural and low income communities. It can also avail feeds without any political strings attached.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion through the research noted that indeed, CSOs politicise issues of development in an attempt to achieve ulterior motives that include furthering a political score. They take advantage of their resourcefulness against the desperation of the government to manipulate the people's perception of the prevailing trends. However, it was observed that all the parties in this puzzle suffer the effects as the implementing agencies risk prosecution or de-registration. Government over-stretches its budget trying to cover up the gaps while the beneficiaries face starvation. Overall, the vicious cycle continues to inflict pain on everyone. There have thus been simultaneous processes of accommodation and incorporation, indifference and neglect, exploitation and repression.

It is therefore recommended that, as a way of rectifying the problem; attempts at aligning development with a specific political ideology must be stopped, Zimbabwe's laws around CSOs must be allowing and errant-proof enough to detect and prosecute any deviants, the political playing field must be even and democratic enough never to allow deep-rooted polarisation and that

people must be actively participative in all the development programmes to clear off manipulation by CSOs.

(4 018 words)

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