

IMPROVING TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PEACEBUILDING AND CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: A CASE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study explores ways of enhancing and or improving approaches which a traditional institution in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes in Mashonaland Central Province in Zimbabwe. The mixed method approach was study employed by combining questionnaires with community members, focus group discussions with traditional chief's council members and in-depth interviews with traditional chiefs. The findings of the study were that traditional methods of conflict prevention and management are cultural and community specific and are possible mechanisms of promoting peace at grassroots levels. The study recommended that traditional institutions must be transparent, corruption free and fair, must support gender equity, must carry out awareness campaign to market their services which are heading towards extinction and should communicate using the media and other modern day technological advancements.

KEYWORDS

Traditional institutions, transparent, technological advancements, democracy

1.INTRODUCTION

The disturbances of traditional societal structures due to globalisation, technology and democratic principles as well changing political world, in a number of African states, make the prospects of traditional mechanisms, methods and approaches for conflict transformation and peacebuilding becomes limited. These traditional mechanisms and approaches are appropriate in some situations and not all. Nonetheless, it would be an error to disregard that prospective and not to use it where feasible. Traditional methods of resolving conflicts are not certainly a solution for all societal problems, but the traditional methods, approaches and techniques have been undervalued by conflict and peace activists and practitioners who were educated and brainwashed with the Western mindset. Generally, traditional methods, mechanisms and approaches might give an essential insight for conflict transformation methods more (Boege, 2012).

These traditional systems, methods, mechanisms and approaches should not work out of the legislative principles existing in judicial justice systems. This means that application of traditional methods, mechanisms and approaches should complement the judicial justice system by shaping closure in addressing human rights violations and perverted deaths caused by identified perpetrators living in the same community and known by the victim (Boege, 2012).

To appreciate true psycho-social healing and exculpation, it is imperative for conflicting parties to go through all the stages of conflict transformation until they become conscious of recovery until they reach finality. Even though, these traditional processes require time and closely working together of warring factions and other interested stallholders to comprehend an effective system, it has been proven that it is an investment worth to have. Therefore, it is suggested that:

Peacebuilding and conflict transformation framework should be utilised in Zimbabwe where traditional institutions had become latent to attain bottom-up, victim-centered psycho-social healing and reconciliation.

2.OBJECTIVES

To suggest cost-effective strategies for strengthening traditional institutions in post conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding,

3.RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How can the traditional institutions be strengthened to ensure effective peacebuilding and conflict transformation within communities?

4.METHODOLOGY

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

4.1 Study Area

Mashonaland Central province in Zimbabwe was the case study area for this study. Area of study covered is 28 347km² and a population of 1 152 520 which is about 8.5% representation of the total population of Zimbabwe. Seven districts of the province covered are Guruve with a population of 200 833 people, Shamva with a population of 98 077, Mount Darwin with a population of 307 946 people, Muzarabani with a population of 121 127 people, Mazowe with a population of 198 966 people, Rushinga with a population of 67 829 people and Bindura with a population of 156 842 people, Census Report (2012).

4.2 Population

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

4.3 Sample and Sampling Technique

The study used a mixed methods approach combining questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Survey data was collected from a sample of 250 respondents

which was drawn using a stratified random sampling approach from all the 7 districts in the province. In-depth interviews were done with 7 participants representing the 19 traditional chiefs in the province. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with 65 out of 87 members who comprise the Chiefs' Councils (*Dare Ramambo*). Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

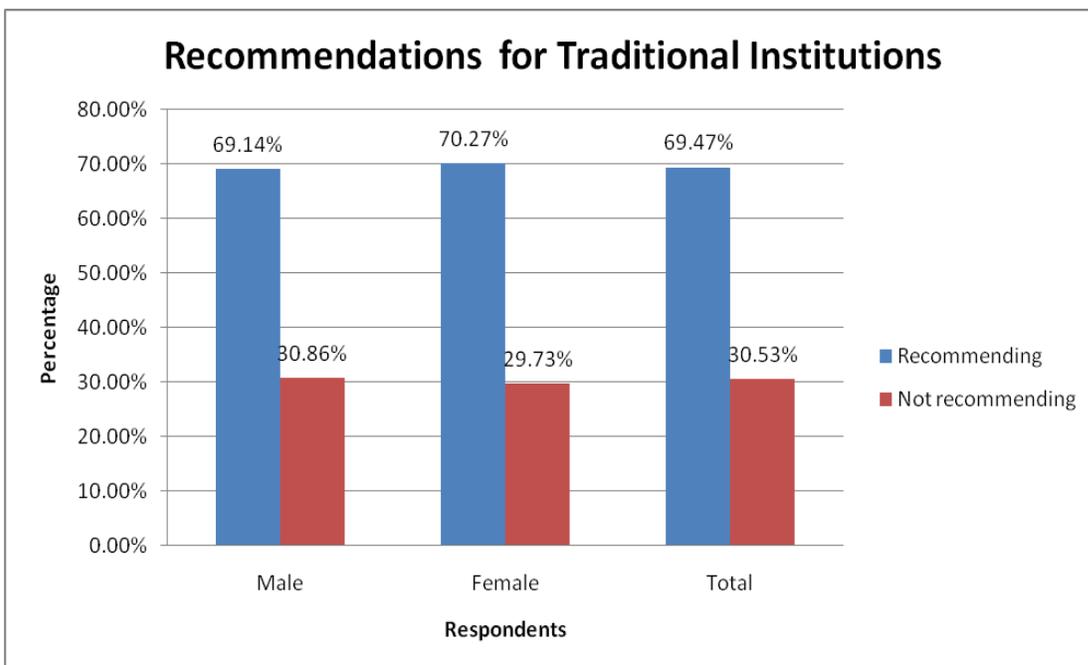
5.1 Strategies and Suggestions to Improve Traditional Institutions in Conflict Transformation

This study was to get strategies and suggestions on improving the work of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes.

5.2 Expectations for Traditional Institutions Involvement in Conflict Transformation

The researcher was interested in finding out if community members would recommend participation of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Results obtained were as follows:

Figure 1 below shows that community members recommended participation of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation issues.



Source; Primary data

Figure 1 Recommendations for traditional institutions in peacebuilding

There were no noticeable differences between male and female on recommending participation of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes and/or activities.

Reasons by the majority of respondents for recommending traditional institutions were as presented on Figure 2. The reasons for recommending traditional institutions to be involved and participate in conflict resolution and conflict transformation are presented in ascending order of prominence. They include that traditional institutions; are traditionally local governing authorities, are fair, can promote peaceful co-existence and are impartial and democratic.



Source; Primary data

Figure 2 Reasons for recommending involvement of traditional institutions

A few of the respondents could not recommend participation and involvement of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation matters. Figure 4.13 shows reasons traditional institutions were not recommended to play a part in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. The reasons are presented in ascending order of prominence. Reasons that traditional institutions should not fit to play a part in peacebuilding: were politically co-opted, outdated, undemocratic, partisan, biased and uneducated.



Source; Primary data

Figure 3 Reasons for not recommending traditional institutions' involvement

There was not much difference between male and female in recommending traditional institutions' involvement. However, with almost one third of respondents not recommending traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, this could be the result of some respondents living in urban areas who find it not necessary since in most cases, urban areas do not fall under the jurisdiction of traditional authorities but municipal authorities. Despite this, traditional institutions were highly recommended.

FGDs and KIIs data indicated that traditional institutions were relevant and suitable in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. When asked why they recommended traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, all informants indicated traditional institutions were legally and culturally important to preserve culture and tradition. One of the informants echoed his sentiments as "*chivanhu chedu chinochengetedzwa nesu madzishe, ndicho hwaro hweunhu, runyararo nemudiriro dzematunhu*" (KII informant). (Our tradition which traditional institutions preserve serves an important purpose in promoting one to be humane and is also for peace and community development).

Survey, FGDs and KIIs data presented above indicated that traditional institutions were not effective when it comes to political issues but were very effective on land issues and social disputes. However, this could not prevent participation of traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes, particularly at grassroots level up to national levels. Traditional institutions were highly recommended to initiate, spearhead and implement peacebuilding programmes. Gelfand (1999), Mutisi (2012), Chemhuru (2012) and Chitsike (2012) were some of the scholars who also recommended participation of traditional institutions in peacebuilding in Africa. The recommendation was based on observations which indicated that

Western models of peacebuilding were failing to bring long-lasting solution to African problems. Even though the traditional models of peacebuilding were recommended, the researcher on cost-benefit analysis concluded that the benefits of fusing Western models with African models outweigh the disadvantages involved.

Madondo (2000) observed that democratic deliberations were not followed on the decision to re-empower traditional institutions around the late 1990s, and the same institutions were most likely courted to boost up political chances for ZANU PF which was facing severe political confrontation from newly born opposition MDC in 1999. Faced with the reality that MDC would win the support of both rural and urban areas, ZANU PF resorted back to empower traditional support as equal political partners to curb or limit the support base of MDC in rural areas. The government opportunistically moved rapidly to slot in the institution of traditional institutions, as an imperative, though it previously was separated in political constituency (Ncube, 2011).

5.3 Improving Participation of Traditional Institutions

The study wanted to find suggestions for improving traditional institutions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This objective wanted to establish cost-effective measures to enhance and/or to improve involvement, participation and efficiency of traditional institutions. Table 1 below shows the proposed suggestions.

Table 1. Ways to improve traditional institutions in peacebuilding

Suggestion for Improvements	Sex of Respondents		Total (n=100)
	Male (n=175)	Female (n=74)	
Should be apolitical	34.3%	23.0%	30.9%
Must have a code of conduct	14.3%	13.5%	14.1%
Should be upgraded to modern standards of governance systems	29.7%	33.8%	30.9%
Should promote values of ubuntu and tradition	37.1%	18.9%	23.7%
Transparency needed	27.4%	21.6%	25.7%
Must support gender equity	26.3%	56.8%	35.3%
Must carry awareness campaigns for their importance	17.1%	2.7%	12.9%
Communication needs improvement through the media	20.6%	18.9%	20.1%
Needs training/education in conflict resolutions and peacebuilding	42.9%	24.3%	37.3%
Should be democratic	24.0%	16.2%	22.5%
Must have proper national representation	11.4%	0.0%	8.0%
Should have documentation	27.7%	31.1%	27.3%
Must have legal representation in resolving disputes	33.1%	32.4%	32.9%
Should be consistent and systematic in resolving disputes	35.4%	40.5%	36.9%
Should make use of modern technology	8.6%	2.7%	6.8%
Should not be corrupt	16.0%	18.9%	16.9%
Must not be on government pay sheet	27.7%	29.7%	26.9%
Must work with NGOs and CSOs in promoting peace	20.6%	16.2%	18.9%
Should promote political tolerance	29.7%	24.3%	28.1%

Source; Primary data

There were no major differences between males and females on that traditional institution: they indicated that they should have a code of conduct, should be upgraded to modern standards of governance systems. Transparency is needed while communication needs improvement through the media, should have documentation. Traditional institutions must have legal representation in resolving disputes, should be consistent and systematic in resolving disputes, should not be corrupt, must not be on government pay sheet and must work with NGOs and CSOs in promoting peace and must promote political tolerance.

More males than females suggested that traditional institutions: should be apolitical, should promote values of *ubuntu* and tradition, should be democratic, must carry awareness campaigns for their importance, need training/education in conflict resolutions and peacebuilding and must have proper national representation. This could be a result of the fact that traditional institutions are male dominated, therefore, how they operate and managed are best known to men than women. On the other hand, more females than males suggested that traditional institutions must support gender equity. This could be a result of the advocacy of United Nations Resolution 1325 of 2000 which encourages participation of women in leadership and development of communities as their male counterparts.

Data gathered through FGDs indicated that the popular view suggested that traditional institutions need to be empowered legally to deal effectively and efficiently. If this could be done, traditional institutions would become apolitical. One of the informants said “*traditional institutions must retain their traditional role independent from political influence, empowerment legally to deal with all issues affecting community members*” (FGD informant). A few of the informants suggested that traditional institutions must be accorded equal legal powers same as magistrates since they deal with same social and land disputes. Also, suggested was that government and the private sector must create employment opportunities for the youth, which was a key solution to have a clean source of income.

The majority of KII informants suggested that traditional institutions need legal empowerment to deal with all matters affecting community members, and traditional institution must be apolitical. One key informant even said “*mambo itsime rinomwiwa nemunhu wese, hazvinei nebato rematongerwe enyika rawada, unoramba uri munhu wamambo iyeye chete*” (KII informant). (A chief is like a well, where everyone quenches’ thirst, regardless of one’s’ political affiliation, custodianship rests with the chief). Few of the informants suggested that there is need to have a set standard or strategy for peacebuilding and conflict transformation. A well documented disciplinary action must be in place for use by traditional institutions countrywide. One of the key informants said “*formal training is needed and must have a code of conduct to guard against mal-practices and corruption*” (KII informant). Some of the informants suggested that there should be a mutual code of conduct between traditional leaders and the judicial system. When probed on the fact that being on government pay sheet compromises their roles, all informants indicated that whether on government pay sheet or not, roles of traditional institutions never differ, therefore, it had no negative effects to community life.

Survey, FGDs and KIIs data revealed commonalities in that traditional institution need training, legal empowerment to deal with all community ills, must be apolitical and need formal training conflict resolution and conflict transformation. FGDs and KIIs emphasise more on legal empowerment, formal conflict resolution and conflict transformation structures. To this end, it is

clear that some issues which community members attribute as challenges affecting traditional institutions are to not challenging to the traditional institutions, for instance, lack of documentation and absence of legal representation. Mohammed (2010) viewed this as a great rift between traditional leaders which could be filled up through reviving traditional governance strategies through both formal and informal education systems.

Even when being manipulated currently by politicians, traditional leaders are well respected by their subjects and as such, they remain very important part for the pursuit for conflict resolution methods and transformation in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, it is complicated to effectively utilise the indigenous understanding and principles in peacebuilding because the wardens of these principles and practices are acting antagonistically. As long as the traditional chiefs can be influenced by government and purposely act as politicians, their significance to peacebuilding remains compromised (Makochekanwa and Kwaramba, 2010).

A small number of the traditional leaders were considered to be apolitical with another small segment actually crossing the great divide to join the MDC. The consequence for the traditional leaders who cross to join and become active the MDC members were eventually magnifying the divergence between the two political parties, therefore, dropping down to their communities. Actually, the politically active of traditional leaders must take a signal from those traditional leaders who chose to stay neutral so that they remain appropriate to the healing process. There is no doubt the country will do well to immeasurably levels from an apolitical traditional leadership (Makochekanwa and Kwaramba, 2010).

In contrast to what case study data revealed about traditional institutions being on government pay sheet, Dodo (2010) postulated that you cannot bite the hand that feeds you, there is need for impartiality and transparency as the detects of democratic rule merits, would be compromised. Chitsike (2012) believed that traditional values, for example, inter-marriages, festivals, music and dance, joking relationships could encourage unity, harmony and peace, hence, need to be promoted in all spheres of life. Dore (1995), Madondo (2010) and Chitsike (2012) believed that improving and/or enhancing participation of traditional institutions is based on two things; reviving latent traditional values and norms in order to attain bottom-up victim centred psycho-social healing and finality. Combining traditional values, systems and structures with the existing justice systems to complement both the legal aspects and traditional values and approaches when addressing human rights violations and perverted deaths caused people known by the victim(s).

6. FINDINGS

The research's findings also suggested that traditional institutions can be incorporated and actively participate in peacebuilding at community level with much appreciation and success.

The study also found the study concluded that traditional institutions are still suitable, relevant and should be mainstreamed in all processes of conflict management, but this should be done in accordance with the value system of the concerned community members.

7.RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommended that traditional institutions should actively participate in peacebuilding and conflict transformation programmes. Traditional institutions should be apolitical and must

have a code of conduct recognised at law. Also, traditional institutions should be upgraded to modern standards of governance systems and should promote values of *Ubuntu* and tradition.

Traditional institutions must be transparent, corruption free and fair, must support gender equity, must carry out awareness campaign to market their services which are heading towards extinction and should communicate using the media and other technological advancement. They need training/education in conflict resolutions and peacebuilding and must have legal representation in resolving disputes and must not be on government paysheet.

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