



Zimbabwe Citizen Engagement Model: *Laying the Foundation*

Abstract

This paper seeks to lay a strong foundation for the development of a national model of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe. Noting that a model by its very nature seeks to serve as an ideal roadmap to plan and implement activities, not to describe what is practically there but what ought to be. The study is primarily based on desk-top review of global and local literature and grounded views from civic activists in Harare, Masvingo and Manicaland provinces. As some scholars argue, the findings show a failure to differentiate community mobilization and community engagement in civil society work. This has resulted in two main frameworks, in our conceptualization, that characterize most civil society interventions and initiatives meant to address community problems and advance sustainable development. The two prevailing models are the Paternalistic Model and the Workerist Model. The fulcrum of the paternalistic model is that citizens are manipulated by civil society organizations and local power holders as a tick-boxing and public relations stint. There is no genuine participation by citizens. The latter is characterized by informing, teaching and training. In this situation, citizen participation is restricted to a one-way format and relations are business-like shaped by project demands. Consequently, this paper goes further to propose a Transformative Model. At the centre of this model is citizen power characterized by partnerships, delegated power and citizen control. However, for the full implementation of the Transformative Model, the paper proposes changes in methodological approaches. The changes include diversifying engagement techniques beyond meetings, understanding the rural community structures and institutions and building sustainable mutual relations with communities.

Introduction

This research is meant to develop a strong foundation toward the development of a national citizen engagement model to proffer the best ways of involving citizens in decision-making processes that produce effective social change, policy outputs and meets democratic expectations. Of importance is to realize that a model by its very nature seeks to serve as an ideal roadmap to plan and implement activities, not to merely describe what is practically there in order to suit current project activities but what ought to be.

Citizen/ community engagement has gained new currency in post- 2013 Zimbabwe. A number of civil society organizations have embarked on projects that are meant to promote citizen engagement. However, there is still need for a deeper understanding of what community engagement is and for an effective model that can result in sustainable political and social change. This is the gap that this paper seeks to cover. What is community engagement? It is a process by which members of the community take responsibility for their issues and choose to get involved in community development work that contributes to solving the local community problems. The key words above are *responsibility* and *involvement*. Some of the activities the communities might get involved in, include building a community hall, establishing a community income generating project and partnering with civil society organizations in development initiatives.

Community engagement is important for various reasons. Some of them include issues raised below.

- Promotes self-reliance: it decreases dependence on external stakeholders and the central government
- Low cost: members of community are able to get involved on the basis of what they can afford
- Promotes utilization of local knowledge
- Promotes behavioral changes. For example, the participation and momentum generated by others on advocacy against gender based violence in the community can transform the patriarchy societal norms in ways that are necessary for behavioral change.
- It increases local acceptability of projects. If there is participation by local members, then projects are most likely to be locally accepted than those merely driven by outsiders.
- Promotes sustainability of projects. Projects are likely to continue at the end of the project if there is community ownership.

Community engagement therefore differs with political mobilization. As Muzondidya (2015) has argued,

Political mobilization...is an activity of rousing masses of people both to express themselves politically and also to undertake particular action (whereas) community engagement aims to create long lasting partnerships that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs and practices (also see Bealey 1999). Political mobilization takes place when political elites (such as politicians, party workers, or social movement leaders) reach out to members of various groups in an attempt to get group members to undertake a particular political action, such as voting, strikes, demonstrations and protest marches.

A community can be defined as a group of people living together in the same area that share common interests and objectives and have some social relationships at the local level. A village, a ward, a constituency and a district are examples of communities.

A community has various characteristics. Some of the typical characteristics of a community are:

- Local leadership: a community has a form of power structure. Some of it might be elected, inherited, natural or even appointed like Members of Parliament, traditional leaders, elders and councilors. There are also other forms of power structures in the local institutions such as school committees, traditional courts, women groups, youth groups *et cetera*. It is therefore important to recognize the presence of a local leadership if one is to be able to work effectively with communities.
- Infrastructure and institutions: in general, in a community, there is infrastructure such as community halls, churches, dip tanks, roads, schools, houses, land *et cetera*.
- Rules: a community has rules that govern people's behavior. These are often unwritten but known by the group of people that forms a community.
- Social outcasts: in each community there are usually people who do not abide by the norms of the community
- Culture, customs and beliefs: a community has shared customs, beliefs and culture. These can be expressed through traditional rituals, language etc.
- Diversity: Not everyone has the same opinions about everything.

Objectives of research

The purpose of this scientific inquiry is to strengthen ongoing citizen engagement programs being implemented by the Election Resource Centre (ERC) and the broader civil society toward a what ought to be. In particular, it seeks to develop a strong foundation for the development of a citizen engagement model that can transform Zimbabwe. The Election Resource Centre will utilize the model to guide its programming so that the citizens, communities and local partners can more efficiently and effectively meet the quotidian concern to realize citizen power by Zimbabwean citizens. In order to achieve the stated objectives, the methods of inquiry are outlined below.

Methodology: Grounded Theory

In this study, ERC used grounded theory in order to obtain a transformative explanation of citizen participation actions and processes that are grounded in empirics (Charmaz, 2006). The advantage of grounded theory is that it provides a systematic process of building a theory tailor-made to the local specifics, especially in situations where such no theory exists (Pergert, 2009). The purpose of grounded theory is to identify the main concern of activists and weave the behaviors into patterns (Breckenridge, Jones, Elliott, & Nichol, 2012). As Bringer et al (2006) have argued, the term theory here refers to a ‘methodology to assist in the development of an explanatory model grounded in empirical data.’ Grounded theory demanded gathering field data and doing analysis simultaneously, in ways that allowed refining the theoretical framework emerging from the study.

Methods

The actual methods drew from the qualitative philosophy. As Neuman (2003) has argued, qualitative methods can be used to develop a conceptual framework. This is detailed below.

Document, archival and media analyses

The initial and bulk of the data included studying the successive ERC workshop narrative reports for each community they have worked in for a period of at least five 5 years. This entailed reviewing minutes from the meetings, records of participant lists, staff reports, internal and external review reports, research reports on citizen participation; citizen needs assessment documents, public meeting agendas and extensive global literature. The approach also included looking at other agency such as the media that covered the same events. From these records it was possible to delineate the profiles of the participants and select research respondents based on age, gender, frequency of participation and societal position for interviews.

Key informant interviews

The study sites included Bikita West, Bikita East constituencies located in Masvingo province and Mutasa district located in Manicaland province. This helped to gain a direct understanding of the way participation processes are defined and understood by the citizens.

At the center of the study were ethnographic methods in the form of extensive interviews with citizens who have been involved in citizen participation and mobilization over a period of 3 days.

The rich ethnographic data was very useful for grounded theory analysis. This helped to cover the ‘round of life’ that occurs within a particular group (Charmaz, 2006, p. 21). The key informants included ERC senior officers, ERC field officers and 3 key informants from each community. The respondents were selected based on age, gender, frequency of participation and societal position. The interviews were designed to allow asking open questions, listening, further probing and recording. The interviews were triangulated with desk-top data. Interview questions were framed to get data on the specificities in line with a grounded theory methodology. With key informant interviews, new concepts emerged and relationships among the concepts from document analysis became evident. The key informant interviews also targeted civics that are doing work on civic engagement in order to get an understanding of current approaches in use which are conceptualized and explained in the next section.

Potential bias

The ERC researchers’ personal and professional experiences with the activists, civil society organizations, contexts, and processes involved in this research project enhanced the ability to discern easily and address the issues at hand. In addition, it enriched the grounded theory approach as there was limited field-time rather than promoting bias. Grounded theory requires rich in-depth knowledge even out of practical experiences. The next section focuses on the conceptual framework.

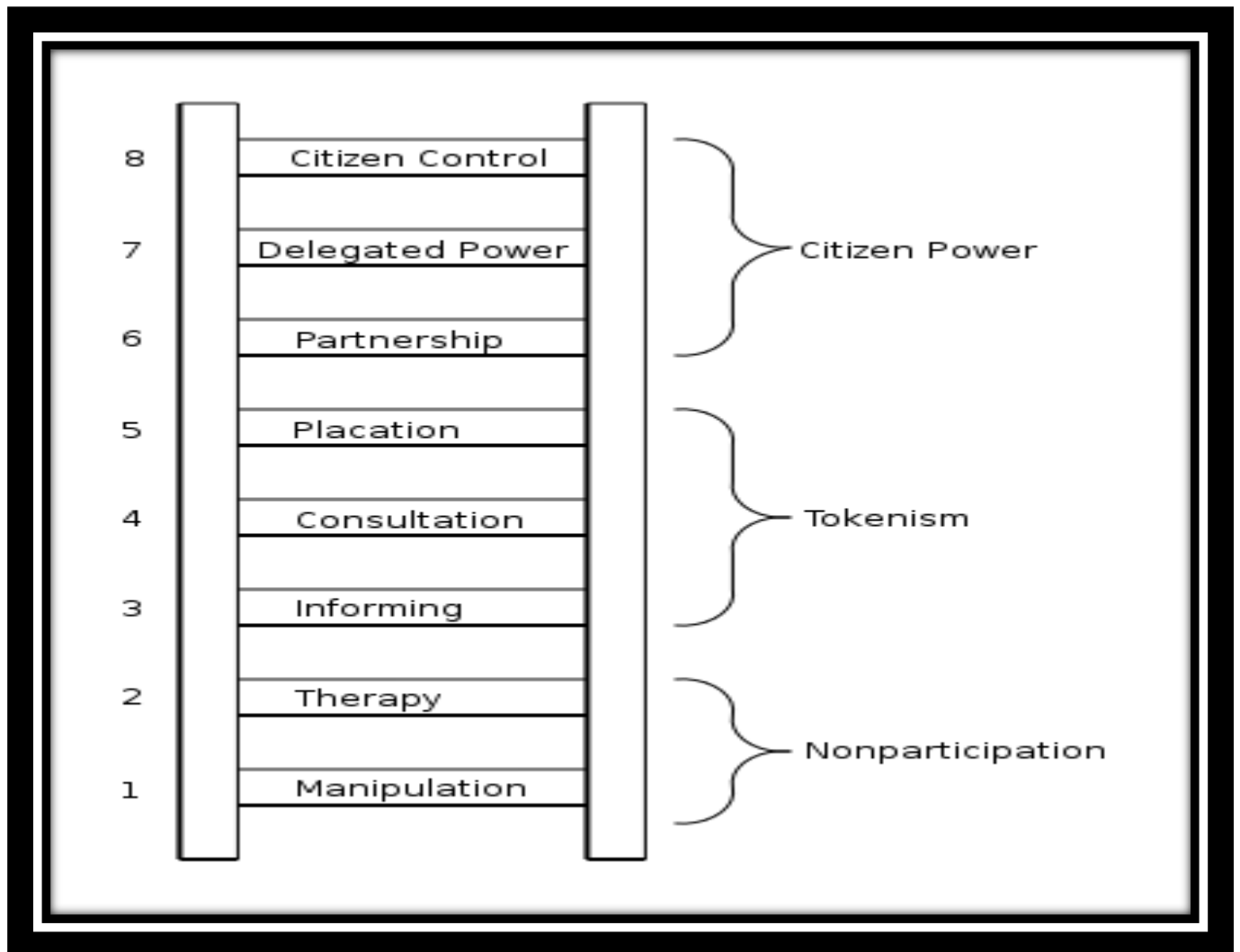
Conceptual Framework

This section explains the global citizen participation model that shapes the conceptualization of local models. It is the framing of the global ladder of citizen participation rather than its details that provide some analytic lens. Based on the synthesis of available data, the section proffers two dominant conceptual models of current citizen involvement in Zimbabwe today. These are the workerist and paternalistic models as conceptualized by the researcher.

Global model: Ladder of citizen participation

In formulating the guiding conceptual framework, we start with the end. This is because the ultimate model to be developed is meant for practitioners and therefore must be theoretically grounded in results and high social impact. Any good guiding framework must then lead to the desirable end. The paper therefore starts from Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation. Arnstein (1969) addressed the nature and effectiveness of citizen participation by using the image of a ladder on which each step corresponds to the extent of citizen participation in public processes. She designed 8 steps corresponding to three broad degrees of influence as illustrated diagrammatically below.

Diagram 1: The Ladder of Citizen Participation



The hierarchical order from the bottom is non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. The concepts are explained below.

1. **Non-Participation** is characterized by Manipulation and Therapy. The objective is to control people by insidious means to the benefit of the power holders. For example, people can be put in committees to rubber stamp decisions made elsewhere. It is used as a public relations stunt and leads to no genuine participation of citizens.
2. **Tokenism** is characterized by Informing, Consultation and Placation. In this situation citizen participation is restricted to a one-way format. There is no mechanism for feedback, follow ups and assurances for implementing positive social change. Citizens have no real power to decide or negotiate their issues. Power holders will remain with the power to decide. Informing and consulting are important first steps towards citizen power but most projects usually end there and that is inadequate. Examples used by civil society are public

meetings to inform citizens about their rights, needs assessments, research surveys with no feedback mechanism and assurance that concerns will be addressed.

3. **Citizen Power** is characterized by partnerships, delegated power and citizen control. At this stage, citizens have degrees of autonomy in decision-making. Citizens are able to negotiate with power holders, share planning and decision making with the authorities.

The ladder of citizen participation helps us to see the desired end, which is citizen power. However, there are critiques to the model that have to be taken into consideration. It does not outline the local challenges to citizen participation and the actual methodological processes to achieving the desired end that of citizen power. However, in its framing it is a good starting point.

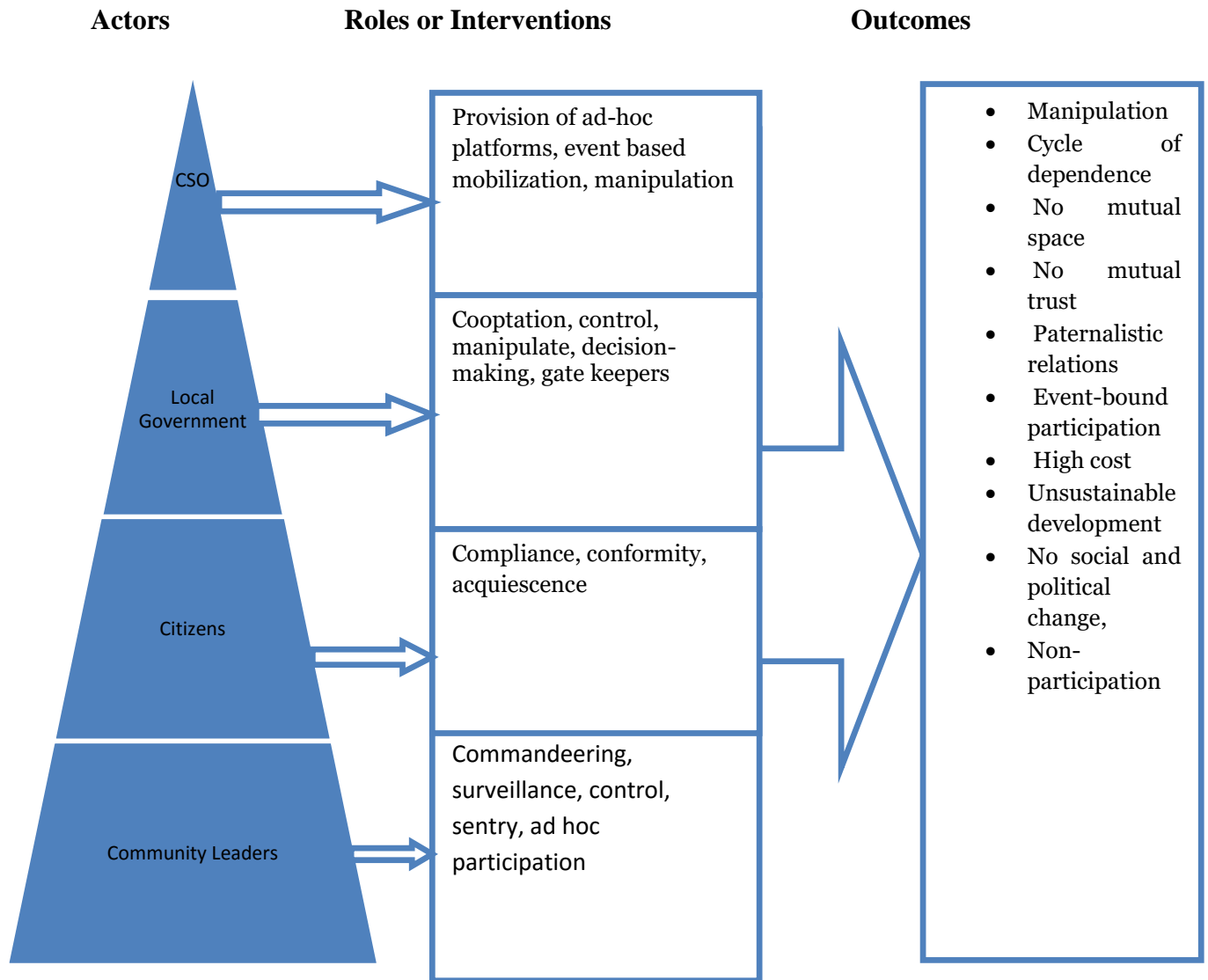
Local Models: Paternalistic, Workerist and Transformative

Drawing from field data and informed by the characteristics of Arnstein (1969)'s non-participation level, the paper posits a localized paternalistic model that explains some of the current interventions by civics in communities. The paper also proposes the workerist model, which is informed by the global tokenism degree of participation. It is also from Arnstein's citizen power degree of participation that the transformative model is developed. However, the paper goes further to provide the local challenges, offer solutions and provide ten critical transformative steps depicted in a transformative cycle. The following section describes the local models.

The Paternalistic Model

At the centre of analysis, the fulcrum of the paternalistic model is that citizens are manipulated by CSOs and local power holders as a tick-boxing and public relations stunt. In the current context, this is the model mainly used by government departments in their 'engagement' with citizens. From this study, it is the second most used model. There is no genuine participation by citizens. This is almost equivalent to non-participation. The model prescribes citizen dependency on external actors. Citizens are manipulated, co-opted, and controlled by the wielders of power. This result in paternalistic relations, event bound participation, high cost and no sustainable social and political change. This is depicted diagrammatically below.

Diagram 2: Paternalistic model



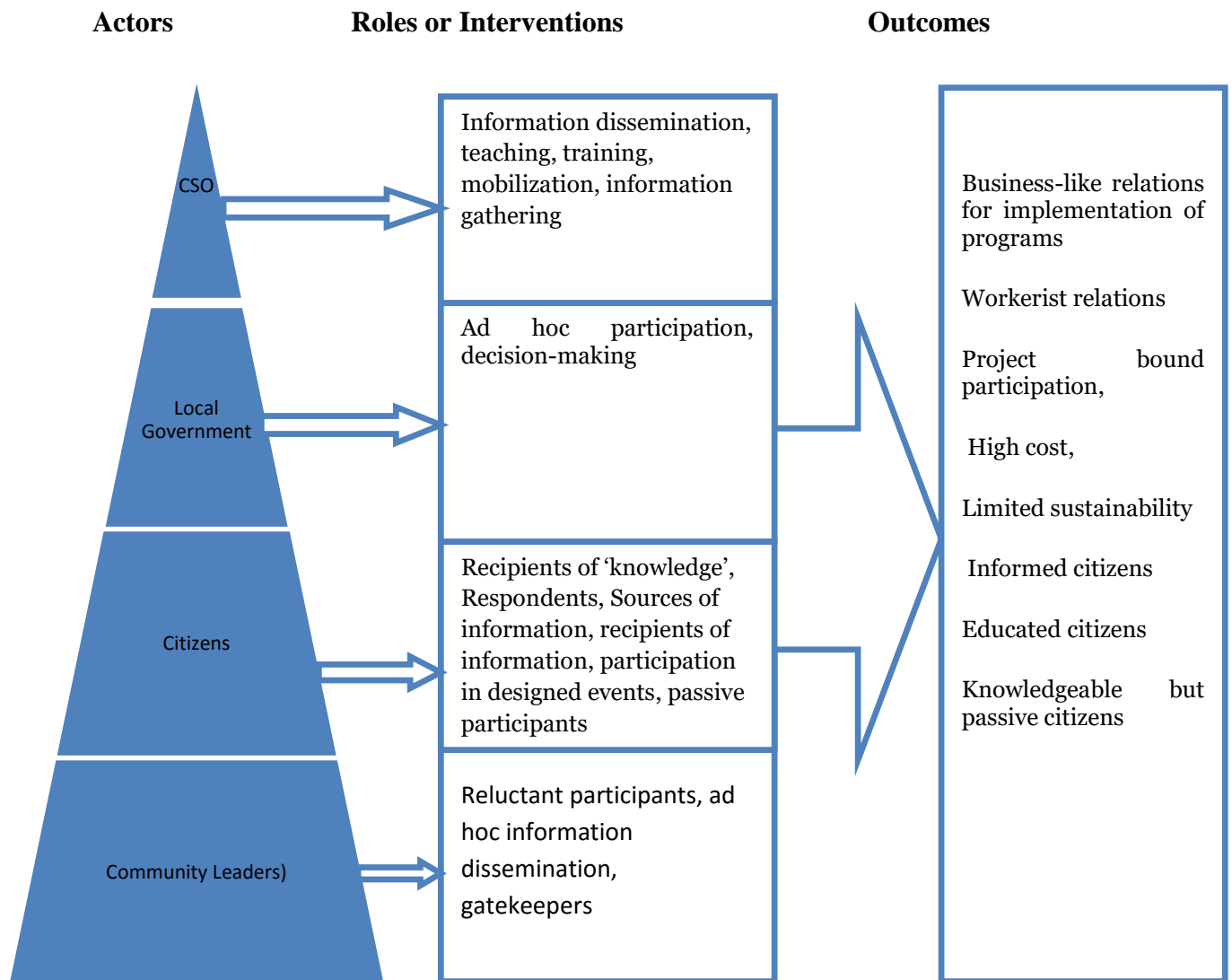
The Workerist Model

The Workerist Model is characterized by informing, teaching and training. This appeared the most dominant model used by civil society organizations today. In this situation, citizen participation is restricted to a one-way format. At centre of analysis, the fulcrum of the workerist model is citizens are mobilized to participate in project bound activities. In this regard, there are civic awareness campaigns, information dissemination through press statements and radio programs that are non-interactive. There is no proper mechanism for feedback, follow ups and assurances for implementing positive social and political change. Citizens have no real power to decide or negotiate their issues. Power holders remain with the real power to decide. Informing, teaching and training are important first steps towards citizen power but most projects usually end there and that is inadequate. Examples used by civil society are public meetings to inform citizens about their rights, needs assessments, research surveys with no feedback mechanism and assurance that concerns will be addressed.

This has resulted in business-like or workerist relations that are tied to the implementation of the project at hand. The workerist model has led to the massive production of informed and knowledgeable citizens in particular localities but passive in nature. That is why citizens in surveys know the importance of participation but actually do not participate. Actors get in and do whatever needs to be done and leave the communities as soon as the project is over in search for the next project. There is limited sustainability.

This is depicted diagrammatically below.

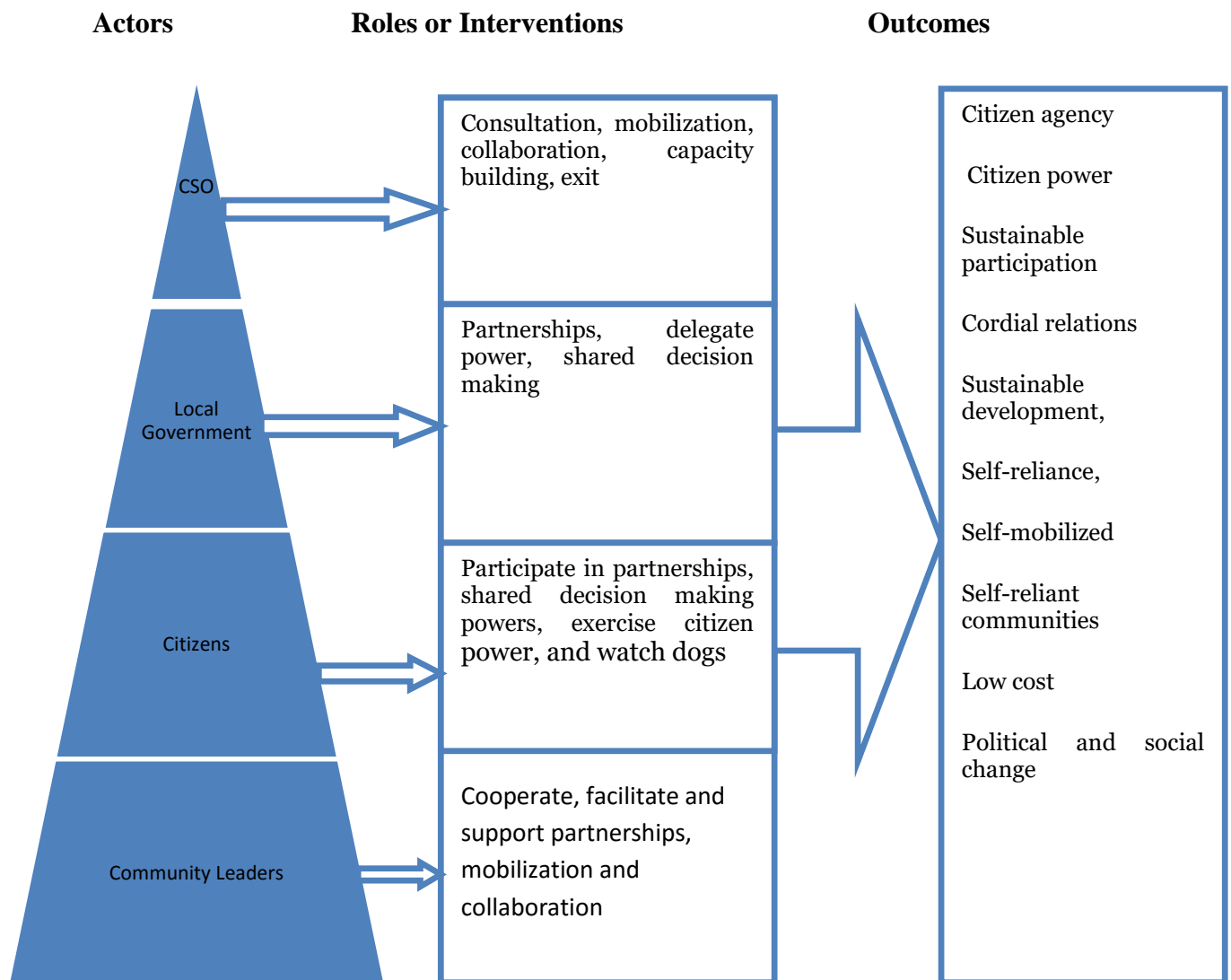
Diagram 3: Workerist model



The Transformative Model

The Transformative Model is characterized by partnerships, delegated power and citizen control. The transformative model seems the least applied by most civil society organizations. This is because of internal and external challenges explained later. However, there are other organizations that have started to take transformative steps and the findings in this paper might help to catalyze the transformative processes. The transformative model entails that citizens have degrees of autonomy in decision-making. Citizens are able to negotiate with power holders, share planning and decision making with the authorities. There is genuine redistribution of power to the have-nots. In this way citizens can even have self-controlled projects like gardens, institutions such as schools et cetera. It results in transformative power and sustainable projects in communities that are self-reliant and self-mobilized. This can be depicted diagrammatically below:

Diagram 4: Transformative model



The following are ten practical steps toward a transformative model.

(1)Gather information about community, (2) define the issue, (3) create community contacts, (4) share the idea, (5) create citizen community engagement teams, (6) mobilize families, neighbors and villagers, (7) make community declarations, publicize the declarations (radio etc.),(8) decide on partnerships with CSOs, private sector, and local government and government, (9) implement& (10) co-evaluate. The ten steps are depicted cyclical below.

Diagram 5: Cycle of Transformation



Mainstreaming women and young people

A crucial tenet to a transformative model, is to transform gender relations and ensure genuine participation by women. Zimbabwe rural areas are dominated by patriarchy. It is therefore important to ensure that the transformative model supersede the patriarchal structure which tend to disadvantage women and young people. Hence each step of the transformative cycle must include equal and genuine participation of women. For illustration, (1) Gather information about

community (include young people and women as they might have different and divergent views), (2) define the issue (include women and youth as they might have particular issues of concern), (3) create community contacts (make sure that community contacts are not just dominated by old men. Women church leaders, youth leaders, women clubs' leaders, respected elderly women can equally be good community contacts) (4) share the idea (the idea must be fairly shared to a broader section of the youth and women in the community), (5) create citizen community engagement teams (the engagement terms must be 50/50 men and women representation and in terms of positions the zebra model must apply i.e. if a woman is chairperson then a men must be vice-chairperson. Note that the community engagement teams must also include young people), (6) mobilize families, neighbors and villagers (women and young people must not only be targets but also make up teams of mobilization) (7) make community declarations (ensure the declarations speak to the issues of women and young people), publicize the declarations through radio etc. (give women and young people space on the radio and other spaces), (8) decide on partnerships with CSOs, private sector, and local government and government (women and young people must be actively involved and must be part of the partnerships), (9) implement (ensure young people and women are part of the actual implementation of decisions made)& (10) co-evaluate (once women and young people have been involved they must be part of the co-evaluation processes). The next section focuses on broader impediments to the transformative model.

Local challenges and dangers to a transformative model

First, *there is lack of organic presence in communities*. This has made it difficult for organizers to gain access to communities given the multiple layers of institutions one has to negotiate. Civil society organizations need police clearance to hold meetings and in some communities in Masvingo and Manicaland provinces they require Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with local government which is difficult and laborious to get. The MOU application process might take up to three (3) months and if an organization fails to get the MOUS, it risks being placed on high surveillance alert by the state hence limiting the possibilities of using other avenues. In terms of project design, there is little planned time by CSOs to build relations with organic community leaders so as to make community entry much easier. Strong organic relations, which have to be continuously nourished, are key in unlocking entry into communities. Weak organic presence makes it difficult to effectively engage communities using the transformative model.

Second, *there are no convincing sustainability plans in regard to most projects*. This is as a result of lack of ownership by the communities. Consequently, the communities seem to have no convincing plans, in terms of how to continue with the work once the project is finished. Sustainability is an important element of the transformative model as participation cannot be project-time bound.

Third, *there is a narrow use of action engagement techniques almost confined to meetings only in most communities*. The only form of engagement that has been used by some rural communities is the meeting. 'I am in a meeting', is the buzz response from CSO activists. A diverse range of techniques that can keep communities actively engaged and elected officials on their feet have not been effectively tested. This is mainly because of the politicized nature of communities and potential for victimization. Whereas some arguments have been convincing on the risk factor,

others have merely been defensive for lack of diversity. Meetings are, in most cases, equally dangerous, as they require physical presence. Meetings only are inadequate for a transformative model of engagement.

Fourth, *there is also evidently, limited knowledge of the complex rural structures and institutions that communities need to engage.* In most cases, engagement is limited to the Councilor, traditional leader and sometimes the District Administrator. This is more open in the rural areas where there are various layers. The trainers, trainers of trainers, volunteers, community in action group members need to have in-depth knowledge on the structures to engage and the relevant issues. This will set a strong foundational base for the transformative model.

Fifth, *some civil society actors are still locked in blinkered approaches to engagement.* They still focus on approaches that promote mobilization towards a particular action rather than sustainable engagement. It is therefore not surprising that very few organizations are facilitating partnerships between and among Community Based Organizations (CBOs), local businesspersons (private sector), churches, sports teams, council and citizens. Grounded collaboration, partnerships and citizen power are central to the Transformative model.

From the five observations above that are based on synthesis of data, effective community engagement towards a transformative model will require some re-think. In the next section some solution oriented insights are elaborated.

Solutions: toward a transformative model

First, *a critical step in citizen engagement is community entry.* Without community entry there can be hardly any effective citizen engagement and the transformative model falls away. What is community entry? This is a technique used to gain access into a community for purposes of sustainable and effective development programs. It involves understanding the community, its inhabitants, local leadership, customs, history and culture and establishing a sustainable working relationship with them.

The following are important in community entry.

- Identifying and building a relationship with contact persons (that is influential local community leaders) who can therefore cooperate as agents of social change.
- Preliminary research. Sourcing information through surveys, at informal gatherings such as weddings, funerals and drinking places. There is also need to consult other community based organizations doing work in the area or invite other community leaders like pastors and traditional leaders to get an appreciation of the relevant information about the community.
- Use the information in planning community development initiatives
- Preliminary visits: About two weeks or so before a meeting, some representatives from the civil society organization must be able to visit the community and inform the community leaders of the intended event and also courteously seek permission. The preliminary visit with the community leaders should prioritize clarifying the purpose of the meeting,

explaining how the entire community will benefit and seek the views of the community leaders on the issue at hand.

There are some little but important things that matter in the generality of the Zimbabwe culture when engaging the community contact persons. Paying attention to the following aspects is key:

- Formal and respectful greetings and introductions (Cultural Protocol)
- Briefing the community leader on the objective of your visit and asking for permission to get started in the conversation
- Presentation of the project initiatives emphasizing on how they will benefit all the citizens in the community
- Motivating for contributions from the community leader
- Reacting positively to negative responses and offering mitigations
- Asking for permission to have the next meeting and to be allowed to leave (Cultural Protocol)

It is important to study the role and nature of the local community contact person in order to effectively use the approach above to seek community entry, approval and support for the duration of project implementation and beyond.

Second, *there is need to build sustainable relationships*. In so doing field officers should consider the following:

- Joint project reviews with communities
- Constant sharing of information with communities. Information can be shared through progress reports, orally in discussion meetings or through pamphlets or via mobile phones (depending on the penetration of such in communities) or use of media especially radio
- Building strong social networks
- Participatory monitoring and evaluation processes
- Accountability and transparency in use of project resources
- Being honest and realistic all the time

Third, *diverse citizen engagement techniques are important in pushing for a transformative agenda*. This refers to interventions that maximize the access and participation of the citizens by strengthening the relationships between policy makers, providers, and service users (DFID, 2003). These include letters, petitions, legal action, demonstrations, lobbying and partnerships. We deliberately ignore meetings as they have been overused. The techniques provided for here are legal and provided for in the Zimbabwe Constitution. We discuss each technique.

Public expression

A public expression is a situation where you have a group or groups of organized people come together at a specific place and time to call attention to an issue of concern. A public expression is meant to influence the way things are done, or the way people think. It is a strong way of getting points across to those in power.

What is the purpose of a public expression?

Expressions can serve various purposes which include:

1. *Advocacy*: To urge local authorities to embrace a particular idea, or to make them pay attention to a particular group of people like people living with HIV AIDS.
2. *Solidarity*: To express agreement with an idea or policy, or with a particular issue. For example, a community can demonstrate to support the proposed construction of a maternal clinic in the community by public officials.
3. *Protest*: To show disenchantment against some injustice, event, public official, potential occurrence, et cetera. A community might demonstrate against the possible government plan to destroy 'illegal' houses or to protest against the omission of duty by the police or police brutality in the community.
4. A combination of any or all of the above.

In practice, most public expression events serve more than a single goal. Most either advocate for and support, or protest against, some issue.

Nature of Expressions

Most people think of public expressions in the form of mass gatherings and mass marches often with placards waving crowds led by rowdy and lawless youth. However, there are several forms of peaceful and lawful expressions. Some address local community issues, such as advocating for the drilling of a borehole at a community clinic, do not require huge numbers of people in order to be effectual.

The most popular from our study, take the form of ART, SPORTING GALAS, CULTURAL FESTIVALS, THEATRE and even MUSIC GALAS to make a point. *Street theatre can be effective because it draws a large crowd, often makes points in a humorous and sarcastic way that people can easily understand, and appeals both to the people's concern about the issue and their sense of fun.* It is also a less confrontational form of demonstrating given the politicized nature of Zimbabwe politics. Sporting activities like netball and football tournaments attract huge crowds of young women and men. Local celebrities can also be used during such sporting activities to popularize the message. For example, a Peter Ndhlovu talk on peace after a sporting tournament, would have a very high impact. The organic cultural activities such as 'Nhimbe' functions can also attract a huge number of diverse community members as they already bring people together. Organizing music galas, is a much more popular way of bringing young people together than strenuous door to door mobilization efforts. In a country, where there is deflated interest, some of these tournaments and initiatives need to be explored, as they form the basis and culture of participation towards a transformative model.

When might a community want to organize a public expression?

- When other methods need complementarities like letters and petitions to bring change to a particular issue.

- *Event opportunities*; For example, when the local council is about to decide on increasing the budget for refreshments and the budget for constructing a local hospital is about to be cut. A public expression is effective just before or during a major decision making event.
- *The local visit of a public figure*. The public official might be seen as an ally on a cause, an opponent to the cause, or someone with power to influence local decision makers like the Minister of Local Government or the Minister of Finance
- *A national day commemorating your issue*. The international human rights day on 10 December or international women's day can be an occasion for peaceful expressions by human rights and gender activists in the community.

How a community can organize a public expression event

If the event is to be peaceful and successful there is need for serious planning taking into context the environment. For example, according to the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), Section 24 the organizer of a public gathering shall give at least four clear days' written notice of the holding of the gathering to the regulating authority for the area in which the gathering is to be held. The police officer in command of each police district shall be the regulating authority for that police district.

Under Section 25 of the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) the police are authorized to place restrictions on the gathering or prohibit it entirely as stipulated under section 26 if they have 'reasonable grounds for believing' the gathering will result in public disorder, a breach of the peace, or obstruction of any thoroughfare. These provisions are regularly misunderstood or deliberately misapplied by the police. The organizers of a gathering are required to 'notify' the police; the section does not state that the police must 'give permission'. Having been notified, the police then have the power to prohibit the event, but only on the specified grounds. If no prohibition is made by the responsible authority, then the law is that the gathering is not prohibited and may proceed. In addition, the community can appeal the decision to the courts.

After public expression events there is need for follow up as explained below. There are a number of possible ways to do this:

- *Follow up on the issue with the targeted officials*, councilors for example and refer to the public event as evidence of community support for the issue.
- *Follow up within the community*, using the energy and consciousness generated by the public event to get more citizens involved in keeping the issue before the public.
- *Get the media* to do a series of stories on the public issue

In summary, if the community considers a public expression as the right thing, they must choose the form of expression, plan it carefully taking into account the legal environment, carry it out well on the day and follow up diligently in ways suggested above. We now move to discuss Lobbying.

Letter

There are many reasons why it is important for citizens to write a letter, including:

- To inform the public officials on an issue that affects the community

- To impart local knowledge to public officials especially new leaders
- To formally ask for a meeting to discuss an issue of concern to the citizens/community
- To show support for a proposed law or policy
- To demonstrate disapproval over a proposed law or policy
- To criticize public officials for bad decisions
- To thank public officials for good decisions
- To ask for help, action or support on a particular issue

When can citizens write a letter to the local officials?

Citizens can write a letter when there is an issue but especially when:

- They want public officials to consider a policy proposal (e.g., increasing the budget allocation for building a local clinic).
- There is a looming debate in council on an issue of concern like the budget
- They want to oppose or support a proposed policy (like increases in parking or dipping fees)
- They want to highlight a shortage in a particular area (e.g. lack of reliable public transport in the area)
- They need public officials to give information and take inputs on proposed policies

Petition

A petition is a formal written request, typically one signed by many people, appealing to authority in respect of a particular cause. The petition is presented to decision-makers that have the power to effect the changes. A petition usually involves the collection of signatures. A petition can help to influence public officials to implement, change or cancel a proposed policy.

The community might petition the local government to improve the problems of water, public transport, roads and drugs in hospital. *In politically sensitive areas, it is advisable to focus more on developmental issues than hard political issues to avoid victimization.*

There are two basic types of petitions, namely the State, and non-State. The state petitions are mainly petitions issued to local government/public officials and non-state petitions can be put to businesses, industries, or private organizations and civil society organizations.

Why citizens must use a petition?

There are various reasons including:

- To increase community awareness on a particular issue
- To prove widespread community support for a particular issue
- To help bring about community supported changes or stop disapproved actions

When should citizens priorities a petition?

A petition is important as an engagement when:

- There is significant citizen support for an issue
- There is an important issue
- Petitions have not been overused in the community
- The issues are more developmental than political

How to spur action from a letter / petition?

First, you have to decide: What are you trying to achieve? Who is the petition or letter aimed at, and what is your community or self, asking for? Be clear about what it is you want done, and who must do it. Second, *include a lucid justification*, about why you are trying to achieve this change. What are the positive impacts of your proposed change? How will it also benefit the public officials? And what could be the result of no action being taken on the particular issue to the community and the public officials? Once you have answered these questions, the rest of the letter/ petition will depend on the local circumstances and specific problem to be addressed.

Here are some tips to get public attention and possible action:

- Communities working in conjunction with partner CSOs can make a news release at the submission of petition. Mediums can include social media, radio, community newspaper, or national newspapers.
- Following up on demands. The community must make determined follow ups to their stated demands in the letter/petition. The public officials must know that the communities will not give up till the issue has been addressed.
- Citizens can use a petition/letter in conjunction with other actions such as lobbying and demonstrations to show public and community support of the issue.

Legal action

Legal action refers to a lawsuit. Citizens can use civil and criminal action. In summary there are two points about legal action.

First, *pursuing legal action should be a last resort to be employed when all other options seem not to be working*. It is expensive, uncertain and time consuming. Because it is an adversary process, it can damage relationships with local authorities that can be destructive to your work in the community. Use it only when you have convincingly ruled out your other options.

Second, *if a community is to pursue legal action they need a lawyer because the local authorities or the other side be it a local private company will at least have a lawyer*. Unless you are an expert in your own right and understand both the law then your chances of winning without a lawyer are very low. So communities must strive to find a lawyer if they are to engage in a legal suit.

Why would communities initiate legal action?

These are some of the key reasons that might leave the community with no choice but to take legal action.

- The public officials might be refusing to deal with the community at all
- The local authorities might be dishonesty and unreliable in negotiations.
- The community needs a court order to resolve an issue
- The local authorities have made it clear that legal action is the only action they will accept. They leave the community with no choice.
- The public officials are doing, or about to do, something so harmful that the community has to act swiftly. For example, the local authorities might consider stopping a program that supplies ARVs to people living with HIV-AIDS in the community.
- When public authorities are to take an irrevocable action - one whose consequences are permanent. The demolition of houses for people like 'Operation Murambatsvina' is irreversible once the action is taken so a community can justifiably take legal action.

Why not initiate legal action?

Some basics that might serve to discourage citizens from initiating a lawsuit:

Legal action is expensive especially if you are challenging the local government with resources. The largest cost, of course, is lawyers' fees which can run into thousands of dollars per single case. There are also court costs like fees for filing the case *et cetera*. There is also a lot of time spent, some cases can drag on for years and years.

However, *the costs can be reduced if citizens get lawyers who can work free of charge because they believe in the issue and that it is for the public good.* The University of Zimbabwe legal clinic can provide these services. One can also get human rights associations such as the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) that can represent the communities if the issues fall within the human rights paradigm. There might also be a 'good Samaritan' willing to pay for the case if they are concerned enough about your issue.

A lawsuit can build barriers not only between community and local authorities, but between community and the whole structure of government. If you sue a Councilor, other councilors may not want to deal with you, let alone support you. If you manage to settle a dispute without a lot of publicity or going to law, however, they may see you as a reasonable individual. Realistically, this may work the other way as well. If you sue a Councilor, other councilors might see you as someone they have to deal with, because you will go the extreme if they do not.

If you lose, you may set a legal precedent that will affect other initiatives in the future. However, if you win it can also set a strong precedence. There is need to look at other available options that may transform society. The next section is on lobbying.

Lobbying

Lobbying means an ethical persuasion of someone with decision making powers (this could be a member of the local council), to take a course of action that supports a community issue. For the avoidance of doubt, we do not refer to bribes, under-the-table envelopes, kickbacks, and cronyism or sweetheart deals. Rather we are talking about ethical citizen-based lobbying. Our emphasis is on lobbying public officials on the merits of the community/citizens. Public officials have the power to turn ideas into policy which the community does not have, therefore it is necessary to lobby.

When should communities lobby decision makers?

Lobbying can be a useful engagement tool if:

- There are public officials with different views and you want to give more credence to your view
- The decision that will be made is significantly crucial to the community
- The local decision makers seem indecisive on the best course of action
- The community has valuable information that is unknown to the public officials

When should communities avoid lobbying decision makers?

- When the decision makers already have all the relevant information that the community might want to provide
- When the decision makers have heard from the community representatives very frequently and recently before
- When the decision makers give signals that they have heard enough from you

Identifying Lobbying issues

Lobbying works best when citizens have the right issue. This means an issue has to be *compelling, sympathetic, and winnable*.

Suppose the issues are to get the local clinic renamed under a local traditional leader, to get local councils to fire all senior employees without degree qualifications and to ban the cutting of trees for tobacco curing in the community. These are not ideal issues for lobbying. Renaming the local clinic is not very compelling, the tree cutting issue is probably not sympathetic especially in communities where it is an important part of livelihoods, and the degree issue is unlikely to be winnable if someone considers the value of other types of qualifications.

In contrast, suppose you want to raise the budget for the construction of a clinic in the community, or the drilling of a borehole to provide clean water or the adoption of cheaper community based models of producing food. These issues are likely to have very different ratings on the compelling, sympathetic, and winnable scales than the ones raised above.

A compelling, sympathetic, and winnable issue;

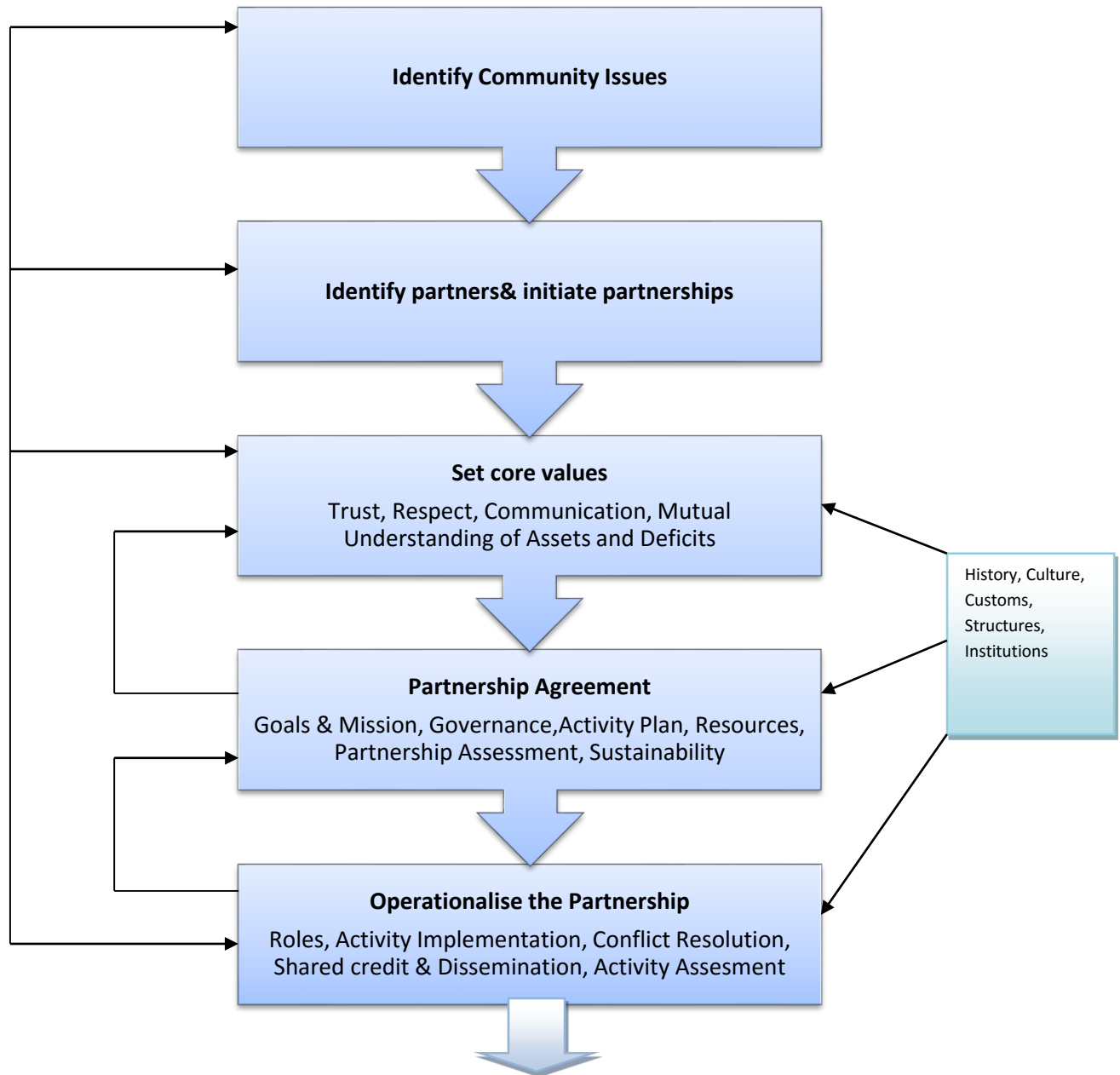
- Relates to an issue that is of primary concern to the broader community
- Provides the local decision makers with an opportunity to be an important figure or a darling with the community at large
- Avoids unpleasant conflict with important constituencies
- Saves public money by increasing the efficiency of a particular project

For effective lobbying, you need a grassroots based support for the issue. You can have the most right issue but usually decision makers respond to groups they are accountable to. Decision makers must know you are watching them collectively and that you will reward or punish them according to their decisions.

Fourth, *Partnerships and collaborations are an important mechanism that can enhance transformative engagement and ensure an intervention beyond community mobilization.* Communities can engage with the *private sector, local government and non-profit making organizations.* Partnerships/Collaborations must be guided by an issue/problem that is central to the community's needs. Partnerships can be around schools, HIV AIDS prevention, training, business investments (where communities have shares), and coordination of social service delivery, infrastructure development like construction of dams for crop irrigation, and management of local public institutions.

Here, the proposed guiding model of partnerships is adapted from Eric Gass' seminal work on 'The Path to Partnership: Revisiting the Five Key Elements of University-Community Partnership'. Of importance is to identify the burning community issue, identify a potential partner and initiate a partnership, build core values, enter into an agreement, operationalize the agreement leading to sustainable development. This must take into consideration the cultural and political dynamics of the communities so that partnerships are appropriate for that particular context. This is presented diagrammatically below.

Diagram 6: Partnership model



As argued above, most of the community engagement work is being implemented in the rural areas, yet there is little knowledge at different levels of the structure and institutions to constructively engage. Without this knowledge, transformative model will remain a pie in the sky. The next section elaborates on the rural anatomy.

Fifth, knowing the relevant rural structures and institutions to engage is important.

Knowing decision makers

First step is to know who the decision makers are for engagement on local government issues as this is the area most civil society organizations are focusing on hence it is given special attention. For rural communities engaging on social service delivery, the rural district council within which

that particular community falls is very key. You have to know the chairperson and vice chairperson of the local council. The names of the local elected ward councilors must be public knowledge. Community organizers cannot be effective if they do not know these people.

Of course, while knowing council committee members may be helpful, it is not the same thing as knowing how that committee works in practice. That may be complicated but one can learn even from other civil society organizations. If communities want the council to increase the budget for local clinics whom do they approach? If communities want a road to be repaired or a bridge to be constructed whom do they contact? Communities will need to find out whether the issue even falls within the realm of local government before approaching the officials. A discussion of the next section will help to give insights on what issues are covered by rural district councils, what committees are in place and the issues that they deal with.

Rural District Councils Committees

In this section we discuss some of the committees of Rural District Councils that communities can engage. These are the finance committee, area committees, roads committee, ward development committee, rural district development committee and other committees.

Finance Committee

The finance committee consists of five or less councilors. It is responsible for the overall financial affairs of the council and its committees; in accordance with standing orders or by-laws, if any, of the council. The finance committee should meet at least once a month. At least once every three months the finance committee should submit at an ordinary meeting of the council a schedule of all payments made by or on behalf of the council and any committee thereof. At the end of every financial year, the finance committee shall submit at an ordinary meeting of the council an interim report showing the financial transactions and affairs of the council during that financial year.

Areas committee

If there is urban land within a council area, the rural district council may appoint an Areas committee to exercise any function of the council within that area of urban land. An area committee is made up of councilors representing the wards that fall within that area. A chairperson of the committee is chosen among the councilors. Other members include members of every village development committee, neighborhood development committee within the area concerned and not more than two co-opted members elected at a public meeting of voters in each ward. Note that an area committee shall not have power to impose levies, rates, special rates, rents or charges, to borrow money, to expropriate property or to make by-laws.

Town boards

If there is a town area within a council area there shall be a town board. A town board is made up of councilors of town wards which constitute the town.

Roads committee

A roads committee is responsible for all matters relating to the construction and maintenance of roads in the council area. The number of committee members is considered by the council.

Ward development committee

For each ward there is a committee known as the ward development committee, consisting of the councilor for the ward, who shall be the chairman of the committee and the chairman and secretary of every village development committee and neighborhood development committee in the ward. A ward development committee should, on or before the 31st of March in each year, prepare and submit a ward development plan to the rural district development committee of the council.

Rural district development committee

For each council area there should be a rural district development committee, consisting of—(a) the district administrator; and (b) the chairman of every other committee established by the council; and (c) the chief executive officer of the council and such other officers of the council as the council may determine; and (d) the senior officer in the district of— (i) the Zimbabwe Republic Police; and (ii) the Zimbabwe National Army; and (iii) the President’s Department; And (e) the district head of each Ministry and department of a Ministry within the district that the Minister may designate by notice in writing to the district administrator; and (f) such further persons representing other organizations and interests as the Minister, on the recommendation of the district administrator, may permit.

The functions of a rural district development committee are to (a) to consider ward development plans submitted to it and (b) to make recommendations to the council as to matters to be included in the annual development and other long-term plans for the district within which the council area is located; and (c) to prepare the annual district development plan for approval by the council and assist in the preparation of other long-term plans for the council area; and (d) when instructed to do so by the council, to investigate the implementation of the annual development and other long-term plans for the council area; and (e) to exercise such other functions in relation to the annual development and other long-term plans for the district as may be assigned to it from time to time by the council.

A district development plan should be prepared and presented to the council before the 31st May in every year.

Other committees of council

There can be other committees of council appointed by council to deal with a general or specific issue. The parent committee may also appoint sub-committees. It is important to keep track of these committees.

Bureaucracy

Community mobilisers must also know the bureaucratic structure or effective citizen engagement. This includes the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the council, other officers and employees. At a district level there is a District Administrator (DA) and related staff.

Issues covered by Rural District Councils

There are a range of issues that the Rural District Councils are mandated to deal with. Rural District Councils can deal with the following wide range of issues. If a community has any of these issues on the table they are right to approach the rural district council.

1. Acquisition, maintenance, development and disposal of property.
2. Open spaces.
3. Recreational facilities.
4. Showgrounds.
5. Trees.
6. Conservation of natural resources.
7. Bush fires.
8. Fences.
9. Clearing of land.
10. Cultivation and farming.
11. Grazing.
12. Agricultural and other services.
13. Animal diseases.
14. Facilities for animals.
15. Fisheries.
16. Slaughter-houses.
17. Markets and agricultural and other produce.
18. Sale of products.
19. Manufacture and sale of mahewu.
20. Roads, bridges, dams, etc.
21. Parking.
22. Omnibuses.
23. Ferries.
24. Lighting.
25. Decorations and illuminations.
26. Advertising hoardings.
27. Drains, sewers and sewerage works.
28. Water.
29. Obstruction of water flow.
30. Pollution.
31. Public sanitary conveniences.
32. Effluent or refuse removal and treatment.
33. Control of pests.
34. Hospitals, clinics and health services.
35. Ambulances.
36. Fire brigades.
37. Crèches.
38. Maternity and child welfare services.
39. Family planning services.
40. Charitable institutions.
41. Maintenance allowances.
42. Funerals.
43. Grants to charities, sports etc.
44. Grants to other local authorities.
45. Educational institutions.
46. Youth centres.
47. Employment bureau.
48. Libraries, museums, theatres, public halls, botanical and zoological gardens.
49. Orchestras and bands.
50. Aerodromes and helicopter stations.
51. Boats.
52. Publicity.
53. Public entertainment.
54. Allowances for councilors and members of committees.
55. Acting allowances.
56. Travelling expenses.
57. Courses for councilors, members of committees, officers and employees.
58. Loans to officers and employees for transport.
59. Congresses.
60. Subscriptions to associations.
61. Insurance.
62. Mementoes.
63. Coats of arms and seal.
64. Monuments, statues and relics

Given the information given above, there is thus need to develop a simplified manual in vernacular languages as well that explains the complex rural structures and institutions that communities can use to engage with public officials. Much of the data is already provided for in this research. The manuals can be summarized during radio shows, be packaged in the form of fliers/CDs and distributed during planned community meetings. This will go a long way in diversifying points and layers of engagement for the community.

In the larger scheme of things, communities should identify goals, find good reasons why the decision maker should do what they want, know who to approach on a particular issue and what to say and how to say it and demonstrate to the decision maker why the issue is also of significance to him or her. The specificities will depend on the issue and specific method from techniques given earlier.

Conclusion

Finally, this paper sought to develop a strong foundation for the development of a national model of citizen engagement in Zimbabwe. Noting that the paper developed an ideal roadmap reflecting what ought to be rather than merely regurgitating what is. The study was primarily based on desk-top review of global and local literature as well as grounded views from activists in Harare, Masvingo and Manicaland provinces. As some scholars argue, the findings showed a failure to differentiate community mobilization and community engagement in civil society work. This has resulted in two main frameworks, in our conceptualization, that characterize most civil society interventions and initiatives meant to address community problems and advance sustainable development. The two prevailing models are the Paternalistic Model and the Workerist Model with the former being the one used mostly by government officials and the later by civil society organizations. The consequences have been non-genuine participation by citizens and one-way participation reminiscent of a top-down approach from 'experts'. In this situation, citizen participation is characterized by paternalistic relations and business-like relations shaped by time-bound project demands. However, this paper went further to propose a Transformative Model, with citizen power at the centre and suggested detailed changes in community engagement techniques in ways that may lead to sustainable social and political change championed by an empowered citizen as some civil society organizations are already doing.

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1 This paper benefited directly and indirectly from the sources below. Hence acknowledgement is to the sources herein.

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