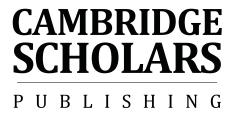# Citizen Participation and Local Governance

Citizen Participation and Local Governance: Case Study of the Combined Harare Residents Association (Zimbabwe)

By

Jephias Mapuva

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

Through devolution and decentralisation, central government has been able to hand down executive powers to local authorities; thereby bringing decision-making processes to the door step of the grassroots people. This has enabled citizens to participate in the administration of local authorities through contributions and presentations through the formation of residents associations. The Combined Harare Residents Association has made presentations to the local council and in the interim has been branded an opposition emissary. In budgetary processes, through residents associations, citizens have tried to influence budgetary allocations in favour of a pro-poor budget. However challenges have been encountered by residents associations as their membership suffers from a number of impediments ranging from low literacy and high poverty levels to the despotic nature of local authority officials. Additionally, some councillors have rudimentary understanding of local authority legislative provisions and modalities, let alone the low literacy levels of some of them. In recent years, CHRA has developed from a local association seeking to address issues of service delivery to one which attempts to influence issues of a national magnitude by compelling political authorities to address national issues such as economic development and constitutionalism.

***

The central argument of this book is based on the premise that citizens have the right to participate in governance processes within their geographical boundaries, as enshrined in *Article 21* of the Universal Declaration of Human and People's Rights and *Article 13* of the African Charter of Human and People's Rights, both of which concur that *"Every citizen shall have the right to participate freely in the government of his country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives in accordance with the provisions of the law"*. Consequently, it is on this

premise that the author attempts to highlight and establish the extent to CHRA and the whole pro-democratic civil society movement alongside existing political, economic, social as well as environmental factors, have inculcated a culture of participation among its members.

Political developments in the decade 1980-1990 and the civic virtue in Zimbabwe

From the attainment of political independence in 1980, there were a number of political developments which militated against the ideals of the liberation struggle and the tenets of democracy in Zimbabwe. The liberation struggle had been executed in quest of universal suffrage, freedom and the adoption of democratic institutions and practices in the country. Armed with high hopes of a prosperous country where universal suffrage would be presented to all citizens as well as other civil liberties at the attainment of political independence in 1980, the developments of the post-colonial Zimbabwe were a disappointment to many citizens. The civil unrest in the early 1980s and the causalities incurred in the civil strife presented signs of what was to come and it cast doubts about the sustainability of the new democratic dispensation in the country. The signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 signalled the creation of a one-party state in Zimbabwe as the only formidable opposition-PF ZAPU was absorbed by ZANU PF in the process. Numerous constitutional amendments to suit ZANU PF were effected with constitutional Amendment 17 providing an Executive President with enormous arbitrary powers. Although all these developments caused dis-comfort within the general citizenry and civil society movement of the day, it is not surprising that many civic groups went as far as issues out carefully structured statements of discontent, especially given the polarization of society on the aftermath of the Matabeleland civil unrest where over 20 000 people had died, and many were either maimed and/or displaced. Only church-related civic groups such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), conscious of their religious obligations, dared to undertake an investigation of the Matabeleland Massacres and established the atrocious manner in which the unrest was handled and falling short of calling it an ethnic cleansing exercise by the military. This saw more civic groups joining the CCJP in condemning government's military operation in Matabeleland, with ZimRights joining later to deploy human rights activists to ascertain human rights violation in the military escapade in Matabeleland. Other political developments which further infringed on people's rights included the Land Reform Programme, which was

executed on the backdrop of political violence and disorderliness with due disregard of individual property rights. Although on the surface these developments might not relevant to CHRA, what the author seeks to achieve is to express the view that these political developments did not measure up to the tenets of democracy, but that they were laying a foundation and justification for the creation of a multi-faceted civil society movement capable of addressing all areas of democracy such as suffrage, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. Even at local government level, residents began to view the political establishment of the 1980s and 1990 as not only inconsiderate, but one which had shifted from the ideals of the liberation struggle which were to establish a participatory democracy and people-driven country characterised by equitable allocation of resources.

Although it was at a time when opposition to government was detrimental and suicidal, many social movements, civic groups and NGOs were formed and existing ones beginning to re-align their objectives which had initially been non-confrontational and began to call upon government to account and respect human rights. It was in the midst of these calls that human rights began to take centre stage with relevant groups like the Zimbabwe Human Rights Organisation (**ZimRights**) was formed in 1992. The civil society even began to diversify towards the end of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21th saw the formation of feminist organizations like Women Of Zimbabwe Arise (**WOZA**) presenting a threat to government through composite demands for government to address any anomalies in the political and economic spheres ranging from the availability of basic food commodities, making education affordable for the poor to restoring democracy in the country. The 'expropriation' of white commercial farms signalled the government and ZANU PF's preparedness to contravene property rights of individuals. The holding of the National Referendum in 1999, the first-ever referendum to be held in post-colonial Zimbabwe heralded the beginning of a new era as government had shown the first ever signs of succumbing to pressure from civil society for a new constitution to replace the Lancaster House Constitution of 1979. It was also the first sign that the ZAN PF government was losing grip and becoming increasingly unpopular with the electorate. The period also heralded the increasing popularity of civics at different spheres of government. At local government level, residents' associations began to join in the bandwagon of groups demanding improved service delivery, respect for human rights and the need to address the political and economic crises that were bedevilling the country for the last decade, with the Combined Harare Residents Association

(**CHRA**) having been the most prominent. In large cities, residents associations began to consolidate through forming coalitions. In smaller towns once defunct residents associations began to re-emerge while news were formed in towns that had not had any representations at local government level. Others like CHRA and BURA began to re-align their objectives to go beyond local governance and transcending their boundaries to clamour for the resolution of the constitutional crisis, and the improvement of the national economy, as well as the need for the political parties to accept election results in both local government and national elections. It is therefore the purpose of this book to establish the extent to which civil society institutions like residents associations have enhanced citizen participation in governance processes and how local governance have transformed during the tumultuous years of the 1990s which were characterised by political and economic crises and diminishing participatory spaces.

Residents' Associations as a Conduit for Citizen Participation

Residents associations are an old concept, having started during the colonial era when due to the increase in the number of Africans in urban areas, an interest arouse around their conditions of living. These associations have been associated with urban dwellings and during colonial days, with poor living conditions such as over crowdedness, establishment and living conditions in squatter camps (informal settlements) as well as shortage of safe drinking waters and other proper sanitary conditions befitting human habitation. Local authorities became increasingly under pressure from residents to address these issues.

Consequently, urban development and human settlement has brought to the fore issues of good living conditions, proper service delivery and good governance. Historically, associational life amongst Africans in the towns tended to be as temporal and ephemeral as the periods spent by migrant workers in the early urban settlements (Moyo, Makumbe and Raftopoulos, 2000:23) and were spaces "…coterminous with modernization and therefore antithetical to African tradition and control (Yoshikuni, 1999, in Moyo & Makumbe, 2000:23). The high rates of urban population growth raised the need for a corresponding increase in the provision of quality services. However, urban local authorities lack adequate resources to meet the demand for quality services, which is on the rise as a consequence of political emancipation, high literacy rates and increased global

communication. The challenge facing decision-makers has been to develop models of local governance that can best facilitate the involvement of civil society and how much civil society can contribute to the establishment of good governance in a sustainable way. For Mamadou (1996:79), the challenges of local governance emanates from "…the institutional disconnect between formal modern institutions transplanted from outside and indigenous, informal institutions rooted in local culture namely entire government machinery, from ministries to local governments". It is this 'disconnect' which the Combined Harare Residents' Association has attempted to address by calling on the local authority to account. Matovu, (2006:69) notes that increasing demands for local government transformation and decentralization "…have opened up spaces for better participation in decision-making processes and administration". In this vein, the Combined Harare Residents Association's activities in attempting to enhance citizen participation in budgetary processes as well as other democratic overtures will be deliberated upon.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LOCAL GOVERNANCE DISCOURSE:
A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Local governance has, in recent years, rose in prominence as industrialisation and urbanisation have equally increased in intensity, resulting in an influx of rural-urban migration, mostly in search of better employment opportunities and other 'greener pastures'. This influx into urban areas has equally put pressure on existing infrastructure most of which has been in existence since the colonial times. The pressure so exerted on existing infrastructure has resulted in sewer bursts and shortage of housing for the increasing urban population as well as shortage of safe drinking water. Energy consumption has also increased resulting in power outrages and regular power cuts. Given global recession and diminishing resources, governments and local authorities have been unable to provide for their urban population, resulting in appalling services deliveries to citizens. In an attempt to be part of the solution, citizens have demanded that they be made part of the problem-solving mechanism in affairs that affect their livelihoods and demanding a place in the decision-making process within their constituencies.

Unlike in Africa where urban development initiatives and legislation are country-specific, in Europe local governance is guided by regional legislative instruments which all countries concerned should abide by. The European Union has a charter, the European Charter, which guides member countries on how local governance should be conducted within their specific constituencies with emphasis being on good local governance and the inculcation of a culture of democratic local governance. In an effort to articulate local governance, the Charter employs *decentralisation* "involving the delegation of a range of powers, competencies and resources from the central government to elected local (sub-national) governments" (Charter, 2007:2); *de-concentration* which is the delegation of administrative functions from the State to local non-elected public structures (Charter, 2007:2), as well as *local democratic governance* which espouses and encourages an equal participation of all stakeholders of a territory (State,

citizen civil society, private sector), reinforces accountability towards citizens and responsiveness to social demands in seeking to satisfy the general interest.

Civil Society, Decentralisation and Local Governance in the African context

The local government transformation and decentralization processes underway in Sub-Saharan Africa have opened space to better participate in decision-making processes and administration (Matovu, 2006:5). The challenge facing decision-makers has been to develop models of local governance that can best facilitate the involvement of civil society as well as how and how much civil society can contribute to the establishment of good governance in a sustainable way. Scholars have provided varied definitions of the concept of civil society, with the most common definition referring to civil society as organizations through which citizens participate and exert influence over public life. Manor (1999:34) maintains that it can be understood as "organized interests with a significant degree of autonomy from the state". Swilling (1992:4) offers the view that civil society consists of locally constituted voluntary organizations, which have the capacity to influence and even determine the structure of power and the allocation of resources. These are institutions that exert pressure and control as "watch-dogs" on state institutions in the area of governance and development, and jealously guard their autonomy and identity. Mamadou (1996:78) argues that many African countries are characterized by an institutional disconnect between formal modern institutions transplanted from outside and indigenous, informal institutions rooted in local culture. Formal institutions include the entire government machinery, from ministries to local governments. Civil society organizations exist as political organizations, trade unions, human rights groups, community-based organizations, and others. As a rule, civil society organizations adhere to the following principles: participation, transparency, accountability, equity, effectiveness and efficiency, strategic vision, and good management.

In theory, a vibrant civil society can contribute to effective institutional development and democratic decentralization, enhance the responsiveness of government institutions, increase the information flow between government and the people, make development projects more sustainable, enhance accountability, transparency and integrity—all of which constitute good governance. However, considering the challenges that face local

governance, it might be difficult for government to fully embrace civil society as a pillar of democratic decentralization.

The socio-political and economic crises that engulfed Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s has persuaded state and non-state actors to collective review policy and institutional mechanisms for delivering services and foster development. Citizens demand quality services, while city managers lack the resources and morale to perform. One of the reasons civil society groups sprung up in the 1990s was the incapability of local governments to deliver services and fight against poverty and environmental destruction on their own.

It is unfortunate, as country experiences reveal, that the two parties (state and civil society) have difficulties engaging in a productive relationship. Heyden (1983:13) had earlier observed that in most African countries, governmental staff tended to be quite arbitrary in their approach to the people for whom they were designing or executing policies. If the people questioned or resisted arbitrary tactics, the officials resorted to intimidation or other measures aimed at punishing the vocal citizens. This culture continues unabated in spite of decentralization and democratization of governance. In Uganda public officials are wary of civic associations, not least because of their role as vocal advocates for the disadvantaged, and are therefore reluctant to allow them to play a more active role in public affairs. Councillors tend to believe that civil society thrives on sowing seeds of political discontent and on challenging the legitimacy of the councils. In Zimbabwe, the liberation background of the country which forced it to adopt a socialist/communist stance, tend to view non-state actors as saboteurs who should be guarded against or even avoided at all costs. Consequently local governance in Zimbabwe is heavily politicised with the ruling political party calling the shots to municipal authorities.

CHAPTER THREE

DEMOCRATIC DISCOURSES IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN ZIMBABWE

Generally, democratic discourses in governance are informed by such practices as *participation*, *decentralisation* and *devolution* of authority from central government to local structures and to institutions such as municipalities herein referred to as local authorities. Accordingly, terms such as governance; participation and participatory democracy; local governance; decentralisation and devolution have come to dominate the [local] governance parlance and discourse. Governance is about how governments and other social organizations interact, how they relate to citizens, and how decisions are taken in a complex world (Graham, & Plumptre, 2003:2), and involves "…the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social development" (World Bank, 1994; UNDP, 1997). Hyden and Court (1992:19) view governance as *"…the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which state as well as economic and social actors interact to make decisions"*. Folscher, in World Bank (2007:243) notes that increased state effectiveness in service delivery and the creation of citizen participatory spaces is evident of good governance.

In participatory democracy "…citizens should have direct roles in public choices or at least engage more deeply with substantive political issues and be assured that officials will be responsive to their concerns and judgments" (Cohen and Fung 2004:27). Gaventa (2006:150) regards participatory governance as "…deepening democratic engagement through the participation of citizens in the processes of [local] governance". In participatory democracy citizens should be actively involved in matters that affect them by demanding accountability from the state ensuring government's responsiveness to service delivery and other societal needs (Jones and Weale, 1999:91). This justifies why citizens call on elected officials to account.

The World Bank (2007:191) points out that "…specific legislation governs sub-national governments through the constitution which recognizes local government and prescribes the need for civic participation in local matters". Zimbabwe's local government system dates back to 1891 when the Salisbury Sanitary Board was established under the Urban Councils Act to look at the sanitary needs of an increasing African population in the then capital city of Salisbury (Wekwete, 1988.1:19). The Urban Councils Act was preceded by the Municipal Act (1930). A number of other pieces of legislation facilitated the carrying out of most of additional functions by Urban Councils. For example, the Services Levy Act (Chapter 78) empowered Urban Councils to impose a form of levy on employers of African labour, which funds could be used to subsidize housing and urban transport services for Africans in urban areas (Palley, 1996:630). Increased disenchantment with ZANU PF rule led to a vote of no confidence in most ZANU PF councilors across the country, leading to partisan amendments to the Urban Councils Act to further empower the Minister of Local Government, a ZANU PF apologist to disadvantage citizens in numerous ways, including dismissing democratically elected mayors and councilors in most cities and arbitrarily appointing Commissions to run the affairs of urban areas, a move which was disapproved by CHRA on many occasions. However, the dynamic nature of Zimbabwe's political landscape brought about principally by the democratic decay that has characterized Zimbabwe's politics towards the end of the 1990s has brought all the above cited benefits to African urbanites to an end as the state became increasingly entrenched in a *laager mentality*.

In Zimbabwe, all urban areas are divided into high-density (former African) and low-density (former European) areas. As the terms imply, most middle and low income earners reside in high-density areas, and the areas are mostly characterised by large family units and high poverty and literacy levels, hence much more demand for service delivery and activism is found in these residential areas. These are areas which have often formed the bedrock of resistance and a source of dissenting voices from an increasingly restive population as the residents are most affected by poor service delivery. This argument is supported by Makumbe (1998:67) who argues that "urban areas tend to have a significantly higher level of political consciousness than rural areas, at least in Zimbabwe". Makumbe further notes that resident' associations "have become fora for opposing national government policies, especially those that impinge on citizens' rights" (Makumbe, 1998:87).

The impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme has left many casualties in its wake because much of the retrenchments and school drop outs occurred during this time, thereby exacerbating poverty levels among the urban citizens, mostly in high density areas and informal settlements as the state became increasingly bankrupt an could not afford to subsidise basic commodities and services. This happened on the backdrop of an unprecedented increase in quality and improved service delivery by citizens I urban areas, giving residents associations homework as to how they were going to engage local authorities on the same issue. High poverty levels in urban areas and a demand for better service delivery against the backdrop of worsening service provision in all urban areas brought about by the sanctions imposed on the country by western governments further exacerbated the quagmire in which local authorities found themselves in. Subsequently, this catch22 situation contributed to the creation and emergence of a militant urban population whose knowledge of citizen entitlements went beyond that of the early 1980s when citizens treated the then ruling party, ZANU PF and government as entities beyond reproach. These appalling living conditions and low living standards constructed an urban population whose resolve to meet their objectives of demanding good service delivery from the local authorities helped them employ mobilisation strategies akin to those utilised during the colonial era for equitable fair living and working conditions. All these factors held implications for democratic representation of the citizens residing in the different urban residential areas.

Urbanization and the rise of civil society

As Africa's urban settlements grew in both number and size faster than in any other region of the world, recent reviews of urbanization trends have shown that the urban population of Africa is growing by 6 percent per annum, twice as fast as that of Latin America or East Asia (Bossuyt, 2000:6). It is projected that at the current rate, the urban population is likely to reach 500 million by the year 2025 due to increased massive migration from rural to urban centres, in addition to natural growth within the urban centres themselves. The high rates of urban population growth raise the need for a corresponding increase in the provision of services. However, urban local authorities have always been characterised by lack of adequate resources to meet the demand for quality services, which is on the rise as a consequence of political emancipation, high literacy rates and increased global communication.

Lwanga-Ntale, Golooba-Mutebi and Taaka, (1999:46) have cited various factors as the cause of civil society's rapid growth in urban areas. Firstly, urban citizens are more enlightened and sophisticated than their rural counterparts. As a result, they are interested in establishing independent space outside the direct control of the state to escape political and economic oppression and improve their living conditions. Secondly, indigenous associations receive external assistance from international organizations which enhance their propensity to engage the state and improve their operations. Thirdly, the conditionalities imposed on governments to liberalize and democratize lead to state withdrawal from the provision of basic services, thereby giving citizens the opportunity to exercise some control over their lives.

Associational life in urban areas in colonial Zimbabwe: a historical overview

Industrialisation and the desire for colonial authorities to derive maximum profit from their industrial concerns led to the need for cheap labour. Ordinarily the existence of Africans in urban areas was prohibited under colonial legislation unless they were providing cheap labour in mines and factories. Colonial authorities saw it necessary to have some control of Africans in urban areas by putting in place laws that would govern their freedoms of association, movement, and even assembly. This justifies the enactment of laws which required every African to possess a pass indicating their names and that of their employer where applicable. With the advent of increased industrialization in the 1930s and 1940s, the number of Africans in urban areas correspondingly increased, leading to the development of formal settlements. Associational life amongst Africans in the towns tended to be as temporal and ephemeral as the periods spent by migrant workers in the early urban settlements (Moyo, Makumbe and Raftopoulos, 2000:23). For the colonial state, up until the 1940s, "…the urban space was considered European space in which blacks were to be allowed for short periods of time" (Moyo, 2001:32). In the language of the colonialists, the urban spaces were coterminous with modernization and therefore antithetical to African tradition and control (Yoshikuni, 1999, in Moyo & Makumbe, 2000:23). It is therefore not surprising that Africans were largely located in rural areas where reserves had been created for them by the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, and those in urban areas were settled in designated areas with limited recreational and housing facilities.

With further increased industrialization, the number of workers in urban areas also increased and this led to the development of larger cities like Salisbury and Bulawayo that had large industrial concerns. This also led to the formation and prominence of organizations residents' associations that would engage authorities in improving the living conditions of urban residents. However, in the early days, the residents associations were limited in scope and attempted to address those issues that the colonial administration did not considerer sensitive, such as demanding equality with whites in terms of job opportunities and living standards. The emergence of residents associations in tandem with trade unionism gave birth to militancy as the colonial administration refused to consider Africans as equal human beings. The militant spirit manifested itself through more demands for citizens' rights in all aspects of life. This was the genesis of trade unionism which according to the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1951 was illegal. With the advent of greater industrialization and urbanization in the 1940s and 1950s more African migrated to urban areas in search of job opportunities, resulting in an upsurge in the African population in towns. As industrialisation further grew in leaps and bounds, more labour was required and recruited, leading to the growth of cities. This had a knock-on effect on the formation of new groups like township resident associations which emerged initially with the aim of fighting for the rights of urban residents, but later working in league with the emerging liberation movements for political emancipation of the African people not only in urban areas, but even in rural areas. With the passage of time, these resident associations began to diversify their engagement with the colonial administration by challenging the white economic and political order. They began to demand for the observance of human rights, universal suffrage and enfranchisement, political representation and improved living and working conditions for Africans.

With the attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe in 1980, much of the colonial legislation was reversed in an attempt to democratise local governance. Through the Urban Councils Act (1993) residents were empowered to form residents associations through which citizens would make representations to the local authority. These are associations through which residents can participate and influence the decision-making processes in the local governance by having a say in the affairs that affect their lives, especially given that "the post-independence local government system in Zimbabwe was deliberately designed to create a one-party state with the ruling ZANU PF as the one party (Makumbe, 1998:97). However the legacy brought about by the liberation created a scenario where

everything and every functionary had to be ZANU PF. Up until the late 1990s, most urban councils were staffed with ZANU PF supporters and even senior positions such as those of the Town Clerk, Chamber Secretary or mayor (though ceremonial position) were packed with ruling party supporters, functionaries and operatives. Wekwete, (1988) in Makumbe,(1998:86) concurred with the affinity between ZANU (PF) and the whole local government structure by asserting that "the whole local government structure in Zimbabwe is a carbon copy of the ZANU (PF) structure". Councillors and other municipal council officials were elected or appointed on a partisan basis - on the basis of the strength of support for the then ZANU (PF) party. This was necessitated by ZANU PF's willingness to exclude any voices of dissent from the operations of municipal and city councils. Municipal bylaws and other processes such as municipal budgetary processes were handed over to residents. In some cases, although the Urban Councils Acts requires that the local authority places and advertisement in the media publicising any municipal decisions and budgets for the following year, they have always been aware of the fact that up until the early 1990s, residents in urban areas did not bother themselves about having to partake in the budgetary processes of council.

Attempts at forming residents associations during the early 1980s were viewed by the ruling party as unnecessary. However, continued poor service delivery, water reticulation and sewer bursts uncollected refuse strengthened residents' resolve to solve their own problems with cities and town councils. This resulted in residents having to revisit the concept of residents associations which had existed during the colonial era and to enhance and overhaul the associations into vibrant formations that would not only confine themselves to immediate needs of towns and cities, but extended their demands to incorporate issues of both local and central governance. This is the premise on which Residents Associations in large cities like Harare, Bulawayo, Mutare and Gweru were formed and modelled. Residents such as the Combined Harare Association have contributed to the restoration, promotion and sustenance of elements of democratic institutions through enhancing citizen participation in governance processes. Recent political developments in which the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) dominated most of urban (and even rural councils) have precipitated a paradigm shift in the composition of most urban councils. This case study would help the author to articulate the extent to which the formation has enhanced citizen participation through engaging government on the plight of urban residents brought about poor service delivery. The book will also explore

how the formation has mobilized the residents around its broad objective of engaging government and campaigning not only for improved service delivery in local government, but to restore democracy in the country through exhorting their members to participate in the constitution outreach programmes, partake in all electoral processes and be involved in the constitution-making process. This mandate by CHRA has out span its initial functions and operations which, mostly hinged on local governance and service delivery.

In Zimbabwe, all urban areas are divided into high-density (former African) and low-density (former European) areas. As the terms imply, most middle and low income earners reside in high-density areas, and the areas are mostly characterised by large family units and high levels of poverty, hence much more incidences of service breakdown, poor service delivery protests and a source of voices of dissent. The impact of the Structural Adjustment Programme left many casualties in that much of the retrenchments and school drop outs occurred during this time, thereby exacerbating poverty levels among the urban citizens. This has created an increased demand on urban authorities for improved service delivery. High poverty levels in urban areas and a demand for better service delivery against the backdrop of worsening service provision in all urban areas brought about by the sanctions has culminated in the emergence of a militant urban population whose knowledge of their rights as citizens goes beyond that of the early 1980s when citizens treated the ruling party and government as entities beyond reproach, a population whose resolve to meet their objectives could see them employing any mobilisation strategy available to them. All these factors have implications for democratic representation of the citizens residing in the two different urban residential areas. The fact that the two groups of people reside in urban settings have a bearing on their political consciousness, as noted by Makumbe (1998:67) who argues that "urban areas tend to have a significantly higher level of political consciousness than rural areas, at least in Zimbabwe". The political developments in Zimbabwe, coupled by high levels of poverty and a hyperinflationary environment have overshadowed these differences as the two groups of people experience the same political power service delivery and poverty levels brought about by sanctions on the country. It is against this background that the author explores CHRA as a manifestation of a representative residents association whose mandate has not been confined to local governance but with the setting in of democratic decay and diminishing participatory spaces, in Zimbabwe, at least from the late 1990s. CHRA also represents a microcosm of sections of the civil society

movement in the country that due to the gravity of democratic decay in the country had to re-align their objectives and operations in tandem with the requirements of participatory democracy where citizens are required to involve in all governance processes in the country. However, the cause behind the formation of residents associations and much of the civil society movement have been frustrated and worsened by the ZANU PF government's pessimistic view that residents' associations "have become fora for opposing national government policies" (Makumbe, 1998:87). This has left social movements, civil society organisations in limbo as persecutions and surveillance became the order of the day. Although these have been setbacks, but citizens have continued to make these associations and other civic groups operational on the backdrop of forms of harassment and persecutions by state security agents.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE COMBINED HARARE RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION (CHRA)

The World Bank (2007:191) points out that "…specific legislation governs sub-national governments through the constitution which recognizes local government and prescribes the need for civic participation in local matters". Zimbabwe's Local Government system dates back to 1891 when the Salisbury sanitary Board was established (Wekwete, 1988.1:19). The Urban Councils Act was preceded by the Municipal Act (1930). A number of other pieces of legislation facilitated the carrying out of most of additional functions by Urban Councils. For example, the Services Levy Act (Chapter 78) have enabled Urban Councils to impose a levy on employers of African labour, which funds can be used to subsidize housing and urban transport services for Africans in urban areas (Palley, 1996:630). However, the dynamic nature of Zimbabwe's political landscape brought about principally by the democratic decay that has characterized Zimbabwe's politics in recent years has brought all the above cited benefits to African urbanites to an end.

Post-independence amendments to the colonial Urban Councils Act (1973), Chapter 214 resulted in the democratization of the Local Government system by removing racial discrimination pertaining to representation and tenure in urban areas (Wekwete, 1988:20), through the incorporation of former local government areas or African Townships into Urban Council areas (Jordan, 1984:9). This resulted in the enactment of the Urban Councils Act in 1980 and subsequently amended in 1983, 1986, 1993 and 1996. The Act empowers citizens to form residents' associations, through which citizens would influence policy making and other local governance processes. This has seen the creation of the numerous residents' associations, all of which are affiliates of the Combined Harare Residents' Association. The Combined Harare Residents Associations is the umbrella body of the capital's residents associations and in recent years has encompassed and affiliated residents associations from different

towns and cities in Zimbabwe. For purposes of readers, the CHRA will be representative of all residents associations in the country and will act as a microcosm of social movements in Zimbabwe.

CHRA has been taken as a case study because of its magnitude, representing so many satellite residents associations and households around the country. Secondly, the CHRA represents people of all walks of life ranging from the rich to the poor, the formally employed to those in informal sector, the old and the young, the grassroots citizens to the professionals, pensioners and even lodgers, the business sector and the formal households, the Central Business Districts of various towns and cities as well as different suburbs (low-density, medium density and high-density). CHRA also represents those in informal settlements like Epworth where residents' propensity is curtailed by low levels of education. On education and participation the level of education, Shah (2007:253) notes that "educational attainment is less important as a determinant of participation than citizens' grasp of their rights to engage in individual and collective action and to hold state actors to account". This leaves citizens with an inborn intuition to want to be part of a solution to problems bedevilling them.

Preamble to the formation of the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA)

In Zimbabwe, with increased industrialization, the number of workers in urban areas grew, leading to the development of larger cities like Salisbury and Bulawayo that had large industrial concerns. This also led to the formation and prominence of organizations residents' associations that would engage authorities in improving the living conditions of urban residents. With the passage of time, these resident associations began to challenge the white economic and political order.

Residents associations are attempts by residents to participate in the local governance of their affairs. Zimbabwe's Local Government system dates back to 1891 when the Salisbury Sanitary Board was established (Wekwete, 1988.1:19). The Urban Councils Act was preceded by the Municipal Act (1930). A number of other pieces of legislation facilitated the carrying out of most of additional functions by Urban Councils. For example, the Services Levy Act (Chapter 78) have enabled Urban Councils to impose a levy on employers of African labour, which funds can be used to subsidize housing and urban transport services for Africans

in urban areas (Palley, 1996:630). However, the dynamic nature of Zimbabwe's political landscape brought about principally by the democratic decay that has characterized Zimbabwe's politics in recent years has brought all the above cited benefits to African urbanites to an end.

Residents' Associations are voluntary organizations that thrive on the commitment of the citizens to participate. Participation in these voluntary associations has attracted a lot of controversy in recent years with some associations being accused of extensions of opposition political parties. Irvin and Stansbury (2005:59) argue that "…because citizen participants are not paid for their time,[such] committees may be dominated by strongly partisan participants whose livelihood or values are strongly affected by the decisions being made, or by those who live comfortably enough to allow them to participate regularly". It has been argued that "…citizen-participation committees such as resident associations, are usually overpopulated with members of the top socio-economic group" (Weber 2000:59) because "…the main priorities [of those from the low-income groups] are to provide for their families, not spend time in meetings" (Russell and Vidler, 2000, in Irvin and Stansbury, 2005:59). However, the composition of CHRA goes against this assumption as the organization is populated by the grieved poverty-stricken citizen in urban areas whose interest is not confined to improved service delivery, but the restoration of democratic institutions in the country, hence their involvement in national programmes like the constitution-making process, election monitoring and petitioning the Minister of Local Government against dismissal of democratically-elected councillors in any town and city in the country.

The author has cited the CHRA into the discussion of local governance and as a microcosm of residents associations throughout the country because of its magnitude which is a coalition of numerous similar-minded local government endeavours to enhance citizen participatory tools. Firstly the organization takes cognizance of many households in the country. Secondly, the CHRA represents people of all walks of life ranging from the rich to the poor, the formally employed to those in informal sector, the old and the young, the grassroots to the professionals, pensioners and even lodgers, the business sector and the formal households, the Central Business Districts of various towns surrounding the capital city as well as different suburbs (low-density, medium density and high-density) as has been cited before.

However, while there has been evidence to support the effectiveness of residents associations insofar as influencing policy is concerned,

developments theorists argue to the contrary. The World Bank (2000:56) argues that the ordinary citizens do not have the capacity and ability to influence public policy. To facilitate citizen participation, an appropriate and enabling environment should be created where human rights are observed, democratic structures put in place, the constitution is upheld, and the need to allow civil society unlimited access to the citizenry. It points out that "…the poor are often untouched by formal civil society organizations; instead they rely on a host of informal associations within their communities that often lack the capacity to influence government decision making, and which are by-and-large limited in number, resources and leverage". However, this is rather a discouraging remark by developmental multilateral institutions that should be canvassing for participatory democracy through citizen involvement in national and local programmes and decision-making processes.

Post-independence amendments to the colonial Urban Councils Act (1996, Chapter 214 resulted in the democratization of the local government system by removing racial discrimination pertaining to representation and tenure in urban areas (Wekwete, 1988:20), through the incorporation of former local government areas or African Townships into Urban Council areas (Jordan, 1984:9) leading to the enactment of the Urban Councils Act in 1980.

In 1999, six neighbourhood residents' groups-some dating back to the 1940s- merged to form CHRA. The Combined Harare Residents Associations as the umbrella body of the capital's residents associations and in recent years has encompassed and affiliated residents associations from different towns and cities in Zimbabwe.

CHRA is guided by its vision which is:

"*To be an effective watchdog and vehicle for good governance in Harare and a model for advocacy.*

Its mission statement is:

"*To represent and support all residents of Harare by advocating for effective, transparent and affordable municipal and other services and quality facilities on a professional, non partisan basis*".

In 2005, the association re-aligned its objectives from those of merely being a rate payers association to that of being "…an expression of the growing power of residents' collective action and …an effective monitor of the activities of elected councilors as well as municipal (Davies, 2005:7). In 1999, a trust was formed and CHRA was registered as a civil society organization. In 2000, an advocacy centre was established as a way facilitating and engaging local authority as well as central government on issues that affect residents within CHRA area of jurisdiction and beyond. The constitution of CHRA portrays the organization as one whose objective is *"to promote and protect the rights of residents of Harare* (CHRA, 2006a). CHRA's preoccupation with urban governance, as cited by Kamete (2009:62), is amplified by its maxim which reads "CHRA for Enhanced Civic Participation in Local Governance". According to (Kamete, 2009:62) CHRA has set local governance-related objectives as;

- *advocating for effective, transparent and affordable municipal and other services and quality facilities;*
- *making representations to and liaising with Harare City Council, city councilors, Central Government or any ministries, government departments or other public institutions concerning matters affecting residents of Harare and is environs;*
- *promoting and encouraging public awareness and participation by residents in local governance issues; and*
- *doing all things necessary to protect and promote the rights and interests of residents.*

Summed up, it is these objectives that define CHRA's "core focus", which is "…to develop participatory approaches to local governance and demand for accountability" (Davies, 2005:10).

In 2000, an Advocacy Centre was established as CHRA's secretariat which oversees the day-to-day running of the affairs of the movement. In addition to the secretariat, CHRA has structures which enables it to consult with residents as well as the general citizenry on pertinent issues like those pertaining to good governance, not only at local government levels, but nationally. These are the General Council, Standing Committees.

The General Council (GC) is the supreme decision making body of the Association in between the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The GC meets every month and is constituted by the Ward Chairpersons and

Coordinators from the Association's ward committees and the Management Committee.

The Association has the following six (6) Standing Committees (S.C):

    1. Programmes
    2. Finance
    3. Information and Publicity
    4. Legal
    5. Membership
    6. Environment

Each one of these Standing Committees deals with matters that falls within is armpits as the names suggest.

The S.C makes recommendations on programming and activities to the Secretariat. Ward Chairpersons and Coordinators volunteer into Standing Committees. The Chairperson of each S.C sits in the Management Committee.

In addition to these structures, CHRA has representations in different wards, from where it is able to reach out to residents and be in a position to access their needs and allow them to participate in the running of the City of Harare. In an effort to reach out to citizens and educate them on issues of participatory governance and their rights, CHRA has come up with projects. The projects are, Grassroots Advocacy Project, Capacity Building Project as well as the Information Blitz Project[1].

4.1 The Grassroots Advocacy Initiative Project

The Grassroots Advocacy Initiative Project enables CHRA to disseminate and gather information pertaining to the welfare of ratepayers and their subsequent participation in local governance in Mbare[2] and beyond. The Grassroots Advocacy Initiative seeks to coordinate advocacy initiatives, gather and disseminate information. CHRA acts as a public response

---

[1] CHRA 2009

[2] Mbare is a high density suburb in Harare and is home to both low-income and middle income groups.