Community Development Trajectory in Zimbabwe through Establishment of Information Centres. A Case of Chinhoyi, Mashonaland West Province.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the impact of Community Information Centres (CICs) in promoting socio-economic developments in Zimbabwe's communities after the massive establishment across the country in 2016. The mixed methodology approach was ideal for this research as the researchers sought to interpret whether CICs were empowering the community with information, knowledge and bridging the digital divide gap between cities and township communities in Zimbabwe. Data were collected from users (community) of the Mashonaland West Province, community information centre in Chinhoyi town through questionnaires and interviews. The study respondents were76 participants out of the 100 targeted monthly users of the Mashona land West Province, community information centre in Chinhoyi town. The convenient sampling technique was employed in this study. The findings of the study revealed that Chinhoyi community information centre was not adequately developing the community due to inadequate infrastructure and poor internet connectivity. Thus, for example Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) infrastructure, such as computers were a scarcity tool to the users resulting in the sharing of these gadgets or taking turns to use the machines. This in turn negatively affected the service delivery at Chinhoyi community information centre. This study discovered that Chinhoyi community information centre is however slowly developing the community, despite the challenges faced. The study recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe in conjunction withPostal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) must fully fund and adequately resource community information centres with latest ICTs infrastructure and provide enough bandwidth. Lastly, this study recommends that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies must set aside a budget for construction of purposely built community information centres. Through such an act, provision of good service delivery at the information centres can be achieved thereby promoting rapid and effective development in communities.

Keywords: Community Information Centres, Community, Information Communication Technologies, Socio-Economic Development, Service Delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Community information centres (CICs) are public places where people can access computers, the internet and other digital technologies that enable them to gather information, create, learn, and communicate with others while they develop essential skills. In developing countries community information centres (CICs) are viewed as rural knowledge centres/ information kiosks/ village knowledge centres or common service

centres which seek to provide shared and mediated access to information and services through the use of new technologies like computers and internet connectivity (Murekji, 2010).

According to Walsham (2010) the concept of community information centres emerged in Europe in the early 1970s. The focal point was acquisition, processing, storing and dissemination of information to cope with information needs of individuals and communities. In the 1980s there was a change in the way these CICs operated as they began to incorporate an element of communication(Walsham, 2010). Community information centres were no longer just used to store, retrieve and disseminate information; they were used for communicative purposes. Due to time progression development opportunities were noticed in use of these CICs, which resulted in the emerging theme: CICs for community development. Therefore, for this reason advent of CICs in Europe was seen as a model for digital inclusion for community development in all countries whether developed or developing.

Rajah (2015) highlighted that CICs provide information to the marginalised/rural disadvantaged people, reduce technological discrimination and the digital divide between urban and rural areas. Furthermore, Rajah (2015) mentioned that in the remote villages of Bangladesh, community information centre's like Pallitathya Kendra rural CIC provide information on livelihood for example, agriculture, health, legal and human rights, education, technology awareness, disaster management and rural employment. The CIC provides a platform for the aspirants to surf the internet, visit job employment sites and locate promising careers anywhere in the country or the world without leaving their homes.

Totolo (2011), revealed that the establishment of CICs was incorporated in SADC in 2001 setting out the broad policy for SADC's member states on cultivating this increasingly important field of digital inclusion as they endeavour to bridge the digital divide between Southern Africa and the rest of the world. Recognising the impact of CICs in other regions and understanding their importance SADC passed its Declaration on Information and Communication Technologies in 2001, setting out broad policies for the region on cultivating this increasingly important field. "It is a well-known history of Africa's lack of adoption, use and access to ICTs", contrary to this statement the development of CICs has showed positive ICT impacts in developing countries (Grand et al., 2010).These positive results were reported in eight country reports in the SADC with the use of Web 2.0 tools such as Skype evidenced as a breakthrough in the lives of CIC users in these countries. Web 2.0 tools are well known for extending access and enhancing education (Al-Aufi& Fulton, 2014; Badea, 2014, Sey et al., 2013). The Southern African community information centres, previously known as community information resource centres commenced in the 1970s (although one was established as early as 1933 in South Africa). According to literature CICs in Southern Africa mushroomed in 1989, borrowing from the west Government policies. In Southern Africa CICs started being established with an attempt to ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to access and effectively use ICT in order to enable them to participate fully in the educational, social and economic activities and democratic processes (Cullen, 2002).

Munyoka and Maharaj (2019) acknowledges that Southern African developing countries (SADC) are adopting and implementing CICs to ensure that marginalised communities are digitally included. Faroqi, Siddiquee and Ullah (2019) points out that CICs are access points of information, an innovative way of closing the digital divide and accelerating economic development by providing value added information, knowledge, and services.

In Zimbabwe community information centres (CICs) exist with a purpose of offering various services to the public such as: internet,recreational (gaming) services, printing, faxing, photocopying, imaging, document lamination, email services, and e-learning services among others (Zimbabwean Concept paper, 2016). These CICs are a major tool for community development as they provide e-access to communities in respect to material access, skills access, and usage access.The motives behind establishment of CICs in Zimbabwe was to support communities economically, socially, and promoting educational development through global

linking.Hikwa and Maisiri (2014) noted that the deployment of ICTs in Zimbabwe dates back to the 1970s when the public service sectors started to provide ICT services. The authors go on to note that in 2009 the ministry of Information Technology was formed after the establishment of the inclusive government. To this end the Zimbabwean government using the experience from the continent decided to embark on establishing CICs in order to bring the benefits of ICT to Zimbabweans. This would see the citizens being more informed, more educated and able to be innovative and in turn effect community development.

The government of Zimbabwe therefore committed itself to make sure that universal access was available through the introduction of CICs across the country. According to POTRAZ the programme began in November 2016 to install at least 210 CICs across the country, with 12 centres having been installed prior as pilot projects (Pembere, 2016). To date there has been no follow up on the development of these centres to aid stakeholders in tailoring CIC services to ascertain community development.This study was inspired by lack of a followup after the establishment of community information centres (CICs) in Zimbabwe, with an intention to assess how these centres have contributed to communities. According to the Zimbabwe ICT policy (2016) "Zimbabwe is lagging behind in technology, research and development." In an attempt to fix this issue of lagging behind in technology, research and development the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a project of establishingcommunity information centres across the country in 2016.It is now seven years after the establishment of community information centres in Zimbabwe, hence what has become of this project?. This study was an attempt to fill in this information gap. Theoretically and practically this study was conducted with an intention to assist policy makers with useful suggestions on the sustainability of CICs project in Zimbabwe for community development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To date no feedback mechanism has been proffered in Zimbabwe to assess if actually the communityinformation centres (CICs) are benefitting the public in any trajectory and impacting community development. The only literature that exists is a study conducted by Ndinde in 2014 which proposed for an establishment of CICs to aid community development. The CICs project in Zimbabwe started in 2016 and seven years after their establishment no literature exists to track their development and contributions made by these centres. It essential to understand that, after implementation feedback is a necessity in assisting responsible authorities in adjusting where necessary, to make improvements on existing features and pave way for future developments. It is against this background that the researchers were triggered to carry out a research.

This study was guided by the following objectives which are to:

1. Identify services provided by CICs for community development.
2. Ascertain problems encountered by CICs in the provision of information services for community development.
3. Find out how CICs enhance community development.
4. Proffer ways to enhance CICs geared for community development

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed researchapproach.The combination of the known scientific research approaches were ideal for this study because it sought to construe whether CICs were empowering the community with information, knowledge, ICT skills and bridging the digital divide gap between the urban and rural communities in Zimbabwe. A case study research design was employed. According to Copper and Schindler (2011) a case study constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. A case study approach is mainly used to obtain greater understanding of a concept or to help crystallize the

definition of a problem. In this research, the concept being examined is establishment of community information centres for community development in Zimbabwe.Convenientsampling technique was used to select questionnaire participants.The main assumption associated with convenient sampling is that members of the targeted population are homogeneous (Etikan et al., 2016).

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The data findings were presented in the form of descriptive statistics. A statistical package for social science (SPSS) version 21 software was used to analyze the data. Pie charts, graphs and tables were also used to present the data.

Role of the CICs in community development

The role of CICs in community development was presented and analysed as shown on table 1.1, below based on the findings of this study.

Table 1. 1:The CIC effects on community development

Variables	Very effective	Effective	Not sure	Not effective	Very ineffective	Response rate
Trained computer literacy	0% (0)	13.2% (10)	31.6% (24)	39.5% (30)	15.8% (12)	100% (76)
Helped users start projects	7.9% (6)	21.1% (16)	21.1% (16)	50% (38)	0% (0)	100% (76)
Gave out farming information	39.5% (30)	34.2% (26)	26.3% (20)	0% (0)	0% (0)	100% (76)
Job creation	0% (0)	26.3% (20)	7.9% (6)	65.8% (50)	0% (0)	100% (76)
Hosted workshops	0% (0)	10.5% (8)	42.1% (32)	34.2% (26)	13.2% (10)	100% (76)

Source: Field Data, 2022

The effects of CIC on community development were presented in table 1.1 above. The respondents who cumulatively agreed that CICs on community development are very effective were 73.7% on the factor gave out farming information. The respondents who cumulatively disagreed that CIC on community development was not effective were 65.8% on the factor job creation, 55.3% on the factor trained computer literacy, 50% on the factor helped users start projects and 47.4% on hosted workshops. The findings pointed out that the majority of the respondents disagreed that CIC have the effect on community development in most factors while the least agreed that they have an effect on the factor farmers are given farming information. The entire key informant agreed that CIC are effective though they agreed that they need to be improved.

Table1.2: CICs in promoting economic benefits

Importance of CICs in promoting economic benefits					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very important	46	60.5	60.5	60.5
	Not at all important	6	7.9	7.9	68.4
	Slightly important	16	21.1	21.1	89.5
	Not sure	8	10.5	10.5	100.0
Total		76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data, 2022

Importance of CICs in promoting economic benefits was presented in table 1.2 above. The respondents who indicated that it was very important were 60.5%, 21.1% indicated that it was slightly important, 10.5% reflected they not sure and 7.9% indicated that not important at all. The findings revealed that CICs are important in promoting economic benefits. Key informants had the following sentiments in agreement with the respondents.

Key informant 4

"CICs are important in all the community. If they are used well the communities can access information."

Key informant 10

"This is an important service in the community however it is hampered with lots of challenges so it is not working to the required levels."

Table 1.3: Regression analysis on CIC effects on community development.

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	2.148	.834		2.574	.012	.483	3.812
	The CIC effects on community development: Trained computer literacy	.136	.140	.121	.972	.334	-.143	.414
	The CIC effects on community development: Helped users start projects	-.431	.104	-.426	-4.138	.000	-.639	-.223
	The CIC effects on community development: Gave out farming information	-.037	.122	-.029	-.303	.762	-.281	.207
	The CIC effects on community development: Job creation	-.082	.129	-.070	-.632	.529	-.339	.176
	The CIC effects on community development: Hosted workshops	.469	.161	.393	2.905	.005	.147	.791
a.Dependent variable: Duration in which you have been doing business with CIC.								
Source: Field Data, 2022								

H_1: Establishment of CICs ascertains community development.

H_0: Establishment of CICs does not ascertain community development.

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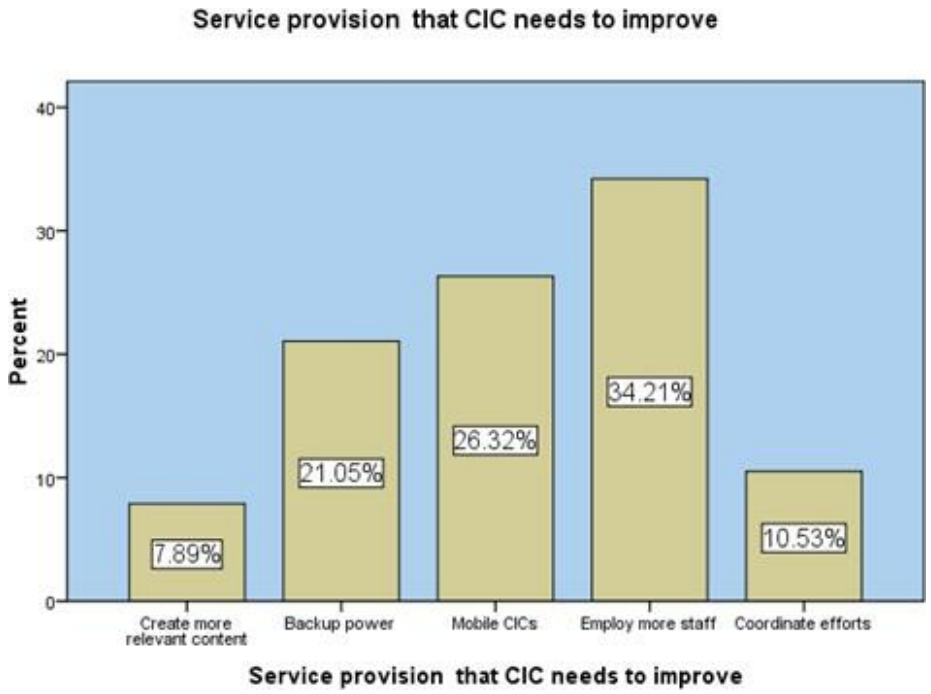
The research hypothesis was presented in the table 1.3 above.

Since $t_{crit?,\ dft,dfe} = t_{cri0.025,75,70}$ =1.990 and T_{cal} is 0.972 on The CIC effects on community development : Trained computer literacy, -0.632 on The CIC effects on community development : Job creation and -0303 on The CIC effects on community development : Gave out farming information , therefore fail to reject H_0 and conclude that establishment of CICs ascertain community development.

Since $t_{crit?,\ dft,dfe} = t_{cri0.025,75,70}$ =1.990 and T_{cal} is 2.905 on The CIC effects on community development : Hosted workshops and -4.138 on The CIC effects on community development: Helped users start projects, therefore reject H_0 and conclude that establishment of CICs ascertain community development. This was echoed by Bhugiro (2012) who in his study indicated that several proactive CIC operators were implementing some praiseworthy good practices at the CICs under different categories, such as electoral activity and e-governance services. Bailley and Ngwenyama (2010) also acknowledge contribution made by CICs in empowering local citizens to be innovative and start entrepreneurial projects.

Ways to enhance the CICs to improve community development

The ways to enhance the CICs to improve community development were presented and analysedin this section.



Source: Field Data, 2022

Figure1.1: Service provision that CIC needs to improve

The service provision that need to improve were presented in figure1.1 above. The respondents who indicated that employ more staff needs to improve were 34.21%, 26.32% indicated that mobile CICs need to improve, 21.05% revealed that backup power need to be improved, 10.53% reflected that coordinate efforts

need to improve and 7.89% indicated that create more relevant content need to improve. The findings reflected that majority of respondents identified the need for more staff to be employed in order to improveCIC service delivery. Whilst the least indicated that creating more relevant content needto be improved. All of the key informants agreed with respondents as they noted that all facets need to improve. Bailey and Ngwenyama (2010) were in support with the findings as they noted that community development requires strategies developed to create opportunities for development.

Challenges encountered by CICs in the provision of information services for community development

The challenges that were faced by CIC in providing information services for community development are presented and analysed in this section.

Key informants had mixed feeling as they had to say the following:

Key informant 1

"They are a number of challenges which ranges from poor security, lack of equipment, network and others,as result we end up requesting users to bring their own gadgets."

Key informant 9

"the major problem is network we lose a number of customers due to network problems. We end up doing other things like printing and binding."

RECOMMENDATIONS EMANATING FROM THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

- The study recommends that the Government of Zimbabwe in conjunction with Postal and Telecommunication Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ) must fully fund and adequately resource Community Information Centres with latest ICTs infrastructure.
- In addition, POTRAZ must increase internet bandwidth at these information centres.
- POTRAZ must recruit staff who possessICT qualifications to work at their Community Information Centres.
- Staff development training programmes must be done and strategically planned in order to keep staff abreast of the changing technological environments.
- This study recommends that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies must set aside a budget for construction of purposely built Community Information Centres. Through such an act, provision of good service delivery at Chinhoyi Community Information Centre can be achieved.
- The study recommends CICs to create more community awareness campaigns, so that CIC services are fully utilised in order to achieve what they are meant to achieve which is narrowing the digital divide by creating the platform and means for social inclusion for Zimbabweans.
- The study recommends CICs to enhance their service delivery through total quality management in all areas of service.
- Stakeholder involvement in enhancing service delivery at CICs in different communities.

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