

A Reflection on Innovative Strategies of Civic Engagement in National Governance of Zambia

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ABSTRACT

Failure by citizens to accelerate the desired human welfare in their civic engagement is a matter of concern. This article therefore reflects on innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia. A case study design within the domain of qualitative approach was used to generate evidence from 23 participants. The research relied on thematic approach to analyse the data. This research revealed that grounding Civic engagement in the cultural environment of Zambia, enhanced feedback mechanisms, inclusion of Education into platforms of civic engagement, promotion of democratic integrity and inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men were the main perceived innovative strategies of civic engagement in Nation governance of Zambia. Among others, the research recommends that the Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal security should create an enabling environment for critical watchdog institutions like civic organizations as these help to create a conducive environment where governance can be practiced by good citizens. Equally, the Electoral Commission of Zambia and Non-government organisation must endeavour to provide both internal and external capacity building on civic issues as this is likely to reciprocate positive and informed engagement.

Keywords: Civic engagement, National governance, innovative strategies.

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

The participation of Citizens in civic affairs is critical for sustaining a viable democracy. This is evident in the history of independence of Zambia in which citizens opted to come together and fight the oppressive government in aspiration for a new nation based on equality, rule of law, social compact and respects for the human dignity among others (Phiri, 2006). This was a democratic experience that was achieved by individual and collective efforts (Matole, Simui and Muleya, 2023). Thus, it can be argued that Civic engagement proved to be a useful tool in this democratic dispensation. However, Norris (2017) is of the view that our engagement in democratic activities should go beyond fighting for freedom instead citizens should have interest in making democracy more authentic in response to community development.

Premised on the foregoing argument, the underlying assumption of this research is that innovative strategies of civic engagement in civic affairs is critical as this is expected to provide an environment that can improve the wellbeing of the citizens. Thus, it is imperative for citizens to envision a form of political activity that would enable them to self-consciously direct their affairs in accordance with the aspirations and commitments they have deliberately accepted (Kawila, et al, 2023).

In generic sense, United Nations (2018) defines civic engagement as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Therefore, one would argue that Civic engagement takes

many forms ranging from individual volunteerism, organisational involvement and electoral participation. It can also include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. This would suggest that Civic Engagement is absolutely instrumental for democracy to be reborn and sustained hence, providing an environment for sustainable development.

Despite comparative advantages embedded in civic engagement, study by Matole (2021) on democratic dispensation observed that some citizens had low interest in civic matters. Equally, a study by Muleya (2015) on teaching of Civic Education found that some citizens were not grounded on ethics that can bring about social change to the community. Studies have also shown that unfriendly democratic environment created by those in government prevents citizens from engaging in democratic activities effectively (Kaumba, 2015; Kinase et al, 2015; Segun, 2013). Achieving good governance requires citizens to continuously navigate towards a particular vision and making sure that day-to-day management of affairs is always lined up with nation's goals and aspirations of the people (Mangalia, 2021). The assumption for this engagement is to improve the quality of living in the community (Kaumba, 2015). A study by Fufa (2017) in the context of Ethiopia revealed that under the right conditions, citizen engagement can help governments achieve improved development results, creating links between citizen engagement and improved public service delivery, public financial management, governance, social inclusion and empowerment.

Statement of the problem

Despite opportunities that comes with civic engagement, recent survey conducted by World Bank (2021) shows that between 2015 and 2020, welfare levels have deteriorated significantly in both rural and urban areas in Zambia. Similarly, the survey by Hubbard et al, (2020) shows that access to adequate water and sanitation was one of the key developmental challenges in the capital city of Lusaka, where water and sanitation infrastructure built in the 1960s and 1970s for a population of 300,000 is insufficient to meet the needs of the current population of approximately three million. Access to sanitation infrastructure in these areas is similarly low, with nearly 88% of households using pit latrines. It was also reported that many key global health indicators are poor in Zambia. This is a problem as this undermines the power of democracy to transform the lives of the people in the community. Therefore, this article attempts to reflect on innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia that would help to accelerate the desired human welfare.

Theoretical framework

This article was guided by framework of civic culture propounded by Almond and Verba (1963). Almond and Verba (1963) maintains that positive move toward the institutions of representative government is essential for a well-functioning democracy. This suggest that the legitimacy of democracy rests upon the public's positive opinions of representative government and its institutions. In essence, Civic culture depicts citizens to be the driver of their own democracy and development but from the informed point of view (Abdu Ghani, 2019). To this effect, civic culture calls for greater focus on principles of responsiveness, inclusiveness and resilience, and strengthened partnerships in national governance. Based on this research, the Civic Culture remains a model of scientific inquiry. In the context of this research, it can be argued that when people are divorced from participating in civic affairs, their communities become vulnerable as few individuals may not be in a position to drive ethos of democracy.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This was qualitative research with a case study design. This was targeted at three institutions selected purposively with keen interest in civic engagement, national governance and community development. This study design falls within the constraints of constructivist and relativist ontology world view whose argument

suggest that knowledge and truth of a particular phenomenon can be obtained through subjective interaction with study participants. This entails that the investigators had an opportunity to interact with participants in their natural setting to observe and make conclusions out of the responses given on the involvement of key stakeholders in national governance of Zambia and their perspectives on innovative strategies of civic engagement in real life context (Yin, 2018).

Study site and selection of the institution

This research was conducted from political institutions, nongovernment organizations and religious institutions based in Lusaka district. The choice for these institutions were that Political parties in Zambia remain the best instrument to fulfil vital functions in democratic politics, (Maingaila, 2021), non-governmental organizations provide insights into policy formulations that have a far-reaching implication on the lives of the citizens (Moonga and Phiri, 2010). This allows them to systematically observe and critically reflect on what happens in practice in the area of governance. The rationale for choosing religious institutions was that the church has a mandate to build the Kingdom of God, preach about peace and transforming the lives of Kingdom citizens (Cheyeka, 2016). This shows that the church should not have only spiritual manifestation but also physical manifestations by providing physical needs to the citizens before the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Sample size and sampling criteria

This research had 23 participants in total. The sample comprised of technocrats on Civic engagement in national governance and community development. Participants were selected using homogenous purposive sampling. This technique was used because participants were carefully selected with a view to the unique information and insights that they could contribute based on their engagement in national governance. The best way to ensure this was using a judgmental sampling approach, by which the researcher decided who to include in the sample especially those with interest in national governance and human welfare.

Instruments for data generation

Interview guide with semi-structured questions was used to generate data from all the participants. The use of Semi-structured interviews was based on the reason advanced by Creswell (2014) who posit that semi-structured interviews are flexible hence helps to gather in-depth information which gives the researcher a complete and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews enabled the investigators to interact with participants and exchange ideas on the subject matter.

Data Analysis

Raw data generated from the field was qualitatively analysed using thematic method. This method of analysis allowed the researches to generate themes in line with the focus of this research. Therefore, the analysis of raw data was to enable the researcher to transform it into meaningful information.

Ethical considerations

The success of this research was based on following research ethics. Firstly, a clearance letter was obtained from the Directorate of Research and graduate Studies of the University of Zambia. Secondly, permission letters were also obtained from secretariat of targeted organisations. Thirdly, participation by participants was through consent. No one was coerced to participate. The purpose and the procedure of the research was well explained to them. Participants were also assured that data to be collected was only for academic purposes and hence to be kept confidential. Fourthly, the researcher assured the participants that names and personal details were not to be revealed or published and that names of participants and their respective organisations were to be represented by certain codes and this was to ensure anonymity. All the mentioned activities were done in order to ensure that the rights of the participants are respected and their dignity as human beings is safeguarded in this research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

A. Innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia

Participants were asked to give their views on innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia. Participants made various submissions and the analysis of data established five themes: (1) Grounding Civic engagement in the cultural environment of Zambia, (2) enhanced feedback mechanisms, (3) inclusion of Education into platforms of civic engagement, (4) promotion of democratic integrity and (5) inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men.

1. Ground Civic engagement in the cultural environment of Zambia

This article revealed that civic engagement is supposed to be grounded in the cultural environment of Zambia. Participants mentioned that the current model of civic engagement is associated with colonialism and most of the citizens especially the illiterate do not understand how to engage effectively. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P4M from organisation D mentioned:

We need to reform colonial laws that were formulated to suppress freedom fighters and move in a direction that those in the ruling party do not feel that they are more Zambian than others, we are all Zambian and we have a huge stake in this country called Zambia.

P10M from F organisation started:

I do admire some certain democracies of course western countries like American one where citizens can say anything against their leaders but I believe we need to start and develop our own concept of democracy.

P1M from organization A narrated:

Illiteracy levels do hinder a lot when it comes to engagement because most of the documents for example national documents are actually written in English and so when you go on the ground you find that some people may not be able to read the Queen's language. So, if some of these important documents can be translated into local languages where people are able to read in their own local languages. For example, when I was working for another organisation, we translated the 7th National Development Plan into at least 8 national languages to enable people understand the content.

2. Enhanced feedback mechanisms

The research revealed that in order to make the platforms of civic engagement more attractive, there was need to enhance feedback mechanisms in terms of sharing information on how to generate progressive ideas and attend to challenges in a more robust way between the elected officials and electorates. Participants mentioned that feedback mechanisms are key to enhance good governance. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P12M from organisation B stated:

We need to develop feedback mechanisms when representing people. For instance, if you are representing people on Ward development committee you are supposed to go back to your community and explain what has been discussed at the ward development committee meeting.

P2M from organisation B mentioned:

The issue of opening up the government in terms of sharing public documents is key because it will help government to be more transparent, and when it is transparent which means everything that they do it will be

subject to scrutiny by people. Sometimes people make what other people may term as bad noise because of lack of information, lack of specific details about the issue and that raises agitation. When government is open enough, open to scrutiny in whatever it is doing, I think it will help to enhance good governance which is embed with enhanced civic participation.

P1M from organisation A narrated:

As you may be aware right now Zambia is grappling with the issue of debt and we have to share between the debt and the remaining resources for government to respond to the needs of the community. When you look at the current budget, the 2022 budget that we have if it is fully actualised, I think it can go a long way to achieve community needs and the best strategy the government can use is to prioritise the needs because needs can never end. However, with the resources that we have we should engage people like we do when developing the National Development Plan because this can give us the priority levels and best feedback mechanism for the required period of time.

3. Inclusion of Education into platforms of civic engagement

This research also revealed that there was need to have some sort of education into platforms of civic engagement. Participants mentioned that if citizens are well informed, they can offer meaningful contribution in the sphere of development and good governance. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P16M from organisation H mentioned:

I would want to emphasise the aspect of citizens to be well informed and knowledgeable as the best guarantee for good governance and taking on or holding leaders accountable. You can have institutions and CSOs that are talking but when the general population are passive like Zambians have been the politicians will ask who are you talking for? This is because people who should drive the agenda for a better Zambia are too quiet and appear passive.

P11F from organisation A stated:

The frameworks of civic engagement are well articulated. We need to raise awareness around these and fully implement them for a full realization of the envisaged changes.

P17M from organisation G mentioned that:

I think there is a lot that we need to do. First of all, we need to understand exactly what civic engagement is all about even us as organizations we need to understand it clear before we take it to the people. My feeling is that people do not understand what civic engagement is and we need to do more in that area. Let me say Capacity building is needed first of all for us as NGOs and people we work for.

4. Promotion of democratic integrity

It was also found that there is need to promote democratic integrity in our civic engagement. Participants mentioned that in most cases, platforms of civic engagement are unattractive due to the presence of abusive language and elements of cadreism. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P13F from organisation G shared the following views:

It is a brilliant idea to have the Ward Development Committees but some time back cadres wanted to be on top of the WDCs with bullying and humiliation statements. I know the current government is really working in addressing those challenges we were facing previously but a lot more needs to be done.

P4M from organisation D stated that:

We have to be on a trajectory where we reform the bad laws, reform the constitution like the President and the Ministers have emphasised through engaging civil society and other stakeholders like the church, traditional leadership and so on so that we ensure we regain our respect as a democratic nation.

5. Inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men

The research also found that inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men is key if our democracy was to flourish. Participants mentioned that some churches lacked holistic approach in their ministry to incorporate real gospel that focuses on promoting human dignity. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P15M from organisation H stated that:

The church lacks the capacity to go for messages that are real in issues of civic education, civic engagement or governance. What the church has been programmed mostly although that is my view is that they talk about heaven but they forget that Christ said that I came so that you can have life in full and have it abundantly. To have abundant life someone need to have a dignified life. A life of poverty, a life of inequalities is not a dignified life. The training of pastors should embed issues to do with governance and social and economic injustice. Issues of accountability should really come out very strong and when you do that you train a group of people who have critical mind then when they go out, they will be able to preach the gospel that is right.

P16M from organisation H observed that:

It is the duty of the church to interpret the community, but many churches tend to interpret the Bible. We do not just need to interpret the Bible but the community as well. If one is in place like Shang'ombo without proper roads, electricity and water supply we cannot be speaking of Heaven and praying. God cannot be doing for us that we can do for ourselves.

P14M from organisation H suggested that:

In as much as we are speaking of spiritual matters, we need also to talk about day-to-day life of the people, we need to talk about education, health in short each and every aspect of human life is involved. The church needs to have a holistic approach to human life. We are here on earth that is the truth, the civic issues pertain to the issues of the earth and you cannot separate the church from earthly issues. For example, this time we are talking about global warming that is an issue which affects the church as well. Basically, as a church we need to have a holistic approach to life.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**A. Innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia****1. Ground Civic engagement in the cultural environment of Zambia**

Findings revealed that in order to make civic engagement attractive, it needs to be anchored on cultural environment of Zambia. This means that initiated civic activities should truly depict national values and principles. This research observed that the current style of engagement does not depict the true picture of the Zambia desired at independence by freedom fighters. To some extent, it appears that independence was gained to replace colonial masters with elected dictators. Thus, making democracy slowly shifting to favour the elites as it were during the colonial days. Findings also suggest that well informed civic actors should endeavour to localise civic engagement by translating books about civic engagement into local languages. This has an implication on helping citizens to fully internalise democracy and how they should engage as prospect agent of change in their communities. This gives an impression that there are some citizens who do not understand English as an official borrowed language. This is why some countries have embraced local languages as

official dialects so as to help citizens relate and comprehend issues easily. The Civic culture by Almond and Verba (1963) which seems to tally with this finding emphasised much on citizens knowing the nature of democracy from a historical perspective which facilitate the achievement of democratization and the stabilization of a regime.

2. Enhanced feedback mechanisms

Going by the recorded erratic engagement between the governors and those being governed, there was a view that enhanced feedback mechanisms was among the innovative means of making civic engagement attractive. The implication this has on civic engagement is that the consistent flow of information between those who govern and those that are being governed can help to make rational decisions among the interested parties. There was also an impression that enhanced feedback mechanisms may function as a powerful catalyst in promoting a shared understanding of community issues that may help the local authority to become more responsive and accountable to residents and ultimately build more support for initiatives and address and mitigate potential challenges. Generally, findings revealed that civic leaders have not done much on reporting back to the community about the work they have undertaken. Participants felt that there was lack of well-defined process, time and resources. In the context of Ethiopia, Fufa (2017) argues that under the right conditions, citizen engagement can help governments achieve improved development results, creating links between citizen engagement and improved public service delivery, public financial management, governance, social inclusion and empowerment.

3. Inclusion of Education into platforms of civic engagement

The findings made an impression that the majority of citizens do not understand how civic engagement works. Thus, it was suggested that platforms of civic engagement should go along with some sort of education. Perhaps, this scenario could be justified from civic education point of view that for people to engage in civic activities effectively, they should possess civic knowledge, skills and dispositions. In the absence of these elements, civic engagement could appear to be very irrelevant hence henceforth, denying people an opportunity for improved living standards. It is on this basis that the model of civic culture guiding this research gives an ideal situation and an opportunity for citizens to be embedded with Civic Knowledge, skills, values and dispositions as tools for vigorous participation in national governance (Almond and Verba, 1963). Another body of knowledge generated by Kaumba (2015) shows that most people lack pertinent information about participation in national governance and as such, people should acquire necessary skills that can help them to participate effectively and meaningfully.

4. Promotion of democratic integrity

It was also revealed that in order to make civic engagement more relevant, civic actors should endeavour to promote democratic integrity. From the responses given, findings suggest that there was limited integrity in our democracy. Seemingly, this research observed that cadres in the recent past hijacked platforms of civic engagement such as elections, Ward Development Coordinating Committees (WDCC) and District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCC) among others. This resulted into making platforms of civic engagement appear unattractive to some professional and senior citizens hence shunning away from engaging. This was also observed from the just August 2021 general elections where some citizens could not participate in the electoral process due to the presence of violence that characterised the process especially in Lusaka and southern provinces respectively. Lives were reported to have been lost as a result of this violence.

Promotion of democratic integrity can be likened to the situation in Nigeria where election crisis was observed. It was reported that at least 100 people died in federal and state election in 2003; not less than 300 people were killed in violence linked to the 2007 elections and well over 800 people were victims of electoral violence in 2011 presidential elections alone in the North with more than 65,000 people displaced (Segun (2013). With this in mind, Ikyase et al, (2015) recommended that politicians should not use ethnicity and

religion to galvanize support and polarize the populace through politics of religious deception and ethnic chauvinism which have stirred up sentiments and sparked communal violence perennially in Nigeria.

5. Inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men

This research revealed that the religious world lacked messages that focused on promoting human dignity. The research found that the majority of clergy men focused on preaching about the future life in heaven for those who believe so by ignoring the present life. There was an impression that while the so-called men of God promised the congregants that life will be better in heaven, the majority of them lived luxurious life. For this reason, participants felt that life skills in the training of clergy men are missing. It was on this perspective that there should be inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men as this may help them to go for messages that are holistic in nature. Messages that focus on both physical and spiritual needs. This act was demonstrated by Jesus Christ who attended to spiritual needs by preaching the gospel, praying for the people and at the same time feeding the hungry.

Abdu Ghani (2019) supports the idea of skill development in human resource though the scholar did not substantiate which human resource need to be developed. The findings suggest that building human capacity is one of the key requirements needed to achieve sustainable development. This a practical step and action oriented which should be taken seriously if the presence of the church on earth was to be meaningful.

CONCLUSION

This article reflected on innovative strategies of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia. key issues unearthed include; enhanced feedback mechanisms in the engagement process, inclusion of Education into platforms of civic engagement, promotion of democratic integrity and inclusion of life skills in the training of clergy men. Reference has been made to both theoretical and empirical perspectives. The overall picture generated from this inquiry is that human welfare should be at the centre of civic engagement and this should be driven by the citizens themselves with a strong support system from both the state and none state actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, the following are the recommendations;

Ministry of Home Affairs and Internal security should create an enabling environment for critical watchdog institutions like civic organizations as these help to create a conducive environment where governance can be practiced by good citizens.

Electoral Commission of Zambia and Non-government organisation must endeavour to provide both internal and external capacity building on civic issues as this is likely to reciprocate positive and informed engagement.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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