



**Faith
actors'
contribution
to Civic
Space
in Zimbabwe
- SDG 16**

22 May 2018

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The year 2017 saw the academia, the civil society, students, other Faith Based Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and political parties coalescing around the ZCC with regards to empowerment and governance issues, hence securing and widening the civic space towards nation-building, Christian unity and social cohesion. The Church played a similar role as it did in the early 2000s where it raised burning constitutional, human rights, economic, peace and electoral questions / Report page 16

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The full working title of the report is **“Tracking progress in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 16: Documentation on how Faith actors have Defended, Defined and Widened Civic space in Zimbabwe - Report prepared by Rev. Dr. Kenneth Mtata General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches”**

Executive Summary

The role of the church in the public life of Zimbabwe has been both positive and negative. But in the last few years, the positive contribution of the church in the process of the national transition has been visionary and transformative. While the negative contribution of some church actors were evinced by the presence of some African independent churches who filled the Rufaro stadium in support of Grace Mugabe, the wife of the then President, when she was using the church and its various assets to vilify his political opponents, the response of the other churches in the subsequent deterioration and ultimate change of political leadership was recognisable.

The positive engagement of the Church and faith-based actors to contribute to the realisation of a just, peaceful and inclusive Zimbabwean society can be traced as far back as the struggle for independence, from the 1960s and 1970s. The struggle for independence was generally waged by the people of Zimbabwe under the leadership of the nationalists, most of whom had been educated at church mission institutions. In these mission schools, the would-be nationalists attained empowering education that encouraged critical thinking. Such education emboldened the students to take up an active role in the struggle for independence.

Following the attainment of independence, the Church joined in the national reconstruction program based on the enduring Christian principles of justice, peace and equity. Of course, there is a dark part of the history when the church lowered its guard and did not provide adequate response to the brutalities against thousands of people, especially from Matebeleland and Midlands Provinces¹ in an operation code named Gukurahundi in the early 1980s. While the government claimed the exercise was aimed at ridding the region of armed dissidents, the indiscriminate killings demonstrated that this was actually a project aimed at getting rid of any political opposition in the form of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Not the whole church was complicit by silence. The church led by the Roman Catholic Church's Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) was one of the main actors to respond immediately to these atrocities by providing the few available documentation of what happened.

Once more, in the 1990s, the Church in Zimbabwe played a catalytic role in championing the agenda for justice and peace by insisting on the need for a home-grown constitution as well as for free, fair and credible elections. People like the Lutheran Bishop, Dr Ambrose Moyo, who had been appointed into the Constitutional Committee but resigned when he saw how the process was manipulated, played an important role in the campaign against the 'No' vote in the subsequent referendum. This was, in fact, the first defeat incurred by the ruling party in an open election. Through instruments like the National Constitutional Assembly² and the Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network³ which were actually formed at the behest of the church, the collective role of the church was quite evident in the defending and defining civic space. The church has also managed to continue creating space for public engagement for example through the initiative to bring different national actors towards a national vision called 'The Zimbabwe We Want'. Other such initiatives such as the National People's Convention have also allowed the church to use its convening power to both open and defend the public space.

As the church continued to create and defend a fair and safe space for civic engagement, students, churches, labour and other sectors of society increased their collective reflection on the agenda for nation-building which saw the different formations leading to the establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change in 2000. Ever since the ruling party resorted to violent and repressive politics leading to violent and highly contentious elections in 2000, 2002, 2005 and 2008. There was an increased cry over violence and intimidation against opposition members as well as allegations of election rigging.⁴ The repression was also escalated by the enforcement of the controversial Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Privacy Act (AIPA). These laws thoroughly restricted any civic social space by restricting freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and other related freedoms. Church space became very useful since it could be used to facilitate civic engagement. It was actually during a trip to one of the prayer events that the leaders of the opposition MDC were brutalised and badly injured.⁵ It had

become clear the church was facilitating civic space to remain open.⁶

Indeed under so much pressure, some churches capitulated and gave in to the dictates of the repressive state⁷. Some church leaders saw this as an opportunity for self-enrichment as some of them accepted personal favours from the government such as farms confiscated from white farmers. This weakened the voice of the church during the time when society desperately needed it. But for some church leaders in the midst of this repression was still the environment for imagination. It was during this period that the Church, under the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD), crafted the “Zimbabwe We Want⁸ Discussion Document” in 2006 which would sow seeds for a new constitution in 2013. Some of the issues raised in the ZWW discussion document included the recognition that all “human beings are created in God’s image, human life is sacrosanct.” It also recognised secular codes such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (1981) to “which Zimbabwe is a signatory”. The ZWW also emphasised that it “was largely to secure independence and freedom that the war of liberation was fought. Therefore, we ought to respect all human life. Deliberate and avoidable taking of human life should be regarded as immoral and against the will of God. In the Zimbabwe that we want, we as human beings, and our social, political, economic, cultural and military institutions, systems and processes should always respect human life...Our struggle for liberation was for freedom and the **Zimbabwe we want** must allow every member of our society to enjoy those freedoms that contribute towards nation building. We therefore need to safeguard those rights, particularly “the freedom of Association, freedom of speech and expression.”⁹

The voice of the church was continuously heard as it played a crucial role by supporting the formation of government of national unity when the nation had reached an impasse following the controversial 2008 election. Although much of its role was behind the scenes, there is general agreement that the church played an important role in the formation of government of national unity in 2009.

The underlying concern of the church to have a home-grown constitution was finally realised when in 2013 churches mobilized its members to be part of the constitution making process. As noted before, this effort of the church, especially the Zimbabwe Council of churches, had started in the 1990s when the church helped in the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) from its programs. Indeed, the establishment of the new constitution was made possible by the government of national unity. But without the church taking up explicit call for the entrenchment of constitutional democracy, the opposition party in government remained vulnerable and the civil society battle weary after many years of repression and decline of financial resources. The church remained one of the enduring spaces for ongoing engagement because it was resourced locally and thus fundamentally not dependent on external funding. As an enduring space for ongoing engagement, the church also played a leading role in expanding the available space by actively supporting the work of prominent human rights defenders such as Jestina Mukoko under the banner of the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP). In essence, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the ZCC were amongst the initial members of the ZPP at its formation. Individual human rights defenders such as Jestina Mukono, can be singled out as prominent during this period. But still, their work blossomed under the community radio run by churches airing from outside the country. The radio programs were run by churches-supported teams that allowed citizens to have access to alternative national news.

The decline of the opposition parties demonstrated by fragmentation after the election defeat of 2013, saw also the decline of civil society as hope for meaningful change was evaporating and as some civil society actors sought to recalibrate their legitimacy partly by re-adopting people-centeredness as compared to partisanship. Additionally, the decline of civil society during that period could also be explained by fear of victimization and prosecution by the Mugabe administration. Economic decline also saw the civil space closing as many NGOs lost the capacity to occupy space left void by a waning opposition. In 2014, the

Zimbabwe Council of Churches commemorated 50 years of its founding and used the occasion to celebrate its past successes, reflect on its limitations and ponder its future. The occasion helped to highlight the fact that Zimbabwe had just turned 34 from independence from colonial rule. This occasion did, however, not raise the profile of the ZCC to the level of its potential. Other initiatives such as the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum and the Africa Sustainable Peace Institution for Research and Education (ASPIRE) emerged to fill the void left by the Church's inaction. The ASPIRE meeting in 2015 to deliberate on the contextualisation of the SDGs in Zimbabwe was attended by both clergy and civil society actors, sought to show how the church could use their influence to the realisation of the SDGs, especially Goal 16.

In 2016, ASPIRE did another research and the prognosis showed that instead of exhibiting signs of democratic development and good governance, the nation had actually slid into a ditch from which it was unable to extricate itself characterised by deep societal divisions, apathy and acute economic decomposition. The study was necessitated by the observation that the internal succession struggle within the ruling party was getting out of hand and had intensified in 2016. The ZCC, together with the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, produced several pastoral letters to warn that such hyped public confrontation within the ruling party could no longer be sustained. The equally fragmented and under-resourced civil society could not take advantage of this situation. In effect, a number of developments worked against attempts at galvanising a

collective voice amongst civil society, not least the fierce competition for resources and the discernible dearth of strategic leadership.

Not heeding to the call of the church, the situation in the ruling party escalated with the expulsion of the vice-President, E.D. Mnangagwa, at the end of 2017 triggering the intervention of the military, leading to the resignation of the President R.G. Mugabe. This situation created a new crisis for civil society since on one hand there was celebration that with the departure of Mugabe there will be new space for civil society. But there was another concern whether the military, once they had tested power, would allow civil engagement.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches immediately organised civil society to coalesce around a common agenda to engage the new regime. Guided by its 2017–2020 strategic plan which was actually based on the SDG Goal 16, the ZCC offered a safe space for civil society to converge and organize under the National People's Convention (NPC). The NPC became the new space under which civil society, labour, church and social movements would redefine their engagement. In broad terms, the key messages from the NPC centered on speeding up of: the alignment of laws with the constitution and constitutionalism; democratization; social service delivery and effective redress of historical atrocities and fragmentation in the Zimbabwean society. See Annex 5.2 for further details, which is an NPC Outcome Statement that was presented to the new administration.

01 Introduction

The continued decline of the national economy, repressive and tense political environment, and the limited space for civil society engagement that have characterised the situation in Zimbabwe in the last 15 to 20 years contradicts the letter and spirit of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the aspirations of the universally agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially Goal 16, as well as relevant human rights instruments and laws. The church and its different faith-based actors and institutions have carried out key interventions to defend, define and broaden the civic space in this regard. This research report uses the work of various Christian movements and institutions, including the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and Zimbabwe Devine Destiny, as well as the experiences of the Africa Sustainable Peace Institute for Research and Education (ASPIRE) to demonstrate how such efforts played out in Zimbabwe particularly in the context of the recently concluded Operation Restore Legacy.

In addition to the use of secondary data through document analysis, the research team conducted Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) disaggregated by gender and age in 5 Districts across Zimbabwe. These discussions captured perceptions of different social groups through a series of guided questions that elicit their knowledge, attitudes and impressions concerning the specific project outcomes. The FGDs incorporated a community scorecard in which church members rated responsiveness and accountability of power holders as well as their own capacity and confidence to hold power holders to account using a grading system in the form of scores.

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with participants derived from all ecumenical forums in the Church and the local church leadership. Key informants were purposively selected, considering their particular knowledge and participation in areas of concerns to specific partners and their outcomes. The research also employed questionnaires and surveys through triangulation so that one tool compliments the short falls of the other.

01.1 Definition of key terms

Defend: to ward-off or repel an attack or attacker from

doing something¹⁰, in this context, preventing any person or group from accessing or using civic space.

Define: to demark sharply the outlines of a concept¹¹, in this case civic space.

Widen: To broaden or extend in scope and range, broaden or extend¹² in this case civic space.

Civic space: the state in which the democratic society is open, citizens and civil society organisations are able to organise, participate and communicate without hindrance. This can only happen when a state holds by its obligations to protect its citizens and respects and facilitates their fundamental rights to associate, assemble peacefully and freely express views and opinions.¹³

This report details the findings of a research on how faith actors have defended and widened civic space in Zimbabwe. Broadly, the various sections of the report provides an account of the research process, the findings, gaps and conclusion which will subsequently inform policy and practice by local and international actors interested in pursuing a sustainable, multi-dimensional and multi-disciplinary development agenda in Zimbabwe. However, the research does not intend to provide a comprehensive and conclusive research outcome but to contribute to the growing stock of knowledge on religion and development and to the pursuit of peace and development in Zimbabwe.

01.2 Contextual analysis of the social, economic and political situation in Zimbabwe

Civic space in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate despite the adoption of the new constitution in 2013, as laws designed to operationalise the various constitutional Commissions were not signed. The major crisis in Zimbabwe has to do with failure to implement the constitution and subsidiary laws. For instance, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) has not been able to address the numerous politically motivated human rights abuses which were perpetuated from the 1980s to date. Similarly, the Gender Commission, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, the Media Commission and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) have all

been formed but not much work has been undertaken in relation to implementation of their mandate partly due to political interference and the lack of independence from the state. In view of this reality/crisis, the church has consistently advocated for the speedy implementation of the constitution and prioritization of the citizens' agenda in national processes. In doing so, and whilst working hard to address its own internal challenges, the church entered into a multiplicity of collaborative pacts with like-minded civil society actors in seeking to promote democracy and to inspire the crafting of a national vision as articulated in the Zimbabwe We Want discussion document. The main thrust of the document was to highlight the role of Spirituality and Morality in public engagement. It also sought to highlight that societies could be united in their diversity as long as citizens learn to respect human life as well as dignity for all. The respect for Democratic Freedoms and Good Governance would generate true participation and subsidiarity. The overall focus would be to ensure everyone lived a life to the full as stated in the gospel of John 10:10.

Media reports indicate that in the period 2014 to 2015, the ZHRC handled over 400 new cases, of which about 50 were open cases while the rest were dealt with privately¹⁴ because of their complexity and sensitivity. It is also important to note that the ZHRC does not have the power to arrest, but to investigate issues reported to it, directly and indirectly. The ZHRC is constitutionally mandated to refer human rights-related offenses to the police who are often accused of being partisan and serving the interests of the incumbent Head of State. Hence, there is a lack of trust among the citizens, the Commission and the police.

Before the enactment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Act, the space to discuss *Gukurahundi*, the 2002, 2005 and 2008 political violence has been heavily monitored and curtailed by the State. Following the advent of the "new dispensation",¹⁵ which denotes the replacement of the Robert Mugabe administration with the one led by E.D. Munangagwa under the auspices of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) through an operation code named Operation Restore Legacy, there has been a

notable increase in the opening up of the civic space. The new dispensation, which effectively started in November 2017, has thus far raised the hopes and expectations of Zimbabweans and foreign investors alike. However, as the country approaches the 2018 elections, political uncertainty is fuelling intra-party fighting spurred on by the succession battles previously in ZANU-PF, the ruling party, and now in MDC-T, the main opposition party. In the former, there is high possibility that the G40 cabal ousted from the governing party will sabotage ZANU-PF in the 2018 elections. There are reports that the *G40* and *Lacoste* factions¹⁶ are already attacking each other in Epworth, Harare.¹⁷ There is a high risk of politically motivated violence at community level and human rights violations which might limit the activities of human rights defenders in rural communities.¹⁸ The ZHRC recently indicated that 'the Commission was disturbed by the sharp rise in cases of political violence ahead of next year's elections.'¹⁹ There is therefore need for concerted peace building efforts in the communities. Such work in community has a gender dimension and hence the establishment of local Peace and Gender Committees established to step up their efforts towards conflict management and resolution in the context of the upcoming elections as it has been noted, over the years, that political conflict affects women and men differently. In particular, research and election monitoring reports by various civics in Zimbabwe have shown that while men are the direct victims and major perpetrators of political violence, a relatively higher number of women and children have been indirectly affected by the same. Thus, the establishment and capacitation of peace and gender structures by the ZCC and other church bodies is as essential aspect of sustainable conflict transformation in Zimbabwe.

The civil society and the academia which have tirelessly tried to unveil human rights abuses have been arrested, tortured and some forced into exile which is indicative of the limited civic space to interrogate pertinent national issues. The Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum reports that the year 2016 witnessed a new wave of protests following citizens' engagement in social movements such as *#Tajamuka/Sesijikile*, *#ThisFlag* among others. As the protests against deteriorating economic conditions

gained momentum, State agents increasingly resorted to the use of brutal force, torture, abductions and arbitrary arrests as a means of intimidating, investigating and obtaining information or confessions from real or perceived offenders as well as to instil fear within the general populace.²⁰

Protests in Harare and Beitbridge failed in 2016 because the military was against them. After a failed attempt to demonstrate against injustices, Zimbabweans resorted to the use of social media platforms as a means of expressing discontent where there is some allowance to protest. However, church activists such as Evan Mawarire, Martha O'Donovan and Matigari were either intimidated or arrested for causing social unrest and insulting the former President through social media. The media in general is still polarised and is generally perceived as being partisan for and against political interests in Zimbabwe. As a result of polarization citizens generally withdrew from participating in national processes thereby widening the divide between policy makers and citizens. In response to apathy and fear arising from years of a repressive administration, various church institutions reoriented their strategic plans accordingly.

The ZHRC recently indicated that “the Commission was disturbed by the sharp rise in cases of political violence ahead of next year’s elections²¹” and warned that the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) could be forced to suspend the 2018 election if a repeat of the 2008 violence is experienced. Ever since the removal of R.G Mugabe from power in November 2017 by the military, there is widespread fear that the army is increasingly getting involved in the public sphere which might further shrink the civic space in Zimbabwe especially with the deployment of political commissars all who are still soldiers in active service. It is reported that at the moment the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) has already deployed 2000 commissars led by Retired Lieutenant-General Engelbert Rugeje as part of Zanu PF’s 2018 electoral strategy²², this has raised uncertainty on the credibility of the upcoming election. The protests in November 2017 capitalised on the military action but the military sought legitimacy from the popular action. Ascendance and appointment

of retired General C. Chiwenga to the Vice Presidency, Air Marshal Perence Shiri to the Ministry of Agriculture and Major General S.Moyo to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs only points to the formation and consolidation of a military State and reward of the role the army played in the ouster of R.G Mugabe.

High ranking military personnel Rt.Lt.E.Rugeje the Zanu PF political commissar reminded and threatened people who had attended a Zanu PF rally with a repeat of the 2008 violence.²³ The future is uncertain. In that regard, ZEC has not taken much steps and implemented electoral reforms which guarantee a free, fair and credible election in 2018. The unceremonious resignation of Justice Rita Makarau as the ZEC chairperson and the appointment of High Court Judge Priscilla Chigumba could be indicative of the advancement of factional political interests. Between January and May, 2017 alone, the Zimbabwe Peace Project reported a total of 649 cases of politically motivated violence.²⁴ These cases have been on an upward trend since March, 2017 with harassment and intimidation cases continuing to dominate the recorded violations. Given that the election season is upon Zimbabwe, intimidation in the rural areas escalated as more cases of politicians demanding registration slips from villagers increased²⁵. In response to this and as part of its mandate, the church has mobilized its leadership to continuously undertake voter education targeting the Christian majority in both rural and urban areas.

Cases of villagers being told that the new Bio-metric Voter Registration (BVR) system enables politicians to see who people vote for was also common place. Village Heads are currently distributing the Command Agriculture farming inputs attached to producing the registration slip which is both unconstitutional and intimidatory by nature fixated at demeaning human dignity of the rural folk. ZEC has only verbally condemned this act without any corresponding action to end it. Such a development, if not addressed, may create an impression that voters will be compelled to vote for the party of the giver, and also creates a politically driven sense of discomfort and insecurity for those who do not cooperate with the demands and expectations of the giver.

01.3 The motivations for engagement (the community needs, the experiences and status of the churches/FBOs)

In May, 2016 the Church conducted a research in Zimbabwe and identified 3 major issues in relation to governance and peace which motivated it to engage other stakeholders²⁶:

01.3.1 FRAGMENTATION

Zimbabweans are suspicious and afraid of each other. The Zimbabwean society is deeply fragmented at societal and national level. Leaders in the government and the Church are no longer committed, but are in pursuit of personal gains at the expense of the people. From a church perspective, it is difficult to pin-point who the 'Church' is. Since 2010, there has been the formation of many churches which preach prosperity in an economically deprived country. From a political point of view, there are too many splinter political parties, reported to be 84²⁷, which are breaking away from bigger parties. This development translates into bitter power struggles which have also precipitated into the Church. Individuals within the main political parties are bent on amassing support to secure their own positions after the 2018 elections. For example, the brawl among Nelson Chamisa, Elias Mudzuri and Thokozani Khupe is caused by the issue of succession of the ailing party leader Morgan Tsvangirai of the leading opposition alliance MDC in the case that he fails to represent the party. In most instances, individualism works against the collective national interests.

01.3.2. CITIZEN DISENGAGEMENT

Due to fragmentation at all levels of society, citizens are frustrated and have disengaged from national and civil society activities including those conducted by the church. People are no-longer interested in participating; levels of apathy at social, political and economic levels are high. As government's repressive laws continues to limit public participation and freedom of expression, a growing number of the youthful population has resorted to the use of alternative, "unregulated" social media platforms. At church level, people are moving back and forth between Pentecostal and mainline churches in search for a gospel that speaks to their interests and needs. As such, whilst the ideologically sound continues

to keep with the mainline churches owing to their stability and predictability, the youthful members of the church have rather taken an interest in the prosperity gospel being preached by some Pentecostal churches. In general therefore, the church is under pressure to absorb high levels of mobility and dual allegiance.

01.3.3 ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

Due to a shrinking economy, Zimbabweans are deeply trapped in debts which they are getting from banks and loan "sharks". Citizens sleep in bank queues to collect the little cash money still available the following day. Cash shortages have reached alarming levels. The difficult economic conditions in Zimbabwe have partly entrenched a veritable culture of corruption in and outside the church thereby compromising the foundations upon which the Zimbabwean society is based. In response to this development, some churches have heightened teachings on biblical ethics and values as well as empowering their membership to undertake entrepreneurship initiatives in order to complement existing income sources.

01.3.4. NEEDS ADDRESSED BY THE CHURCH – PROVIDING JOINT VISION, DEVELOPMENT AND SAFE CONVENING SPACE

The study discovered that participants to the study were confident that faith leaders have an important role to play in influencing and shaping opinions and public perceptions of communities who hold them in high regard and look up to them for leadership and guidance. Participants to the study also revealed that faith actors are capacitated to unite, mobilize, develop and 'heal the nation' using resources such as nurturing fellowship, unity and agency, including a vision for nation building on the principles of justice, equity and participation. This is drawn from the hermeneutical resources of relating sacred texts, liberative interpretive traditions to speak to varied contexts of readers. Coming from the background that the ZCC has theological and biblical commitments, it is strategically positioned to address the country's socio-economic needs because she is accorded moral high ground and has proved to be a fertile safe space for critical solidarity for public engagement. Sensitizing faith leaders on peace, human rights and Gender Based

Violence (GBV) will thus create a critical mass of opinion leaders to promote the message of zero tolerance to all forms of violence, creating a more conducive environment for the promotion and protection of the civic space, election and co-existence in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) has increased the buy-in of faith leaders and the laity about human rights, peace and justice, so that these issues trickle down to grassroots level. The ZCC remains an indispensable platform for part of the 80% of people who profess to be Christians²⁸ in Zimbabwe to engage collectively in sustainable dialogue for conflict transformation. As noted in the contextual analysis, dialogue on pertinent national issues is traditionally monitored and restricted; however the situation has improved under the 'new' dispensation.

Closely linked to the above is the observation that churches are safe convening spaces. Research participants revealed that churches are open (safe) spaces to freely talk about injustices, human rights and peace in Zimbabwe as compared to the communities they reside in. Zimbabweans still highly distrust each other in these spaces as others before have worked as informers of the State. The Church remains the space where you find politicians, civilians, pastors and lay people sitting side by side. With appropriate mobilizing and organizing capacities, the church has the power to bring these people together engaging collectively on national issues as illustrated by the increased use of the National People's Convention (NPC) as a trusted, safe convening space for civil society. In the past few months before 'the new dispensation' and removal of Mugabe from power by the military, Zimbabwe's shrinking civic space became marred by intimidation, violence and incarceration of activists who were perceived as 'enemies of the State'.

01.4 Religious/theological argumentation used (inspirations)

The work of the Churches has been distinct from the work of other actors because it is based on some key theological and critical themes.

The starting point of the ZCC engagement is based on the understanding that all human beings are created in the

image of God, as shown in the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2. This understanding combined with the Human Rights Charter has emboldened the Church's defence of the citizens as a Christian duty. If all human beings are created in the image of God, then all people must be treated with dignity and rights.

The second theological starting point recognizes that human beings are already in the bondage of sin and injustice. God always shows up to address injustice by raising God's people to lead the liberation. The story of the book of Exodus shows how God used Moses and Aaron and Miriam to lead the suffering Israelites out of an oppressive and unjust system in Egypt. And ultimately God reveals God's vision of community in the way Jesus identifies his self-sacrificial mission as 'good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed' (Luke 4, 18) Just like in the days of Moses, the ZCC remains the 'voice of the voiceless' and the conscience of the nation in times of oppression to uphold the dignity of mankind in Zimbabwe where the Constitution is disregarded and violated with impunity.

The understanding of peace as Shalom - not merely the absence of war and conflict, but presence of life in fullness - has also informed the work of the ZCC. Shalom, a concept which refers to the total or holistic life, has been adopted by the ZCC. Since 1964, it has put upon itself the responsibility to pursue 'shalom' as the gift of all people regardless of political affiliation, race, ethnicity or religion. This shalom or holistic peace refers to a situation in which everyone enjoys peace mentally, physically and spiritually.

Since the task of the church actors in pursuit of justice means that sometimes the church confronts the powers that be, the ZCC has seen its work within the prophetic theological tradition where the prophets of old engaged the kings without fear and favour. This theology is also aware that there were prophets who legitimated the palace and turning a blind eye to the violations of human dignity. The ZCC has traditionally infused the prophetic tradition in its work by confronting secular power such as did Elijah, Jeremiah and Samuel even when it means getting into conflict with the King.

When the population is hurting, the church needs to draw from its theological resources for pastoral care. This theology informs the promotion of unity, justice and total healing and reconciliation of the nation. The commitment of the ZCC to its pastoral duty of comforting people under oppression and providing direction during the time of suffering. All of these theological assets combined will contribute to a peaceful, united and prosperous nation.

O1.5 Church-civil society cooperation in responding to the crisis in Zimbabwe

All ZCC projects which aimed at defending, defining and widening civic space in Zimbabwe were implemented through local women's, men's, youth's and pastor's ecumenical forums of the 26 member churches. The ZCC leveraged the majority advantage to effectively and collectively address the national governance and human rights challenges in Zimbabwe through the alignment of interests, building partnerships and stimulating collective action amongst all stakeholders to defend, define and widen the civic space. Heads of member denominations were also involved for member church buy-in. These constituencies are always key in project planning and

implementation by creating an open-dialogue platform for amplifying voices of the faith community at a larger scale. These projects included raising awareness on the supremacy of the constitution, the need for Christians to participate in national processes especially voting, and holding the government accountable regarding use of public resources.

Cooperation of the national and local governments was also recorded in the projects organised by ASPIRE and the ZCC, though not easy with the former. The ZCC and ASPIRE also saw more CSOs seeking to collaborate with them for example in the National People's Conventions, public dialogues and workshops which enhanced the effectiveness and depth of engagements. One important resource the ZCC brings is the wealth of its local, regional and international networks through platforms such as Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa (FOCISSA), the local ACT Forum, and its partnership with FBOs in Europe and the USA. The recent solidarity visit by the global ecumenical partners led by the World Council of Churches allowed the wealth of religion to be evident.

02 Research findings

02.1 Active citizenship, Good governance and Peace building

THE NATURE OF ENGAGEMENTS

Since the revival of the ZCC²⁹, from a moment of apparent inactivity to ongoing attempts at recalibrating its image and strategic direction, the study noted that faith leaders who have emerged as opinion leaders are more active on **social media platforms** where they have some sense of security and have a larger audience. On such platforms, faith leaders are engaging more on issues related to governance, human rights, politics and democracy without fear. Social media is more accessible and far reaching as compared to other platforms in Zimbabwe as according to the usage Statistics: 6,759,032 are internet users as of June, 2016.³⁰ Since the emergence of Facebook and most recently WhatsApp, the Church is utilising social media platforms to enable church leaders inclusive of Bishops, pastors and the laity to interrogate governance and human rights issues. Social media conversations, enabled by the high technology penetration in Zimbabwe, has seen faith actors being able to reach out to more people as compared to the past years, interrogating human rights, peace and governance issues. Academics, lecturers, activists and leaders are interacting in real time from all parts of the country, but on the same platform.

In 2017, the Local Peace and Gender Committees (LPGC) (see page 8) have assumed a lobby and **advocacy approach** by actively mobilising communities and raising awareness in human rights, electoral processes, peace and conflict issues as well as advisers to local and traditional leaders as they solve conflicts within the communities. They are however not in many communities because the project was limited to specific Districts in Zimbabwe. The ZCC's project design was meant to assist the Church in rebuilding its capacity in effective leveraging of the collective voice of all member churches. This approach was premised on the realisation that the majority of Zimbabweans are connected to the Church and in turn the Church has strong influence on the broader population to raise awareness, mobilise and influence action within the civic space at all levels. The Church realises that when it is united, then it is also in a position

to lobby duty bearers for effective policy reforms. For example, against the background of renewed ZCC, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches and the ZCC arranged a meeting with MDC President, Morgan Tsvangirai, and the then Vice President E.Mnangagwa in August, 2017 to discuss peace, human rights and good governance in preparation for the 2018 elections.

To enhance the participation, relevance and influence of the ordinary citizen in national democratic processes, the ZCC was also instrumental in the distribution of the Constitution through its constitutional awareness project. This document is critical in **raising awareness and knowledge** of civil-political rights which are critical in defending the civic space. By the end of 2017, the ZCC had distributed 400 copies of the constitution across the 10 Provinces after the research revealed that faith actors in the Church do not have the requisite human rights awareness knowledge and capacity of human rights and peace to defend, define and widen the civic space in Zimbabwe. Knowledge is power. In progressive democracies such as South Africa, United States and Britain, citizens defend, define and widen the civic space by exercising their constitutional rights, an element which is lacking in Zimbabwe. About 78% of Zimbabweans do not know the 2013 Constitution.³¹ After the Constitution was distributed, congregants belonging to the men's, women's, youth's and pastor's forum committed themselves to the cause of peace, justice and human rights.

The ZCC also organised and **convened worship services, bible studies and joint ecumenical gatherings and worship** in line with its role in the promotion of church unity and social unity in Zimbabwe. Using readily available resources has also elevated the ZCC as a faith movement bringing Christians together in large numbers. For example, during the celebrations of 40 years of autonomy by the United Methodist Church, 7000 people gathered to commemorate this event and the ZCC General Secretary used this opportunity to talk about unity, peace and prosperity in Zimbabwe.

Through **public community-based dialogues**, the Provincial/National People's Conventions and the Christian

Vote Campaign as platforms for discussions, the ZCC were instrumental in popularising the rights and obligations of citizens through the Church and also organised ecumenical members, the civil society and Zimbabwean citizens in engaging duty bearers. Public statements directed at the government were produced from these people's conventions. The participant's views and opinions on these platforms influenced the recovery of not only ZCC members, but also the nation at large to the benefit of all actors who look up to the Church as a platform for mobilizing citizens and churches to defend and widen the civic space in Zimbabwe. The year 2017 saw the academia, the civil society, students, other Faith Based Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and political parties coalescing around the ZCC with regards to empowerment and governance issues, hence securing and widening the civic space towards nation-building, Christian unity and social cohesion. The Church played a similar role as it did in the early 2000s where it raised burning constitutional, human rights, economic, peace and electoral questions and led to the formation of Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network, National Constitutional Assembly, Zimbabwe Peace Project and ZIMCODD.

02.2 Youth empowerment and Wider Civic Society Networking

In the same context, the ZCC has been providing a platform for young people to engage and promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The research also discovered that there is high apathy amongst the youth. This is sad since the youths make up the majority of the population and hence need to take a lead. In many cases young people's voices are left behind in the civic space. There is deliberate effort by faith leaders in the ZCC to focus on youth under the banner of the Ecumenical Youth Empowerment Programmes as they require support in order to face the challenges posed by a deteriorating socio-economic and political environment in Zimbabwe. During the transition which saw the ouster of former President R.G Mugabe and coming in of President E.D Mnangagwa, young people from across the country gathered for a National Ecumenical Youth Empowerment Summit to discuss the socio-political and economic context, under the auspices of the ZCC. Ecumenical

Young People, apart from sharing different experiences, they had the opportunity to engage various government departments and youth leaders from across the political divide in Zimbabwe.

The Ecumenical Youth Empowerment Programmes have created a dialogue platform that has led to the increase of young faith actors in the civic space. Young people have been visible in civic platforms at local and national level. The voices and presence of young people in the National People's Conventions enabled them to air their views in response to the change of leadership. Young people have also created their own local spaces for engagement known as the Ecumenical Youth Fellowships. These spaces have enabled increased dialogue and sharing of ideas amongst young people. The space has also provided learning and education as young people engage in national development, constitutionalism and economic issues. It has also been a space where young people learn to interrogate pertinent issues through engagement to promote mutual understanding, prevent conflict, combat violence, discrimination, participate in conflict resolution, also building and consolidating peace in the country's new 'dispensation'. This is a sustainable platform that allows ecumenical young people to use their creativity to make the change happen for themselves and for the nation. There is potential to widen a sustainable dialogue platform for young people as they are the majority of the Zimbabwean population.³²

Youth and other faith leaders have also been involved in issues of social and economic justice. The platforms have been created by the Church to engage with the government to address the social and economic problems being faced by Zimbabweans at the moment. The Church has been instrumental in engaging issues around natural resources governance, the national budget and corruption, amongst others. This space has been largely occupied by other civil society players who are into research and advocacy. The Church has however been working together with the civil society to compliment this work by providing a theological reflection and a faith based approach to economic issues. The Church has been working with Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA), Zimbabwe

Coalition on Debt and Development (ZIMCODD) and the Centre for Natural Resources Governance, among other organisations. The Church has also been leading the conversation on the National Budget Review Process under the National People's Convention. This initiative by the Church is meant to provide one common voice for the civil society in general on critical national issues.

02.3 Are there learnings/indicators of success that can be used in various contexts across the country and region?

From the beginning in 1964, churches saw themselves as 'the Church' body attending to the spiritual, physical, social, economic and political needs of Zimbabweans. This church unity is the one which informed all its activities in 2017 which implies that this work can be done when the Church is one. Against this background and in response to the increasingly shrinking civic space in 2017, all ecumenical forums under the ZCC attended and supported public dialogues, trainings, Provincial/ National People's Conventions and formed Local Peace and Gender Committees within the confinements of 'the Church' without fear of arrest or persecution by the State because they felt safe and somehow protected from the State. By using its own buildings, the Church reduced

expenses and also ensured the safety of participants. During the gatherings, the ZCC discussed electoral issues, constitutional issues, governance challenges and *Gukurahundi* and none of the meetings were disrupted by the State.

This points to the fact that 'the Church' must always keep a safe distance from political parties, but actively engage them at the same time to hold them accountable and promote value-based democracy. A good example of how not to relate with politics is the unhealthy conflation of some apostolic churches with the ruling ZANU-PF party during the transitional events of November 2017 in which the Church got embroiled in factional wars and lost its integrity. The Church can be used by politicians to mobilise on its behalf and get corrupted by the benefits it solicits from the relationship. The ZCC also used Training of Trainers (ToTs) to increase the knowledge and understanding of faith leaders in human rights, peace and constitutionalism. When E.D Mnangagwa replaced R.G Mugabe in November, 2017 the ZCC took this opportunity to gather and tap into the views of the masses because the State was distracted. Participants felt that the civic space has opened up a little bit after the fall of Mugabe.

03 Gaps identified

- There is the lack of community protection groups to cushion the community from all forms of conflict and violence. This also includes mechanism in which civil society groups under threat can find shelter from the church. Related to this is the absence of strong, strategic and tactical synergies between and amongst the various church and civil society groups in responding to conflict and human rights abuses. This reality informed the ZCC's intervention strategy to form Local Peace and Gender Committees, but more needs to be done to ensure that communities are self-reliant in effectively responding to conflict and violence.
- The Church also noted with concern the absence of the voice of the church in political issues as some faith leaders have become reluctant to get involved in issues related to human rights and peace building as they are closely related to 'politics'. This raises the urgent need to build strong theological foundations to support the churches in their public engagement. The study concluded that some faith leaders prefer to be actively engaged in issues like gender based violence and less on more controversial issues, except if they are working together with others at the ecumenical level.
- Closely linked to the above is that the Church still lacks competence in advancing peace and human rights issues. More capacity building and trainings need to be done.
- The Church works with very limited funds as Donors are not prepared to readily give money to implement projects as the church is viewed as a 'spiritual' rather than a developmental hub.
- People with Disabilities (PWDs) are left out in some very crucial processes in Zimbabwe. The ZCC and other Faith Based Organisations need to come up with a strategy to deliberately include PWDs.

04 Conclusion

The church in Zimbabwe has demonstrated an important role in creating a fair and safe public space for all when it draws on its mobilising strength and its theological insight in the necessity of critical solidarity with the political powers.

The report exemplifies influential church support to institutionalisation of freedoms of association, assembly and expression as well as of protection of Human Rights Defenders and effective voter education and empowerment in the run up to elections.

The church in Zimbabwe has a track record of substantial underpinning and defence of human rights and peace – both through building a value base and through specific, non-partisan – often innovative - interventions for social justice, effective peace building and reconciliation, and accountable institutions. Examples vary and include ‘the Zimbabwe We Want’ in 2008 to ‘the National Peoples Convention’ process in 2017/18.

The establishment of ‘the Local Peace and Gender Committees’ exemplifies a deep insight in the pivotal role of Gender Justice in securing sustainable conflict transformation.

This contribution to attainment of the SDG 16 has not been unambiguous and this report also argues the urgent need to build strong theological foundations to support the churches in their public engagement.

The report demonstrates a public theology based on a balance between distinction, but not disengagement between church and political parties, between theological and political discourse, in promotion of accountability and value-based democracy. It also demonstrates that the church doesn’t always succeed in striking that balance.

Therefore, ZCC is building on its previous work of facilitating the development and implementation of programmes aimed at promoting active citizenship, citizens broad-based dialogue, public influence and participation in matters that concern them. This influencing include, among other things, to empower, conscientise and build the capacity of church members who risk standing aloof to some of the political processes to the detriment of nation building. Through some of its projects, ZCC has already established local peace committees in Mberengwa, Beitbridge, Gwanda, Matobo, Marondera, Chinhoi and Kadoma Districts, has convened public dialogues in Hwange, Masvingo and Bulawayo, conferred the youths in Harare and organised community ward-based trainings across the country. This intervention will build on that work and allow ZCC to reach out to other Districts and all the other Provinces. The project also enables synergy in the areas of peace and human rights working with and strengthening ZCC’s Provincial and District ecumenical fora’s participation to defend, define and widen the civic space in Zimbabwe in line with the SDG 16 in ensuring access to justice, peace and accountable institutions for all.

05 Annex

Pictures of activities to defend, define and widen the civic space



Baseline survey: Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Figure 1 and 2: The ZCC doing FGDs and KIIs with respondents in Mberengwa.



Constitutional awareness and Electoral processes ward-based trainings and ToTs

Figure 3 and 4: Constitutional awareness and Electoral processes community-ward based trainings in Bulawayo and Training of Trainers (ToT) on constitutional awareness, peace building and electoral processes in Harare.



Establishment of Local Peace and Gender Committees

Figure 5 and 6: Establishments of Local Peace and Gender Committees in Manama and Kadoma.



The Christian Vote Campaign and National People's Conventions

Figure 7 and 8: The Christian Vote Campaign and the National People's Conventions.



Public dialogues

Figure 9 and 10: Public dialogues held in Beitbridge and Bulawayo, respectively.

Endnotes

1. Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe; (CCJPZ; 1997
2. aimed at fostering a locally driven constitution making process
3. which aimed at ensuring electoral processes provided a free and fair environment for democratic space for deciding leadership transitions and governance accountability were some of the institutions that emerged from the work of the ZCC
4. Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum; 2009
5. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1545548/Beaten-blinded-but-defiant-in-face-of-Mugabe.html>
6. <http://www.ccsf.org.zw/sites/default/files/publications/Role%20of%20the%20Church%20in%20Violence-2.pdf>
7. Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation News broadcasted scenes where high ranking ZANU-PF rallies were done with the support of Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe, among others.
8. Zimbabwe We Want, 2006 http://archive.kubatana.net/docs/relig/zim_churches_national_zim_vision_060918.pdf
9. www.swradioafrica.com/Documents/zimbabwe_we_want.doc
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11. ibid
12. Ibid
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15. The new dispensation was terminology used both officially and in the street to describe the new regime after the fall of Mugabe.
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27. Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2018
28. Freedom House; 2016
29. The ZCC had declined in its influence in the last few years. It has taken a new influential role in the last two years.
30. Zimbabwe Internet Statistics and Telecommunications Report (2016), www.internetworldstats.com › Africa Internet Stats ›
31. Freedom House; 2017
32. 2012 National Population Census



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