

Civil Society Organisations, the Devolution Agenda and the Quest for Gender Sensitive Social Service Delivery in Bindura District

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Abstract

The study endeavoured to examine the contributions of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in promoting gender-sensitive social services in the context of a devolved governance system in Zimbabwe. The study used Bindura District as a case study. The study used qualitative methodology and a case study to examine the strategies being used by the CSOs. A total of 54 participants participated in the study and the sample represented a cross-section of CSOs, local council representatives, central government representatives and ordinary citizens. Data were collected using interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Key findings were that the CSOs are doing a lot through advocacy and lobbying to raise awareness of the need for gender-sensitive social services and to use the opportunities presented by devolution. The other finding was that the CSOs have been using a collaborative than confrontational approach and this has tended to enhance cooperation with key government stakeholders. The study also found out that the initiatives have been hamstrung by the polarised political environment prevailing in the country and that the sustainability of the campaigns is likely to be affected by lack of long term funding. The study concluded that the work of CSOs in Bindura District has illuminated the need for service accountability and more importantly gender-sensitive social services in local councils. The study recommended the need for policies providing gender-sensitive local governance indicators so that it becomes easy to track the performance of councils.

Key words: Gender; Devolution; Social services; Civil society; Participation; Focal persons

INTRODUCTION

It has been noted that governance systems that often overlook the importance of gender tend to perpetuate already existing socio-economic inequalities between men and women in society (Wichterich, 2012; United Nations Women, 2014, p.11). Governance, whether at the local, national or international level, should effectively respond to the needs of different categories of people in society. The quest for gender-sensitive social services can best be understood in the context of global and continental developmental blueprints such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063. Locally, the quest for gender parity and gender-sensitive social services can be located in several instruments including the Constitution of Zimbabwe, National Development Strategy 1 and many other policies. SDG 5 which focuses on Gender Equality and achieving equality and empowering women and girls provides a general scope of targets and indicators aimed at alleviating the vulnerability of women and girls. At the continental level the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004) and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008, 2016), are some of the key continental provisions for women empowerment, participation and representation. Locally Zimbabwe has the Gender policy (2013) and mainstreaming initiatives such as affirmative action and the Quota system in parliament that are aimed at promoting women's participation in key decision-making

processes. The revised Zimbabwe National Gender Policy (2017) underscored the need to ensure gender justice, equality, integration, inclusiveness and shared responsibility for sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Section 17 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment Number 20) emphasises the need for gender balance in all government bodies.

The African Gender-Equality Index (2015), praised the continent for making some progress towards achieving gender equality and equity over the past few decades but the Index was also quick to raise the red flag about the slow pace and in some cases a reversal of the gains. Women have remained on the margins of socio-economic and political development on the continent (African Development Forum, 2008; United Nations Development Programme, 2010). African governments are good at ratifying regional and international instruments but often come short when it comes to implementation. Women's participation is tokenistic and determined by their male counterparts (Mashiri and Mawire, 2013). In Zimbabwe, women continue to face financial, economic, cultural and psychological violence that continue to inhibit their full participation in governance processes (Chitando, 2013; Nyamutambwe, 2014; HIVOS, 2017; Zvobgo and Dziva, 2017). Social services have not responded well to men and women in general but the impact has tended to be more profound on women and girls.

The United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report (1995, p.7) famously stated that "Human development, if not engendered is endangered." The provision of gendered developmental processes in all communities should be seen as a human rights issue as encapsulated in international conventions. With the advent of devolution as the preferred system of governance in Zimbabwe, some CSO actors have heightened their calls for gender-sensitive social services delivery in Zimbabwe. Using Bindura District in Mashonaland Central, Zimbabwe as a case study, this study focused on how the CSOs have contributed to the quest for gender-sensitive social services delivery in the district.

Gender-Sensitive Social Services Delivery

Gender is a term that has been widely accepted as referring to the social constructs differentiating men and women and that these constructs largely differ depending on geo-cultural and political variants (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004). Concepts relating to gender include gender equality which is generally taken to mean that the interests of men and women are given equal consideration by ensuring rights, opportunities and responsibilities (Guzura, 2017). Equity, on the other hand, speaks to issues of justice and fairness. The idea is to create fair and just policies, institutions and systems that provide the necessary guarantees for the full enjoyment of rights by both men and women (Reeves and Barden, 2000; Guzura,

2017). The process of achieving gender equality and equity is pursued through gender mainstreaming.

The United Nations (2003, p.13) defined gender mainstreaming as "Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels." Gender mainstreaming can take political, economic or social dimensions. The other goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure human development and freedom by removing all economic, social, cultural and political barriers (Sen, 2001). The United States Agency for International Development (2014) defined gender sensitive social services as "the way service providers treat male or female clients in service delivery facilities and thus affects client willingness to seek services, continue to use services, and carry out the health behaviours advocated by the services.

The Concept of Civil Society

There are many definitions of civil society. A definition by Du Toit et al. (1998, p.264) stated civil society as non-governmental organisations that seek to actively promote development at different levels within the global community. Du Toit et al. stressed that CSOs are not for profit making organisations and are often committed to the idea of popular participation human (resource) development and community (social) education. Civil Society organisations are autonomous and voluntary (Veneklasen, 1994, p.3; Connor, 1999; O'Brien, 1999; Seithi, 2007, p.1). Civil society is a broad concept that involves many actors and operates at different levels from the local level to the international levels. A particularly illustrative insight about the roles of CSOs in society was presented by Edwards (2009:15) who argued that:

"...especially where formal citizenship rights are not well entrenched, it is civil society that provides the channels through which most people can make their voices heard in government decision making, protect and promote their civil and political rights, and strengthen their skills as future political leaders".

In this study, civil society was taken to refer to Non-Governmental Organisations that operate independent of government.

ActionAid (2016) indicated that civil society organisations have been playing an important role in increasing citizen participation in the delivery of services and to demand accountability from public authorities. In some cases, the CSOs have actually gone on to provide the services themselves. A strategy of choice has been advocacy and approaches can be categorised as insider and outsider approaches (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006; Mosley, 2011). Insider strategies refer to those strategies that include cooperation, lobbying for change with the relevant public officials, coalitions and social movements that are less confrontational but more collaborating (Mosley, 2011). On the other hand, "outsider approaches

focus on putting pressure on advocacy targets (i.e. communities, publics, policy makers, decision makers, corporations or private sector stakeholders, civil society). Pressure is applied through confrontation, such as media campaigns or naming and shaming, which is about publicly renouncing targets for their amoral conduct.” (Arensman et. al., 2015; p.592). The outside approaches come with a lot of constrains as they tend to destroy the relationships between and among stakeholders whereas the insider approach tend to be more beneficial. However, this is not to say that these strategies are used in isolation. Often times than not, they are used in complement. This is done with the intention of enhancing effectiveness (Binerkrantz, 2005; Fyall and McGuire, 2015).

Effectiveness of CSO advocacy campaigns for gender-sensitive social services delivery is dependent on several factors. Key to this is the extent to which the messages resonate with the needs of the people as well as appeal to the authorities in a way that does not sound confrontational as well as conducting a proper stakeholder analysis without necessarily excluding important actors (Gaanderse, 2010; Shawki, 2011; Lynn, 2014). Other scholars have also highlighted the importance of organisational capacity and knowledge management to ensure effectiveness of all advocacy efforts (Skene-Prate, 2013; Tsui, Hearn and Young, 2014).

Civil Society and Social Accountability

There is a general consensus that governance can only be effective when there is a balance between the demand side (citizens) and the supply side (government) (World Bank, 2008). Social accountability has generally come to be referred to as the active engagement of citizens in demanding political and administrative accountability from elected and appointed public office bearers (World Bank, 2008, ; United Nations Development Programme, 2012, p.13). Mills (2012, p.24) argued that successful social accountability requires an active citizenry to demand and to push the authorities for accountability.

Various scholars have pointed to the failure of central and local government authorities to provide basic social amenities as giving rise to the proliferation of CSOs and citizens demanding for social accountability (Olusola, 2011 p.33; Amaechi, 2012; Kimechi, 2015). It is because of these many failings that the voices of the citizens must be louder in demanding what is due to them from the authorities (World Bank, 2014). Previous studies regarding civic engagement for social accountability have all pointed out to the centrality of participation and the need to regard citizens as key stakeholders if they are to realise the better services provision from their authorities (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2007; Mercy Corps, 2010; Quick and Bryson, 2016).

However, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (2016) makes a distinction between participation and civic engagement. Participation is taken to imply the

institutional arrangements that allow for participation within an organisation and outside of an organisation whereas civic engagement is how citizens organise themselves to engage authorities on matters of concern and they usually focus on a specific issue usually through advocacy and lobbying.

Advocacy and Lobbying as Civic Engagement for Participation

The term advocacy is very popular among development actors particularly the many CSOs operating on the African continent. Its meaning is not highly contested as with other terms that are often contested. In simple terms, advocacy is defined by Arensman (2018, p.24) as “actively championing a specific cause, policy goal or change.” Another definition was given to advocacy as “the organised effort of like-minded groups or individuals for systemic peaceful change to government policy” (De Wolf, 2007). More broadly, advocacy can apply to opinions and positions as well as legislature, and targets civil society, communities and business, as well as government. From the definitions presented above, it can be argued that advocacy is simply about actively seeking to influence positive policy changes or to improve the welfare of citizens by ensuring that policies are implemented fully.

However, advocacy can be viewed specifically as a development tool and thus bringing about the idea of advocacy for development. Various scholars characterise advocacy for development as efforts at different levels of society and even the international system aimed at influencing or bringing about developmental change (Fagen et al., 2009; Morariu and Brennan, 2009, p.104). The changes cut across a broad spectrum including economic, political, social organisational systems and is usually intended to challenge existing power structures (Gardner and Brindis, 2017). Positive change and inclusive development are generally viewed as common goods that must be accorded to all citizens particularly in cases where the efforts are targeting the root causes of vulnerability and societal inequalities (Arensman et al., 2015). Advocacy has long been used as a strategy of choice in development work and it takes different forms and strategies.

Posner (2004, p.237) noted that there appears to be two notable strategies used i.e. advocacy and substitution. Advocacy appears to be the most popular approach in many CSOs. Civil society in this sense plays the intermediary role between the government and the electorate. CSOs work with the grassroots to identify policy issues and developmental gaps that also need to be addressed. The CSOs then help the communities by relaying the issues to the government. However, this is only possible where the government is responsive and fairly democratic. As noted by Donais (2012, p.62), the pluralist model of civil society depends on the responsiveness and

willingness of the government to accommodate the CSOs.

CSOs Advocacy and Lobbying for social change

There are not many studies in Zimbabwe that have focused on the effectiveness of CSO advocacy and lobbying and their effectiveness in the country. However, continentally and globally, a considerable body of knowledge exists. Some studies have been conducted through the lenses of evaluation sciences and have argued that any measurement of effectiveness must be done through the lenses of the theory of change (ToC) as well as the results chain (Coffman, 2007; Beer and Reed, 2009; James, 2011; Gardner and Brindis, 2017). Several factors are considered when assessing effectiveness of the organisations in sustaining effective lobbying and advocacy for change and some of the factors considered include the structure, size and resources at the disposal of the organisation (Wong, 2012; Shawki, 2011; Skene-Pratt, 2013; Alliance for Justice, 2015).

It has often been noted that measuring effectiveness of successful advocacy and lobbying requires a lot of consideration and that results of such interventions differ from context to context. Shawki (2010, 2011) averred that the effectiveness or outcomes cannot be predicted because a lot of factors come into play including the attitudes of citizens, authorities and the general political and economic environment within which the advocacy takes place. Zimbabwe, just like most other sub-Saharan African country, has been experiencing a decline in the quality of economic performance and social services.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study used qualitative methods and was an explorative case study. Qualitative methods have been found to be the most appropriate when dealing with phenomena that requires an in-depth understanding of how policies work in certain contexts (Conger, 2009; Creswell, 2014; Hunt, 2016). Qualitative research methodologies demand for a systematic approach to designing, collecting and analyzing data. Consequently, the researchers made sure that the study followed the scientific dictates of qualitative methods (Shank, 2012, p.18). A major advantage of the qualitative research in this context was the idea of flexibility given the prevailing SARS-COV-19 World Health Organization protocols. The flexibility allowed the researcher to conduct online interviews whilst avoiding close conduct with the participants.

The population of interest for this study was heterogeneous and drawn from different actors in the district. As a result, the actual population from which the sample was drawn was indeterminate. However, institutions of interest for the study included the office of the Minister of state and Devolution in the province, Local government authorities from Bindura Rural District Council and Bindura Municipality, civil society

organizations operating in the district and ordinary citizens, particularly women.

The researchers used non-probability sampling techniques to come up with a representative sample of 57 participants. The specific non-probability sampling techniques used were purposive sampling. Non-probability was used because of its appropriateness and relevance to the philosophy and methodology used in the study. Non-probability sampling is particularly relevant to exploratory studies and provides an opportunity for the researcher to pick on the most relevant participants for the study. Subsequently, three specific non-probability sampling techniques were used to select the sample for the study and these were; Purposive sampling, Quota sampling, and Convenient.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Meaning of Gender-Sensitive Social Services Delivery.

This objective was mainly directed to the CSO representatives that are advocating for gender-sensitive social services in the context of devolution in Bindura District. The Gender Focal persons at Bindura Municipality and Bindura Rural District Council were also asked about their understanding of the concept of gender-sensitive social service delivery and below are some of their representative answers from participants from CSOs. Their responses were coded CS, denoting civil society;

Gender-sensitive social services delivery is the provision of social services that respond effectively to the gendered needs of society. The needs of men and women differ significantly but you and I know for sure that women are the most affected if services are poor. The range of social services is broad and it covers water, sanitation, education, health. In fact let us just say they cover the scope of social and economic rights. Social services are a human rights issue and must be fulfilled. (CS-P1)

Let me start by stressing that the issue of social services is not new in local councils. However, we want to take advantage of the devolved system of administration to advance social services that are responsive to women and men alike. Be that as it may, you should remember that women bear the burden of taking care of families in most homesteads and if services are compromised, they suffer the most.) (Response from CS-P2)

Existence of Policies to Promote Gender Sensitive Social Services

The participants were asked whether there are policies compelling local councils in the district to ensure the provision of social services at all times. The study found out that there are no codified stand-alone policies speaking about gender sensitive social services in both Bindura Municipality and BRDC. However, the participants indicated that the mere fact that the two councils had Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) was evidence enough

that councils were serious about providing services that respond favorably to the needs of different groups in society. Participants from Bindura Municipality and Bindura Rural District Council listed the duties of GFPs as;

- Acting as liaisons between council and residents in order to promote effective gender services to the residents
- Mapping the needs (particularly of women) and bringing them to the attention of council authorities.
- Facilitating dialogue between council and residents in order to ensure the provision of gender-sensitive social services like education, health, water, markets etc.
- Providing periodic reports to council meetings on gaps in services and other needs.
- Mainstreaming issues in council business or social service delivery
- Plan for GBV issues in council and also participation of women in council.

The GFPs play an important role in illuminating gender issues in all council meetings and in all council portfolios. Participants noted that although devolution does not explicitly talk about gender issues, the system (devolution) of governance provides an opportunity for local governance actors to push for services that respond favourably to all citizens.

Strategies used by CSOs operating in Bindura District to promote gender-sensitive social services in the context of devolution.

There has been notable efforts by CSOs in the district, particularly Institute for Young Women Development (IYWD) and Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) in pushing for the mainstreaming of gender-sensitive social services in the district. The study found out that the organizations are relying on various advocacy and lobbying strategies that include sensitization meetings with different stakeholders, performing arts and accountability meetings.

Sensitization Meetings

A popular approach has been the use of sensitization meetings on devolution and gender sensitive social services delivery. The organizations have been engaging with councils, local government officials, District Development Coordinator's Office and the Provincial Development Coordinator's office to bring to the fore the need for gender sensitivity in social services delivery. They have also reached out to the Resident Minister responsible for Provincial Affairs and Devolution in the province.

These meetings have been held with different participants in the district. Some of the participants were drawn from rural, farming, mining and urban communities in the district. Mining communities particularly included residents from Bindura Nickel Mine (Trojan Mine) and Rane Mine communities. The farming areas covered the Bindura North Constituency with the rural constituencies

largely drawn from Bindura South in areas such as Chiveso, Dengu and Masembura.

Training of Trainers on Gender and Devolution

Another of the various strategies used by the CSOs are the training of trainers on gender and devolution in the District. This strategy was particularly used by IYWD. The organization identified and trained young women in various districts of Mashonaland Central Province including Bindura District. The organization indicated that in Bindura District alone, a total of 15 women were trained as trainers so that they can later on train other women and other stakeholders in the community to promote an understanding of how devolution was going to promote gender-sensitive social services if all actors were to work together in harmony.

The trained young women were some of the participants in the two FGDs that were held and they indicated that the training was an eye-opener and that they hoped to spread the message to other stakeholders in their wards. Training must be viewed as an empowering initiative and the study found out that the trained locals lived with their fellow citizens and were likely to find it easy to spread the word.

However, the study also found out that the trained trainers did not have a budget to run the local level trainings and that this was likely to affect the momentum of the initiative. A disturbing issue found out by the study was that in most cases residents do not commit to community meetings or trainings that do not provide monetary incentives. As a result, sustaining the initiative might prove very difficult.

Use of Community Theatrical Performances

Another popular strategy that is being used is the use of community theatre to raise awareness of the need for gender-sensitive social services in the district. Local drama groups were given a script to develop poems and drama series on the importance of devolution and how it can be used to promote gender-sensitive social services in the district. The organization that has been using this approach mostly has been IYWD. An interview participant from the organization indicated that;

As an organization we opted to use drama and poetry as a tool to communicate the importance of devolution as a model of governance but more importantly, as an opportunity to promote gender-sensitive social services in local governance. Although the use of drama has to an extent been affected by COVID-19 related restrictions, we are generally happy because so far a total of 14 dramas have been held in different places of the district since 2019.

The organization also indicated that they have used poetry as a way of communicating government policy on devolution and as a way of highlighting the need for gender-sensitive social services. The reasoning behind the use of satirical platforms was that the strategy is not confrontational.

Accountability Meetings

Another of the strategies being used are regular accountability meetings. These accountability meetings are held with different actors including local councilors, GFPs, MPs, residents and CSOs. As a result of the prevailing lockdown conditions, these meetings are often held via zoom or google meet platforms. Some of the justifications given for adopting accountability meetings as a strategy were presented below;

We hope that by constantly engaging and demanding accountability, we will eventually get to a situation where our services are gender-sensitive. As an organization we planned for quarterly accountability meetings and so far the response has been encouraging. (Response from CS-P2)

The other participant shared the following;

With resources permitting, we seek to bring stakeholders to these discussion forums as often so that we get appraised on the progress made on providing gender sensitive social services to the people. Slowly but surely, we are applying pressure on authorities and I think our long term objective of gender-sensitive social services is attainable. (Response from CS-P4)

Continuous engagement can be seen as a progressive way of engaging with authorities. However, it might be too early to gauge the impact as it still remains work in progress, particularly in Bindura District.

Effectiveness of these strategies in promoting gender-sensitive social services in Bindura District.

The efforts by the CSOs has generated some considerable interest on the subject of gender-sensitive social services. Although it might be too early to talk about impact, the preliminary indications from the study have shown that the efforts by the CSOs have been effective in bringing the issue on the agenda of council business and creating awareness of the idea among residents.

It is noteworthy that stakeholders in local authorities and in central government has warmly embraced the initiative. They have worked closely with the CSOs to try and improve services in local councils so that they respond to the needs of all citizens, men and women alike. There is greater acknowledgement from council officials that the initiatives by CSOs has seen greater demand for accountability from citizens and this is a good thing. As one interviewee from council noted;

The calls for gender-sensitive social services delivery in councils by CSOs together with residents have heightened expectations and put us under the spotlight and we just have to deliver in order to pacify the voices of the residents.

Another council official had this to say;

The voices of the residents have been louder and louder since the initiatives by CSOs to push for gender-sensitive social services delivery in our institution. The residents seem more aware of the concept as well as their rights to good social services and they are finding more and more platforms to demand this.

The confidence shown by citizens who have benefitted from the initiatives by these CSOs is also growing. Citizens now have confidence to confront government and local authorities to demand better services. Although it might be too early to see real change in terms of the quality of the services and the extent they are gender-sensitive, it is noteworthy that the residents are pretty much a part of the local governance processes and credit to the CSOs for highlighting the opportunities for participation as brought about by devolution. Below are three of the most telling responses from the residents who participated in the study;

We now know that local leaders must listen to our concerns and that as a result of devolution all council decisions must reflect the will of the residents

As women we now know that devolution as a system of governance gives us an opportunity to demand better services from council because most decisions are now made at the local level and must include our voices.

We appreciate IYWD and WCoZ because they made us realize that we have power and the voice to be heard in local governance processes.

The evidence presented has shown that the initiative to push for gender sensitive social services has been well received. However, as highlighted, the assessment is in terms of the effectiveness of the engagement. Whether this will translate to successful provision of gender-sensitive social services will have to be a discussion for another day.

Challenges faced by the CSOs in their quest to promote gender-sensitive social services in the context of devolution.

There are several challenges that were raised by participants. The major ones centered on lack of political will of authorities to continuously engage and the issue of resources and the effects of the COVID-19 and the technological question. These are discussed under each of the respective sub-themes

Lack of Political Will

For any activity to be successful, it must have the political buy in from the relevant authorities. One of the complaints from the CSOs is that some of the public officials, particularly the Resident Minister and the local Members of Parliament (Bindura North and Bindura South Constituencies) are not usually available when needed. They often cite work related commitments but it is almost always the same excuse each time they are invited to meetings. Two responses from participants from CSOs were;

The senior officials from government and parliament are never available when you need them. We sometimes interface with them but getting them to participate in meetings is very difficult. They are always fiving excuses and you want if they are really busy or its just lack of political will to lend their support to this initiative.

We have invited them to meetings but on most occasions they just say they are busy. At times they promise to attend but they will never do so and will never bother to give an excuse.

Political will is an important ingredient in public administration. Both the elected officials and the appointed officials should show commitment to matters of public concern if services are to be improved. Unfortunately, in Zimbabwe, the culture seems to go unchecked because even in the national parliament, ministers and some MPs hardly attend parliamentary sessions.

Limited Resources to Sustain the Lobbying and Advocacy Campaigns for Gender-sensitive social services

Participants from both council and civil society organisations lamented the lack of resources to sustain these initiatives. Ideally, councils should conduct outreach programmes to communicate the programmes that they will be implementing at any given time. However, council officials that participated in the study indicated that they hardly have the resources to carry out the sensitization meetings.

Apart from resources for sensitization meetings, the participants also indicated that councils may not have the resources to action the demands of citizens owing to a lot of factors including non-payment of rates and services by residents as well as lack of financial prioritization of initiatives to promote gender-sensitive social services.

On the other hand, CSOs indicated that much as they would want to sustain their advocacy initiatives, it was almost impossible because all their projects are time-bound and at some point they will come to an end and focus will shift to other priorities. As a result, the impact of the initiatives will be compromised. It will be down to the residents to keep the momentum going. However, it has been noted that the residents only commit to processes that offer them financial incentives.

Effects of COVID-19 and the Technological Question

Participants, particularly those from CSOs lamented the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the mitigating measures put in place by government to reduce the effects of the pandemic. Whilst acknowledging the importance and necessity of government responses, participants pointed out that this had affected the level of citizen participation in governance processes. Responses during interviews with CSOs were captured below;

The restrictive measures have meant that we are unable to meet with the people as often. On occasions where we meet on zoom platforms, some citizens are unable to join because they do not have the smart phones and thus raising questions of exclusion.

Lockdown has necessitated the use of zoom, WhatsApp and other online platforms. However, the major challenge is that some residents, especially in rural, mining and farming towns do not have smart phones and they end up not participating at all.

Two problems arise from the use of online platforms to engage on issues of gender-social services in local governance as evidenced by the comments captured above. The first one is that the platforms are expensive and will require modern smart phones, iPad, tablets or laptops. Unfortunately, for most of the rural, farming, mining and even urban participants do not have the needed resources. As a result they are excluded from the discussions and yet in most cases they are the most affected as well and thus raising issues of exclusion.

EXPLORING WAYS OF IMPROVING THE STRATEGIES

Participants came up with several suggestions as to how the efforts of the CSOs can be enhanced. Strategies raised ranged from calling for E-governance infrastructures, periodic reports to be presented by GFPs in all full council meetings and to be shared with residents, the development of gender-sensitive governance indicators at the local (council) level so that it becomes easy to track the policy performance at council level, an involvement of more actors in order to ensure accountability. The ideas are presented and discussed below;

E-governance Infrastructures

Some of the participants from CSOs called on government to invest in e-governance infrastructure so as to increase governance accountability at the local levels and more importantly, so that residents can be able to easily track the operations of government and to demand gender-sensitive social services in much more interactive and convenient ways. Below are some of the representative responses from the participants;

I feel that they (government authorities) should move with the times and promote the idea of e-governance. I believe that this strategy of governance will help in providing platforms for interaction between government authorities and local residents. It will also promote the demand for gender-sensitive social services as residents can easily check how services are catering for different groups in society. (C1, Interview participant)

The other interview participant from CSOs, C4 had this to say;

Personally I believe that e-governance will be a game-changer in governance accountability. If modelled well and with residents capacitated on the concepts, I can assure you that local and national authorities will feel the pressure for accountability and transparency. The concept will enhance e-participation and e-transparency if I may put it that way.

The idea seemed popular with civil society representatives who took part in the interviews and was also fairly popular with participants in FGDs as it was mentioned more than 5 times by different participants in the two FGDs. Two of the most incisive responses from the participants are captured below;

I personally think that the idea of e-governance will help in ensuring responsive services since residence will be able to easily trace use and expenditure of council resources. It is also particularly important because it enables residents to check if the needs of women, as they are the most affected by poor service delivery, are being addressed). (FGD1- P4)

The other participant from the second FGD argued that;

The use of e-governance is a good strategy to keep us informed of what is happening in council particularly in this COVID-19 pandemic era where we are not allowed into council offices and thus we are in the dark with regards council business.

The response from government and council officials with regards e-governance was rather lukewarm. Some expressed readiness to embrace the idea with some expressing reservations, primarily because they feel that a lot is needed to invest in the infrastructure that is necessary to promote effective e-governance. However, it can be noted that a significant number of the participants felt that e-governance is the way to go especially as a way of keeping track of whether councils are sensitive to the gendered needs of different clients with regards service delivery. E-governance is seen as a game change in promoting governance transparency, responsiveness and accountability (World Bank, 2008).

Periodic Reports Presented By Gender Focal Persons

Another strategy to ensure that councils provide gender-sensitive social services to the residents was the idea of periodic reports giving an appraisal of the state of gender-sensitive social services in local councils and that these reports should be presented by GFPs in councils or in the different tiers of governance as provided for in the constitution of the country. The majority of participants believed that periodic reports will help bring the need for gender-sensitive social services on the council agenda and such, councils will eventually be forced to bring the subject on the agenda. As suggested by the participants these reports could come in the form of monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly or bi-annual reports on gender and social services in local councils. A participant in one of the FGDs had this to say;

They (councils) should provide monthly reports that will provide an update of what they are doing with regards gender-sensitive social services to the residents, particularly women. If they do it this way, we can have confidence that they are determined to address our needs as women.

This was also echoed by a representative from CSOs who proposed quarterly reports from the GFPs I council. She said that;

I personally think that quarterly reports will go a long way in promoting council accountability. The GFPs should be compelled to present reports relating to gender-sensitive social services and these reports should be detailed and should provide key highlights in terms of major achievements and challenges in the quarter that will be under review. I will tell you if this is

adhered to, we will go a long way in providing gender sensitive social services to the residents.

The GFPs from both Bindura Rural District Council and Bindura Municipality indicated that they have always prepared reports but admitted that there is room to improve and to be more consistent they agreed with other participants that ensuring regular reports will promote better accountability and better services in the long run.

DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER-SENSITIVE GOVERNANCE INDICATORS AT DISTRICT LEVEL

Participants argued that the greatest opportunity presented by devolution was to bring decision making powers to the local levels and as such, an opportunity to come up with policy instruments that speak to local realities. To that effect, some participants raised a very important issue to do with governance effectiveness. Representatives from CSOs suggested that if the tracking of council service delivery was to be measured easily and with a high degree of certainty, there was need to ensure that the policies and governance instruments that govern council activities are covered with measurable qualitative and quantitative gender-sensitive governance indicators so that when stakeholders assess the extent of compliance and achievement with regards gender-sensitive social services, they are doing so using some documented indicators.

Council officials agreed to this idea although some were quick to say that even with very good indicators, it will still be difficult if the resources are not made available to the actors. There was a sense that most of the failings are not as a result of poor policies but rather lack of resources or misallocation of resources. Participants in the FGDs did not raise the issue of gender-sensitive governance indicators and this was understandable given the fact that the idea of indicators is rather abstract for those that are not governance practitioners.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

From the study findings, it can be noted that the CSOs quest for citizen participation in local governance issues is highly effective. Basing on the theoretical framework for the study, the Ladder of Participation by Arnstein (1969) it can be noted that the CSOs are pushing citizen participation beyond the tokenistic and non-participation levels to the meaningful exercise of citizen power. Citizen power can only be exercised in meaningful ways if the citizens are equipped with the capabilities for them to demand meaningful change (Almog-Bar and Schmid, 2013). For long, citizen demand for accountability has not been as sustained and effective as exhibited in the current

wave by various CSOs operating in Zimbabwe and in particular, Bindura District as the context of the study.

The study also examined the appropriateness of strategies being used by CSOs. It was noted that they are seeking to change the narrative by adopting collaborating approaches where they choose to work with the government at the different tiers of government. The study noted that this was a welcome departure from the usually militant and combative approach adopted by CSOs in previous years. Scholars like Massimo and Makwerere (2015) had previously noted how the work of CSOs is usually undermined by their antagonistic approach when engaging government officials. It would appear they wanted to replace the role of government and naturally, there was bound to be resistance from government.

However, the approach of bringing government officials and citizens to dialogue has given momentum to the quest for gender sensitive social services delivery in local authorities. The key advocacy approach is to identify the most influential people in both council and the communities and alert them to the gaps that are there with regards service delivery. These people will then serve as agents of change and transformation in the way the councils go about their business. Scholars like (Sloot and Gaanderse, 2010) previously indicated the importance of doing a proper stakeholder mapping exercise if the advocacy campaign is to gain relevance. It is also important to know how to exert pressure when needed. This relates to dealing with insider and outsider stakeholders (Gormley and Cymrot, 2006; Mosley, 2011). The CSOs must be commended for trying to manage the power dynamics in local governance in the district from both outside and inside their organisations. This main strategy has been complemented by capacitating the communities and sensitizing all relevant stakeholders on the need for gender-sensitive social services delivery in local councils.

Although it is too early to gauge the long term impact of the CSO efforts, preliminary indications showed that the initiative to at least sensitize the authorities got the buy in of the key stakeholders. This can be put down to the messaging strategies by the organisations. This resonates with what Lynn (2014) elaborated on the need to win over stakeholders through careful framing of issues. The relatively cordial relationship that the researcher found out between the CSOs and council officials is contrary to what the likes of Masunungure (2014) and Massimo & Makwerere (2015) concluded about the state-civil society relations in Zimbabwe post-2000.

The most important issue here is that it is very possible for the seemingly antagonistic forces to work together. However, the researcher was quick to note that the process of devolution still remains work in progress in Zimbabwe and unless and until the provincial tiers and district tiers are given full autonomy with regards decision making on

use and deployment of resources, the advocacy efforts by CSOs will remain as just but talk shows. It is one thing sensitizing people and creating an awareness of what the ideal situation regarding a particular issue should look like and another getting the things done. This is the exact scenario that currently prevails in Bindura District. CSOs have spread the messages, they have helped in creating awareness of the need for gender-sensitive social service delivery in local governance but it is also evident that the councils do not really have the decision making powers to accommodate and action the demands by citizens.

A disruptive factor that was noted by the researchers was that political polarisation tends to affect the effective engagement of councils, citizens, government officials and the CSOs. Polarization has created a sense of 'us' and 'them' in Zimbabwean society. The situation is made worse by the fact that the relationship between the Government of Zimbabwe and CSOs is problematic. It is further complicated by the fact that Zimbabwean leaders are under targeted sanctions from the United States of America and Britain and the European Union and yet most of these CSOs receive their funding from the same western countries. In this regard, it becomes very difficult for development partners to effectively engage with government and other stakeholders.

The analysis of the findings also showed that most CSO interventions are short term projects that will soon come to an end. Unless there is a sustainability plan, the momentum will soon be lost. The issue of limited capacity and failure to ensure longevity of initiated projects by CSOs was also captured by Skene-Pratt (2013) who lamented the lack of institutional capacity of organisations to drive projects beyond the short term horizon.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions were drawn from the study. The first one was that there is a growing momentum in the need for gender-sensitive social services. It can be concluded that the agency of CSOs in deepening citizen understanding of governance and democratic processes has seen a greater demand for social accountability as evidenced by the findings of the study. This is a good development given the drive towards an Upper middle-income society by the year 2030 in Zimbabwe, the quest for the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the long term vision of attaining Agenda 2063 on the African continent. In all these aspirations, a gender-balanced society is a cross cutting theme and thus the current ongoing efforts are commendable. It can also be concluded that the advocacy and awareness raising strategies being used have ripped some early successes as evidenced by the level of awareness between and among the various actors. Advocacy and lobbying are age-old tools used to influence and negotiate change. Another conclusion from

the study is that political authority will always determine the success or lack of it of any advocacy campaigns by citizens. The level of willingness to action demands from the citizens by political and office bearers is what determines the level of response and quality of action taken.

The study recommended that the Gender Focal Persons in councils present annual social and financial audit reports on how gender issues are being mainstreamed into services provided by councils. The study also recommended the training of council members, residents and CSOs alike on the mainstreaming of gender-sensitive governance indicators in all policies developed and used by local authorities. The study also recommended the need to nurture alliances between government, citizens and CSOs in order to reduce suspicions particularly between government and CSOs with the former often accusing the latter of being regime change agents. The study is also recommending the investment in E-governance so that the process of governance is interactive and easily tracked by citizens.

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