

Integrating the Youth into Mainstream Community Development through Community-Based Planning

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ABSTRACT

The youth constitute a significant proportion of Zimbabwe's population. Despite their significance in numbers, they continue to be marginalised in mainstream planning, decision-making and implementation processes of local development interventions. This study explored the utilisation of community-based planning as a tool for integrating the youth into local development through an action research process. Two research questions are dealt with: what are the essential activities for implementing a youth-friendly community-based planning process? And, what are the impacts of engaging the youth in community-based planning? The results indicated that the key tenets of such a process include local awareness raising, district level engagement, local level institutional functionality assessment, community youth mapping, and intensive planning and community feedback meetings. Impacts of integrating youths into community-based planning include institutionalisation of youth-sensitive planning at district level, improved cohesion by the youth from various political divides, enthusiasm by youths in ensuring incorporation of youth-related issues in ward plans, and renewed vigour by the youth to participate in local development activities. The study recommends youth-sensitive community-based planning as an approach for mainstreaming the youth into community development programmes.

Keywords: community-based planning; community development; youth; Zimbabwe



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Introduction

The youth constitute a significant proportion of the population of most countries. In this paper, the Zimbabwe National Youth Policy definition which is in line with the definition of the African Youth Charter is used that defines youth as every person between the ages 15 to 35 years. In Africa, the number of youths is growing rapidly, for example, in 2015, 226 million youths aged 15 to 24 lived in Africa, accounting for 19 per cent of the global youth population. It is projected that by 2030 the number of youths in Africa will have increased by 42 per cent (United Nations 2015). According to the 2012 national census, the youth in Zimbabwe constituted 36 per cent of the total population, while when combined, children and youths constituted 77 per cent of the population (ZIMSTAT 2012). Despite their significance in numbers, the youth continue to be marginalised in decision-making. The National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe has, as one of its goals, to empower the youth to participate in and contribute to the socio-economic development. This is proposed to be partially driven through meaningful youth participation during the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development programmes and projects (GOZ 2013). At the continental level, the African Youth Charter (Article 11) has provisions for the right of the youth to participate in all spheres of society including decision-making at local, national, regional and continental levels of governance (African Union Commission 2006).

Although there has been growing attention on youth participation in both political and civic spheres, such efforts have mainly been characterised by opportunism and expediency within a cyclical nature (Richter and Panday 2007, 295). In Zimbabwe for example, youth participation in socio-economic spheres has been highly politicised. Over the past 30 years, youths have periodically been recruited into quasi-military groups or “youth wings” of political parties (Ndebele and Billing 2015, 165). The youth continue to be at the forefront of most violent political clashes, and political campaigning strategies. In addition, there are other socio-cultural issues that affect youth participation. One such issue has been the effect of culture and beliefs in planning (Abram 2016). For example, the Ndau tribe in Zimbabwe who are the majority in Mutare and Mutasa (the focal areas for this study) are normally considered highly conservative with a number of values and ethos that may affect youth participation in dialogue and community development. For example, the highly patriarchal traditional dialogic institutions such as village courts impede youth participation in decision-making processes. In some instances, the conservative cultural values do not allow the youth to challenge any decision made by their elders. This has, in some instances been viewed as dampening the zeal by youths to participate in dialogue as some may not see any value in constructive planning dialogues. However, there is growing realisation on the potential role for the youth in local level development although most of such calls are still idealised, with modest achievements (Ndebele and Billing 2015).

A number of studies have been conducted globally on youth engagement in community development planning, including: the youth in community-driven development (Owen,

Sen, and De Berry 2006); the youth in urban planning (Argo, Prabonno, and Singgi 2016); participatory processes for engaging the youth in planning (Gurstein, Lovato, and Ross 2003); the youth and democratic practice in planning (Bessant 2004); potential of youth participation in planning (Frank 2006); and benefits of youth participation in community planning (Checkoway, Pothukuchi, and Finn 1995). In Zimbabwe, concerted efforts have been made in promoting youths' participation through entrepreneurship programmes, engagement through the youth parliament, promoting the use of information communication technologies (ICTs), for example advocacy through non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), and other youth-targeted programmes.

This paper focuses on the youth and local level planning in the Mutare and Mutasa districts in Zimbabwe. A review of community planning literature in Zimbabwean literature points to a dearth of empirical studies. A few such studies were identified including those by Ndebele and Billing (2015), mapping studies by Jensen (2009), and blogs on a number of NGO websites such as Voices of Youth (www.voicesofyouth.org), Youth Policy (www.youthpolicy.org), ICP (www.icicp.org), My Age Zimbabwe (<http://myage-zim.org/category/blog/>), and YETT (www.yett.org). This scenario highlights the need for more empirical research that generates knowledge on youth engagement in the socio-economic spheres at various societal levels. It is within this context that this study is designed to explore the integration of youths into mainstream community development through community-based planning (CBP). The study utilises experiences from the Youth CAN! project implemented between June 2014 and December 2015 in the Mutare and Mutasa districts in Zimbabwe. Two research questions are dealt with: Firstly, what are the essential activities for implementing a youth-friendly CBP process? Secondly, what are the impacts of engaging the youth in CBP?

Rationale of the Youth CAN! Project

The Youth and Community Action for Non-Violence (Youth CAN!) project was co-implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Institute for Development Facilitation Trust (IIDF) between June 2014 and December 2015. The project was implemented in the Mutare and Mutasa districts of Zimbabwe (Figure 1), and managed to reach a total of 6 089 community members of which more than 60 per cent were youths. A situational analysis before the project design showed that youths in the two districts lacked opportunities, knowledge and skills for meaningful engagement with one another and with their communities in planning and decision-making. This made them vulnerable to political manipulation. The project aimed at fostering positive and effective youth participation in local level decision-making and development, as a means to promote their integration into the community and to reduce feelings of marginalisation and powerlessness. A key assumption was that, through engaging in a wide range of integrated and complementary activities that were planned through a

youth-sensitive CBP process, the youth would re-evaluate the cost-benefit of engaging in violence, becoming less vulnerable to manipulation by the political system and therefore less likely to engage in violence.

The project supported the formation of youth forums (YFs) at the village level as a safe space for capacity building, youth interaction, collective action, and preparation for engagement with the wider community. A comprehensive capacity-building programme for a cadre of youth leaders (who led and organised the YFs), coupled with peer-led awareness-raising on peaceful cohabitation and effective community participation, prepared the youth to engage constructively with one another and the wider community. Youth platforms were facilitated for regular meetings that enabled identification of issues of mutual concern, developed strategies to deal with them, and exchanged ideas with youths from other villages. Through constant, constructive interaction and collective action efforts, the youth established commonalities across political divides, broke down stereotypes, built trust, and strengthened peer relationships. In addition, the Youth CAN! project designed and implemented youth-focused initiatives that fostered peacebuilding and empowerment as a means to promote self-efficacy and increased individual and collective resistance to manipulation (IRC 2014).

Through CBP, the project aimed at fostering positive and effective youth participation in local level planning and decision-making. This aimed at integrating the youth into the mainstream community development processes with the aim of reducing feelings of marginalisation and powerlessness. The project also aimed at promoting a dialogic process which ensured that local dialogue mechanisms functioned as effective forums for non-partisan and inclusive tools for youth-friendly community level planning and decision-making.

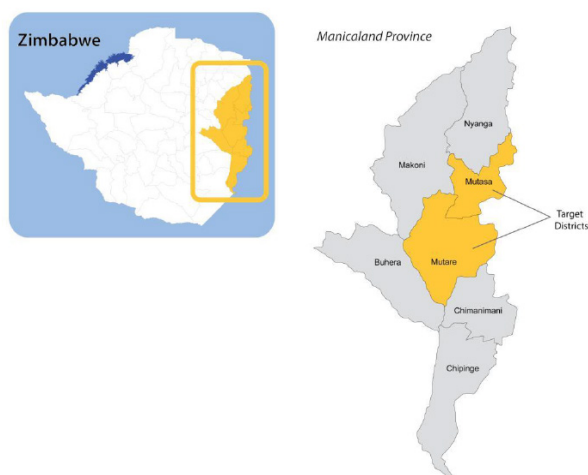


Figure 1: Location of the Mutare and Mutasa districts in Zimbabwe

Source: IRC 2014

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

The Concept of Community-Based Planning

CBP is an empowering planning process that aims at inclusion of marginalised groups in processes of mainstream community planning. It mainstreams lessons and experiences from previous local development activities into existing planning mechanisms. Through the utilisation of existing community planning mechanisms, it ensures institutionalisation of good planning practices within local level planning structures (Gumbo 2009; Kent 1981). In the context of the Youth CAN! project, this entailed facilitating a commonly agreed community agenda to incorporate youths into community planning and developing mechanisms for continuity of such processes through participatory processes. Such a process would ensure the devolution of decision-making, responsibilities, resources, and increase youths' voices in community decision-making.

Experiences from CBP projects in southern Africa indicate that, besides the inclusion of the marginalised community groups in mainstream community planning, other benefits of CBP include enhancing community ownership of interventions; improving the relevance of plans to deal with community priority issues; and advancing the transition from consultation to empowerment through shifting from the traditional consultative planning processes where plans are done based on perceived community needs towards planning based on their own needs. Other benefits also include enhancing outcome-based planning, as opposed to problem-based planning which enhances realistic and creative planning; building local capacity for planning; improving democratic planning and mutual understanding among key stakeholders; providing opportunities for harmonising existing community plans; promoting identification of existing local resources to leverage implementation of proposed plans; and providing opportunities for improved accountability during implementation.

Theorising Community-Based Planning

Although a number of training manuals on CBP have been developed including those by Mahbub and Roy (1997), and Gumbo (2009), the theoretical underpinnings of CBP remain underdeveloped (Reed 1997, 567). In this paper, CBP is viewed as adopting a trans-disciplinary approach by borrowing from theoretical constructs of a number of disciplines. Such disciplines include organisational development, empowerment, collaboration, and community theories. Jamal and Getz (1995, 196) argue that CBP borrows from organisational development theories with regard to the development of mechanisms for collaboration, common visioning and multi-stakeholder engagement.

CBP incorporates collaborative planning among various community member groups and local level stakeholders. The collaborative process strengthens cooperation and

relations among individuals or stakeholders within social groups enhancing coordination and communication towards achieving common goals (Egghe, 1991, 177; Patel, Pettitt, and Wilson 2012). Within the CBP discourse, collaboration appears at the interpersonal, inter- and intragroup and intracommunity. At the interpersonal level, collaboration is a tactic for garnering cooperation (Yukl, Chavez and Seifert 2005).

Although there is no unified understanding of factors that affect collaboration (Patel, Pettitt, and Wilson 2012) at the intergroup, intragroup and intracommunity, collaboration is likely influenced by seven variables, (1) context, (2) support, (3) tasks, (4) interaction process, (5) teams, (6) individuals, and (7) overarching factors (Colbry, Hurwitz, and Adair 2014; Kożuch and Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek 2016; Patel, Pettitt, and Wilson 2012). Context determines the types of individuals and teams who are involved in the collaborative work and defines the type of tasks. Collaboration requires effective and appropriate support, which differentiates between successful and unsuccessful collaborative efforts. With regard to tasks, these form the rules of engagement to meet defined goals. The interaction process defines the collaborative working environment within which participants engage, such as learning, coordination, communication, and decision-making. Various stakeholders and teams have a specified organisational function and contribute to agreed community objectives. Although collaboration is fundamentally a social activity requiring interaction among individuals, a largely task-related effort remains at the level of the individual. Therefore within the context of this paper, individual youth effort in engagement is regarded as fundamental for the success of CBP. Overarching factors such as trust, communication, and cultural values and beliefs are regarded as being relevant and interact with the six main factors discussed above.

Within the context of this paper, CBP adopts an empowerment dimension with regard to mainstreaming the youth into community development. Empowerment has been argued to build self-determination, which encompasses charting one's course of life; expressing needs and establishing goals; planning to achieve set goals; making rational choices; identifying resources; and continuously assessing progress towards set goals (Fetterman 1994, 2). It refers to individuals, families, organisations, and communities gaining control and mastery within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives, in order to improve the equity and quality of their lives (Zimmerman 2000). Empowerment focuses on control, taking a proactive approach to life, and having critical awareness of the socio-political environment (Perkins and Zimmerman 1995; Zimmerman and Warschusky 1998, 4). Critical awareness refers to one's knowledge of how to acquire resources and skills to manage the resources once they are obtained (Kieffer 1984). It allows personal control and participation with others towards agreed goals and plans.

Within the context of this paper, empowerment is based on the assumption that the capacity of youths to engage in community decision-making in order to improve their lives is determined by their ability to control their environment (Hasenfeld 1987, 478). Within the youth development discourse, three dimensions are outlined: personal

empowerment, relational or interpersonal empowerment, and strategic empowerment. Personal empowerment brings a personal sense of being empowered while relational empowerment brings a sense of belongingness and being part of the wider community planning system. Strategic empowerment is gained through having and using knowledge (Russell et al. 2009). Empowerment is grounded within broader social-cultural contexts and structural power relations, and engages in activities to reduce the powerlessness that is created by negative valuations of members of a stigmatised group (Busch and Valentine 2000).

CBP emphasises the importance of “community”. Westoby and Dowling (2013) give five views on community, namely community as dialogue, community as hospitality, community as ethical space, community as *communitas*, and community as collective practice. The concept of community as hospitality is based on the creation of relationships that are welcoming to others including strangers and intruders. These relationships are created to achieve specific goals. It is argued that such a focus is important in communities where community development practitioners and action researchers are integrated as part of community experiences. The notion of community as ethical space is taken as symbolic or as a geographical site of decision and ethical praxis which attempts to re-socialise development (Westoby and Dowling 2013, 7). It involves ethical decisions about choices people make on development. In this respect, dialogue is argued to be important in enhancing consensus and ethical development decisions.

Community as *communitas* avoids structural ways of thinking through promoting multiple perspectives, a shared sense of unity and respect for diversity among members. Beavitt (2012, 2) describes it as an experience when people meet in a place unburdened by their histories. Community is also viewed as a collective process of social change. This can be achieved through engaging in dialogue, extending hospitality, trust and holding each other accountable. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) argue for three fundamental building blocks of communities, namely consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Consciousness of kind is the intrinsic connection that each community member has for others, it creates a shared knowing (knowledge) of belonging. Shared rituals and traditions stem from shared history, culture, values, norms and world views. A sense of responsibility enhances the sense of duty and obligation to the community as a whole and to individual community members.

Research Methodology

This study adopted an action research process. Action research is an orientation to knowledge generation that arises from engagement in a context of practice aiming at effecting desired changes (Huang 2010, 93). In this study, the action research process involved cycles of CBP, action, reflection, learning and re-engagement. The authors were engaged in action research from June 2014 to December 2015 as development facilitators for the IIDF. During the research action process, qualitative data were

gathered through field diaries, after-action reports, community-identified significant-change stories (CISCSs)¹, minutes of community meetings, monthly and quarterly reports, end-of-project reports, formative and summative evaluation reports, informal interviews, and monthly IRC/IIDF reflection meetings. Qualitative data from these reports were analysed through thematic reviews. Ethical considerations in the action research are concerned with the right practice or behaviour in research and the risks associated with using human beings as research subjects (Eikeland 2006). The authors faced the challenge of role contamination (Morton 1999) with regard to balancing the dual roles of being development facilitators and researchers. Ethical issues were guided by the following considerations: concerns about impacts of actions and behaviour of the researchers on the community; avoiding conflict of interest; considering the rights of community members; and reflecting on mitigating measures to community concerns. Table 1 summarises the key action research sessions.

Table 1: Key action research sessions

Type of session	Period	Action research agenda
District level sensitisation	September 2014	Acquire buy-in from the planning authorities and certain key stakeholders
Institutional functionality assessment	September 2014	Gain in-depth understanding on how local level developing institutions are functioning
Formation and consolidation of the DCFT members	September 2014	Establish a district team that gave backstopping to the programme during its implementation
Community youth mapping	August–September 2014	Provide a baseline of current status of youth engagement in local level development
Training manual development	September–November 2014	Inclusive development of CBP training manual
CBP implementation strategies indaba	January 2015	Agree on the implementation strategies for CBP
Preparation meetings for WCFT training	February 2015	Determine the composition of the WCFT for allocation of responsibilities on the WCFT training manual

1 CISCSs is a participatory monitoring and evaluation data collection and analysis technique that can assess intermediate outcomes and programme impact. Unlike the traditional evaluation methods, it does not use prescribed and measurable indicators. Instead, it uses personal stories that indicate change (Limato et al. 2018)

Type of session	Period	Action research agenda
WCFT training	February 2015	Develop shared understanding of CBP and process Create a platform for youth to engage with the wider community Equip WCFT with skills to lead and facilitate the CBP process
Community leadership debriefing	March 2015	Obtain the buyin and ensure common understanding
Broader community sensitisation	April 2015	Allow the broader community to understand the aim of the CBP process Identify the socio-economic groups
DCFT monitoring and backstopping process	May 2015	Ensure efficient project implantation and continuous learning
DCFT reflection meetings	May 2015	Reflect on the impact of WCFT training and issues raised or observed during monitoring and backstopping processes
IPP meetings	May 2015	Receive WCFT feedback from village debriefings Discuss the feasibility of the intensive planning process Discuss way forward with WCFT and local leadership
Intensive planning meetings	May–2 July 2015	Consolidate plans from the socio-economic groups into a ward plan
Community feedback meetings	November 2015	Brief the community on the draft consolidated ward plan Create ownership of the draft plan and make amendments

DCFT: district core facilitation team

IPP: intensive planning preparation

WCFT: ward core facilitation team

Source: Research results.

Results and Discussions

Rolling Out the Youth-Sensitive Community-Based Planning in the Mutasa and Mutare Districts

The youth-sensitive CBP process was implemented between June 2014 and December 2015 in the Mutare and Mutasa districts in Zimbabwe. The processes targeted 10 wards in each district. Initially the process was supposed to be targeted at three villages in each of the targeted wards. It was, however, observed inappropriate to conduct development planning based on three villages when the planning authorities were focusing on integrated ward community-based plans. In both districts previous CBP undertaken with funding from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and Practical Action, had produced ward-based plans which, however, have not been perceived to have adequately engaged the youth. Figure 2 shows the CBP road map that guided the planning process. This section explores the CBP process and draws implications for youth engagement.

Awareness Raising through Inception Workshops

Inception meetings were held on 10 and 11 July 2014. The Mutare workshop had 34 participants while the Mutasa workshop had 36 participants. These included the local chief, representatives from the Department of Social Services, the Marange Vocational Training Centre, the National Employment Services Department, the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, the Ministry of Local Government, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development; and representatives from the President's office, the IRC and the IIDF. The meetings paved a way for a common understanding on the scope of the Youth CAN! project. The implementation strategy was articulated, outlining modalities for stakeholder engagement. Critical implementation factors for the CBP process that were highlighted included:

- a. Strategic targeting for youth beneficiaries – There was a need to target innovative youths with the potential to drive change. Marginalised and disabled youths needed to be incorporated.
- b. Operating within the national policy framework – Cognisance was made for the need to operate within the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), i.e. the national development blue print. Such an approach would allow Youth CAN! to inform policy.
- c. Building capacity for youths to appreciate local development strategies – The project initiated a bottom-up approach that entailed appreciation of local development by

youths as primal to a mainstream integration of the youth into the development agenda.

- d. Adopting a holistic and multi-sectoral approach – This was highlighted with a focus on utilising practical and experiential training approaches.
- e. Avoiding politicisation of the programme.

District Level Consultations and Formation of DCFTs

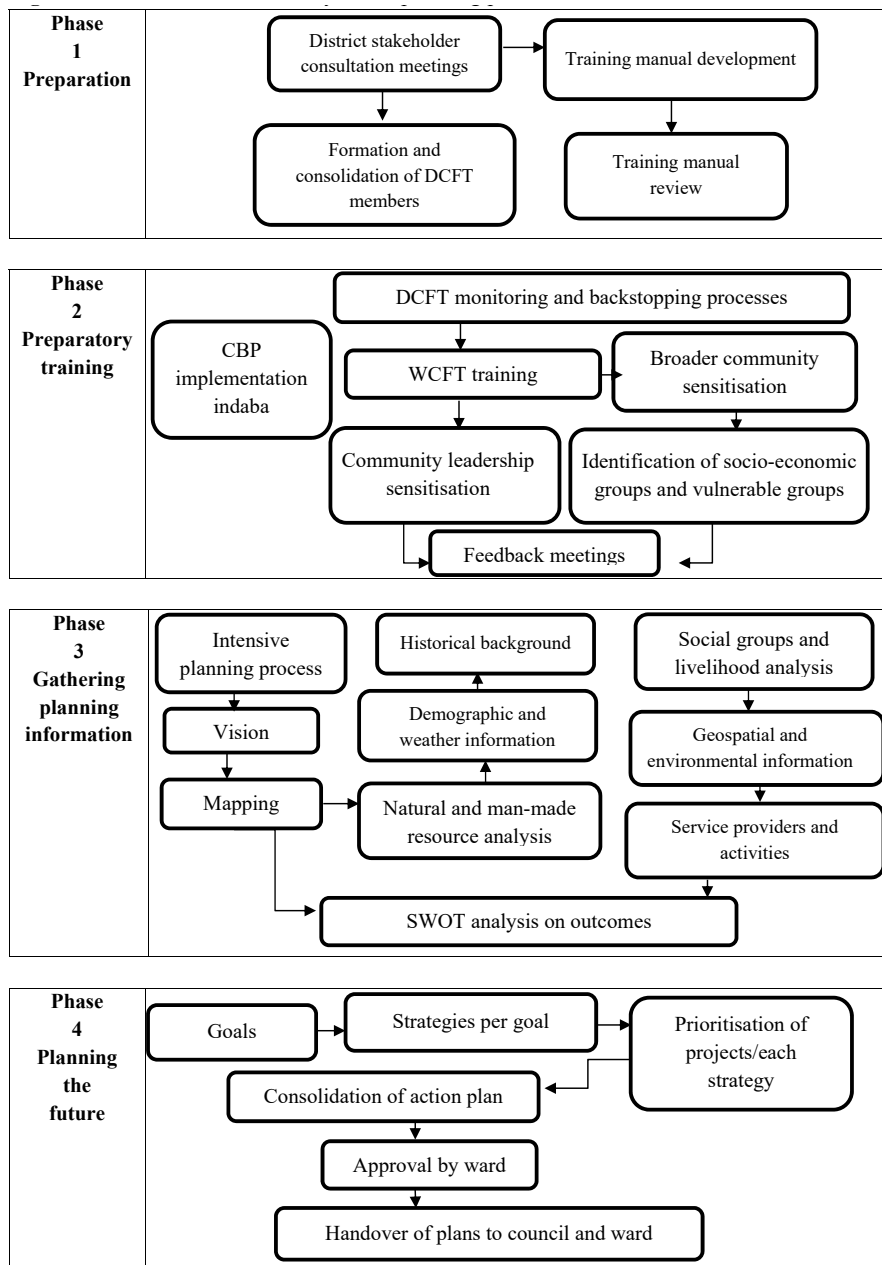
Consultation meetings with the key stakeholders including the District Administrators (DAs), Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and representatives of the President’s office were conducted in September 2014 in each of the districts to build an inclusive strategy on rolling out the planning process. Focal persons were appointed within these offices to participate in the programme as key members of a district core facilitation team (DCFT) including representatives from the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, who provided policy guidance and insights into contemporary youth-related developmental issues. Deliberate effort was made to include individuals with prior experiences in CBP. This process institutionalised youth-sensitive CBP into district level planning structures. For example, in the Mutare district, the DCFT carried out further training of people from other districts in the province to the extent of referring to itself as a “Provincial Training Team”.

Local Level Institutional Functionality Assessment

A rapid institutional functionality assessment of local development structures, village development committees (VIDCOs) and ward development committees (WDCOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), and traditional leadership structures was undertaken in each district using an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach². An AI was particularly applied as a mode of intervention as it deviates from a problem-focused mode which analyses problems without appreciating success and potential within the community (Cooperrider and Srivastva 1987). The rationale was to acquire deeper insights into institutional readiness with regard to youth-sensitive CBP. In this regard, community members were engaged through the creation of positive energies that resonated zeal towards the creation of functional and youth-sensitive local institutions. Some of the findings of the rapid institutional functionality assessment carried out in August 2014 are outlined here.

2 A synthesis of the application of AI can be found in Bushe (2011).

Figure 2: Phases in the community-based planning process



Source: Research Results

The majority of the interviewed respondents (youths, government field officers and some community members) showed ignorance of the existence and functions of development structures. None of the youth interviewed could demonstrate an understanding of the purpose of VIDCOs, village assemblies (VAs), WADCOs and ward assemblies (WAs). Yet these are the legislated institutions that drive local development. This clearly indicated that youths were not knowledgeable about institutional arrangements for local level development. On the other hand, these legislated development structures were not as prescribed in the Rural District Councils Act or the Statutory Instrument 15 of 2000 (GOZ 2001). Instead, political structures like cells and branches were more evident than the actual development structures and played a quasi-development role. There was no calendar of meetings except ad hoc meetings held at the behest of the Councillor, the district or other development agents.

These findings suggested a highly dysfunctional development planning system where political structures masqueraded as the local development institutions. There was no evidence of any documented development planning in the target areas and most projects were as a result of donor initiatives but with a very high community participation. There was, however, happy moments in the community where they could look back and link their own efforts with tangible outcomes. A case example was the community of the Sahumani ward in Mutasa who built their own ward meeting point from community contributions. This provided a solid foundation for CBP.

Institutionalising Youth Participation through Community Youth Mapping

During August to September 2014, a community youth mapping exercise in 20 target wards and 60 villages was conducted. Community youth mapping is a youth-centred participatory development strategy that engages young people to document their community-based resources, needs, and opportunities. The resultant information describes the youths' living conditions and economic situations as seen by themselves as members of their communities, and records the youths' own suggestions for improving their social status. The objectives of the community youth mapping exercise were to assess youth-youth relationships, youth-community relationships, appreciating youths' needs, expectations and frustrations, brainstorming on effective youth engagement strategies, and appreciating youths' natural, social and economic environments. The process led to the identification of youth champions who engaged in youth mobilisation and coordination of YFs during the CBP process. The process led to the registration of 2 215 youths (988 males and 1 227 females), the establishment of 60 YFs and the selection of 62 youth champions. Some of the key findings from the mapping exercise were as follows:

- The harsh socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe at that time impacted negatively on the youth as evidenced by a seemingly low self-esteem, low enthusiasm, and signs of desperation for immediate benefits and reduced trust in development projects due to unfulfilled promises by previous NGOs, civil society organisations and the Government.
- Married youths participated more in meetings than single youths.
- Female representation and participation were very low owing to some of the cultural practices and religious beliefs that undermine women participation in community forums.
- Female youths were generally hesitant to become youth champions. This was linked to the patriarchal nature of the community and religious beliefs (apostolic sects) that did not promote women as local leaders.
- There were attempts by some political leaders to take advantage of youth programmes to promote their political agenda.
- Youths showed a strong inclination towards individual rather than group projects. This could be due to mistrust and weak youth-to-youth relationships as a result of political manipulation.
- Youths were interested in projects which brought immediate direct and tangible benefits.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with CEOs, DAs and representatives from the Ministry of Women, Gender and Community Development, and development partners. A rapid scan of emerging thematic areas from the Mutare KIIs indicated the following cross-cutting themes: there was consensus on what age group constitutes youths (15–35 years); there were non-functional institutional support systems for youths mostly owing to financial resources; considerable support had been provided for youth projects by NGOs and funding agencies; the bad state of relationships between youths and local leadership or stakeholders mostly to mistrust stemming from politics; youths' concerns were often considered but youths were not engaged in decision-making; there was a low percentage of women youths participating in local development; and government support for the youth needed strengthening through depoliticising programmes and increasing lobbying by civil society.

Broader Community Sensitisation for Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

Community sensitisation was conducted in all 20 wards (10 in each district) in April 2015. The purpose was to sensitise the communities on the importance of the CBP process as a tool for youth engagement and to get a buy-in from the leadership and community at large. The platform was also used to identify the possible socio-economic groups to

be represented during the intensive planning sessions. On average 10 socio-economic groups were identified and the most common ones were as follows: youths, the elderly, disabled people, farmers, widows, orphans, vendors, war veterans and pensioners or retirees. The process was led by the DCFTs with representatives from government ministries including local government, agricultural extension and the Ministry of Youth. There were mixed community reactions to the CBP process. For example, in some instances in the Mutare district, people walked away in the middle of the meetings as soon as they realised there were no food handouts. Some of the sentiments by such people were, “*kune vanhu vecouncil hameno kuti varikutaura nezvei. Havana chavauya nacho.*” Meaning, “There are some council staff whose meeting purpose we do not know. They did not bring anything”. Such sentiments indicated that communities seem to have lost trust in the government institutions which they regard as extensions of the political system and which do not provide the needed services to the communities. A review of previous community minutes revealed that the Ministry of Youth once promised people projects but failed to deliver. Such a scenario highlights existing complications of engaging local government institutions in local level planning in Zimbabwe.

Intensive Planning

Intensive planning preparation (IPP) meetings were held in May 2015. These meetings had three key objectives: to receive WCFT feedback from the village debriefings; to assess the feasibility of the intensive planning process; and to discuss the way forward with local leadership and the WCFT. Participants at the meetings were representatives of the following groups: youths, the elderly, disabled people, the immune-compromised, volunteers or health workers, widows and widowers, single parents, farmers, vendors or casual workers, faith healers, traditional leaders, salaried workers, schoolchildren, orphans and other vulnerable children, government departments, councillors, village heads, youth champions and war veterans. In a bid to instil community ownership of the CBP process, communities were asked to donate in kind towards the hosting of the intensive planning sessions. It was observed that during these meetings the level of cohesion in the communities greatly determined the contributions towards the successful hosting of the intensive planning sessions. Some communities in wards 3, 26, 27 and 31 of the Mutasa district showed a high level of organisation. In these areas, the leadership through the councillors and traditional leadership were at the forefront in making donations. Some communities like ward 16 and 23 exhibited tendencies towards “donor mentality”, where they expected the IIDF and IRC to fully cater for the event. Key observations from the process were politicisation of development interventions where politicians rode on community projects to drive their political agendas, and indications of communities being “over-researched” as they felt that CBP was a duplication of what was done before. Some community members were tired of planning processes as some of them asked, “what is there after the plan for our benefit?” Some

claimed they knew what they wanted and claimed that resources were being wasted as they suggested, “*tipeyi mari yemurikuda kuita misanagno iyoyo tigadzire migodhi yedu*” meaning, “give us the money that you want to use for meetings to allow us to repair our boreholes”. The intensive planning process was conducted in all participating wards. The process provided a forum for constructive dialogue to enable communities across wide-ranging socio-economic groups to make decisions on engaging youths in community development priorities. Further to that, the process enabled the removal of the “conspiracy of silence” among youths through allowing them to stand up and tell their stories, communities to debate youth engagement issues across political, religious, gender and other socio-economic differences, and communities to document and share their aspirations with the outside world.

Community Feedback Meetings

Community feedback meetings were meant to authenticate the draft typed plans. The WCFT led the process and 20 meetings were conducted. This process helped in the strengthening the community ownership of the plan. In some cases, community members including the youth questioned some omissions of what they had discussed earlier in their socio-economic groups. The fact that the youth had to ask some questions over the draft plans indicated development of confidence. After the adoption of the draft plans, the IIDF printed them and handed them to the respective district councils for adoption by the full council as the official ward plans.

Emerging Impacts of CBP on Youth Engagement

Although it might be considered premature to measure impacts of the CBP on mainstreaming youths into local level development through CBP, a number of qualitative traits were emerging which could be attributed to the CBP process. Firstly, there was emerging evidence of institutionalisation of youth-sensitive planning in district level institutions. An example is the Mutare DCFT that went beyond the Youth CAN! initiative through training other district teams in youth-sensitive CBP. Secondly, there was evidence of increased enthusiasm by the youth in ensuring that the resultant ward plans reflected youth-related issues. This was evidenced by active participation by youths in community feedback meetings where youths openly advocated for the inclusion of some issues that they felt were misrepresented in the plans. Thirdly, a few selected cases from CISCs indicated some emerging impacts on youths. There was evidence of improved cohesion among youths from various political divides (see the example in Box 1). Such a scenario might improve the youths’ voice in future lobbying for their rights to participate in local level development planning and implementation of projects. There was also evidence of renewed vigour among youths to participate in youth-related activities and contribute towards local development (see Box 2).

Box 1: Youth X – Success story

My name is X, I am a resident of the Muchena Village which is in ward 26 of the Mutasa district. Our village has an unpleasant history of social and economic problems which were very challenging to solve. There were group dynamics and people were always at loggerheads with one another and it did not bring any development to the community. The Youth CAN! project therefore came as a conflict resolution tool and development technique. At first there was a negative response towards the project, which included fear of the unknown, ignorance, and some residents wanted to satisfy their personal needs. It was very difficult to co-ordinate the YFs. I had a great zeal to be part of the Youth CAN! project, and I am proud to mention that I am the youth champion of our forum. Our forum brought unity, teamwork and skills to the youths. The IIDF and its partners required our forum to produce a constitution which had to be obeyed by everyone. The constitution is enabling our project activities to run without facing any hustles. We have received training on group dynamics and conflict resolution strategies. Because of the Youth CAN! project, we are now a different youth group in terms of development. We now have the knowledge and skills. We have the passion for converting our chicken-rearing project into a big registered company in the near future.

Box 2: Success story for youth champion Y

Y is a young lady who is discovering her hidden talents through participation in a young people's project. The project, dubbed Youth CAN! is implemented by the IRC, a local partner in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth in the two districts of Mutasa and Mutare. Through her upbringing Y was not really concerned about developmental work in her community. She never bothered to attend meetings in her community neither did she contribute anything towards the improvement of her surroundings. As a reserved person Y was neither confident nor courageous to stand in front of people.

However, today, through the Youth CAN! Project, Y can stand tall in front of her peers. It is now expected of her as she was elected to be a youth champion. From that time, life has never been the same for Y. "*Ndavekuziva kuti ndiri chi*" (I now realise what I am). She now appreciates the value of education and has decided to further her studies. This transformation happened after she has received training from the Youth CAN! project. Not only did Y get elected as a youth champion, but she was also nominated to be the ward focal person for a different youth donor funded project in her ward. As a young person, she has gained respect from her community and also from her fellow youths, who often seeks her advice.

Practice Recommendations

The need for institutionalising youth participation through legislated local planning structures was found to be fundamental. In this study, youth issues were integrated into planning systems for VIDCOs and WDCOs. Although youth issues are assumed to be well known, the study found that giving the youth their own platforms to deliberate and prioritise issues before discussing them with other stakeholders during planning processes gave a deeper understanding and brought out the root causes. The study realised the importance of programming youth initiatives within the national policy framework. Such an approach made it easy to leverage support and gain knowledge and experiences from government institutions. Youth problems are normally multi-faceted and the study acknowledges the need for multi-stakeholder engagement. This leveraged knowledge and experiences from various angles allowed continuous learning and avoided duplication of activities.

CBP needs to be embedded within existing local institutional arrangements and local planning systems. Development practitioners should realise that communities have ongoing planning processes, some of which are not explicitly documented. During the action research process, the authors realised the need to appreciate local skills and knowledge in planning. This process was enriched through the empowerment of youth champions who facilitated the utilisation of existing community skills and knowledge. These issues are increasingly being viewed as fundamental in planning processes. For example, Edwards and Heinrich (2006) highlight the need for planners to promote mechanisms by which local people consider both their own knowledge and that of scientists and planners in creating approaches that move their own values forward. Such mechanisms will likely ensure that community-based plans are holistic, relevant and implementable.

The need for creating YFs and space for peer learning was found to be fundamental. The youth tended to appreciate, learn and became inspired by sharing experiences from their peers. These lessons are also shared by Percy-Smith (2002) and Worpole (2003) who highlight the importance of the youth having places to meet and hang out with friends, having a variety of activity arenas and feeling part of the community as positive features of developing communities. Community-based planners need to integrate peer learning for youths to allow meaningful dialogic engagement by youths in local development debates and planning platforms.

Conclusion

This study explored the process of mainstreaming the youth into community development through CBP. The study adopted an action research process, where the authors were engaged as development facilitators over 18 months. Two research questions were dealt with: what are the essential activities for implementing a youth-friendly CBP process?

And, what are the impacts of engaging the youth in CBP? The study concludes that the key tenets for effective youth engagement in community development include local awareness raising, district level engagement, local level institutional functionality assessment, community youth mapping, and intensive planning and community feedback meetings. Raising local awareness was found to improve the youths' knowledge on contemporary development issues and to build confidence that encouraged youths to take action.

District level engagement was viewed as fundamental as it legitimises multi-stakeholder engagement, since operational modalities of key institutions were monitored and evaluated at the district level. In addition, it allowed integration of knowledge and experiences from previous level planning processes. Local level institutional functionality allowed in-depth appreciation of the readiness of local institutions for youth-sensitive CBP. The process also allowed the development of holistic mechanisms for the engagement of local institutions that allowed the utilisation of synergies among them. Community youth mapping engaged the youth in documenting their resource base, needs and priorities. This empowered the youth to engage meaningfully in the CBP process with well-thought-out priorities within their local level development context. The intensive planning process was conducted within the context of a dialogic youth-sensitive CBP. It thus amplified youth voices in local development debates. Community feedback meetings allowed the verification and adoption of plans and renewed commitment by community members. Impacts of integrating youths into CBP include the institutionalisation of youth-sensitive planning at district level, improved cohesion by the youth from various political divides, enthusiasm by youths in ensuring incorporation of youth-related issues in ward plans, and renewed vigour by the youth to participate local development activities. The study recommends youth-sensitive CBP as an approach for mainstreaming youths into community development programmes.

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