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Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Urban Planning Advocacy: Lessons from Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper provides a review on the role played by civil society organisations (CSOs) in urban planning advocacy in Zimbabwe. To demonstrate this, the article draws on the cases of the residents, associations and other CSOs from Zimbabwe's major cities and towns namely Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare. CSOs such as Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), Harare Residents Trust (HRT), Gweru Residents Association, Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association, Mutare Resident and Ratepayers Association (MURA) and Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and Dialogue on Shelter (ZHPFDS) are instrumental in championing the interests of the urban poor, so that their concerns are represented in the urban development discourse. CSOs are also critical in bringing good urban governance and social justice in cities. Other Civil Society Organisations such as ZHPFDS specialise solely on advocacy for housing land and, within their ambit, work towards ensuring that the housing poor and homeless have a roof over their head. This is an emphasis on the 'hard infrastructure' provision. On the other hand, there are CSOs concerned almost purely on the 'soft infrastructure' like public awareness campaigns on making city authorities account for their service provision and other related urban governance issues. These groups, like Harare Residents Trust (HRT) often use threat to organise protests and campaigns against bureaucratic injustices and making the resident empowered in informational terms. The paper suggests mutuality and close linkage between CSOs in development and CSOs in the advanced agendas for social justice towards urban sustainability and meaningful governance. Such an approach can be replicated within Zimbabwe, and ultimately across Africa and beyond.

Keywords: Social Justice; Urban Governance; Urban Sustainability; Civil Society Organizations Advocacy; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Social Movements have emerged as an important force in urban settings, particularly in Latin America, Asia, and Europe and in Africa as well. The social movements are usually made up of civil society organizations (CSOs) that champion issues such as human rights, politics, governance to name but a few. Recently, the social movements have shifted their stance a bit to include aspects such as social justice in urban planning and practice. This has marked the formation of Residents Associations and Federations that lobby for service delivery, tenure security issues and housing among others.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) like Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples Federation and Dialogue on Shelter (ZHPFDS), which specialise solely on advocacy for housing land and, within their ambit, work towards ensuring that the housing poor and homeless have a roof over their head (Satterthwaite, 1998). CSOs are mainly concerned with issues such as public awareness campaigns on issues of service delivery and governance. CSOs like the Harare Residents Trust (HRT) often use threat to organise protests and campaigns against bureaucratic injustices and making the resident empowered in informational terms. The paper ends by suggesting mutuality and close linkage between CSOs in development and CSOs in the advanced agendas for social justice towards urban sustainability and meaningful governance. Such an approach can be replicated within Zimbabwe, and ultimately across the continent and beyond.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This section provides an outline of various concepts which underpins this paper. Many urban NGOs were established to address the needs of the urban poor – some worked on housing rights and used the campaign approach as a way to get their message across to state and international agencies. The strategy was to confront governments through demonstrations, agitations and legal proceedings on behalf of the urban poor. Over the past decade, new forms of urban movements have emerged as a way of expressing concerns with regards to the delivery of urban services. Meanwhile, traditional movements of the poor and landless have also undergone profound changes: new leadership, new structures, new methodologies and more women in leadership positions. The older traditional leaders, from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, were men who organized themselves around entitlements and saw their role as demanding rights from the state. They learnt that they had to find a different way of talking to government. They moved from fighting the state to engaging them.

Examples of civil society advocacy initiatives can be drawn from the Asian context. On 17 May 1976, 70,000 people lost their homes when Janata Colony (a slum in Mumbai) was demolished. After a long struggle with the state and national government, the families were moved to Cheetah Camp where they had to rebuild their houses. Over thirty thousand residents had marched to government offices to save Janata Colony, but to no avail. The experience of fighting to save the settlement from eviction provided many lessons for the community's informal leadership. It strengthened their view that they needed to find an alternative strategy whereby affected communities (not just NGOs or politicians) could be at the centre of the process. This was when the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) of India was created. The leadership believed that communities had to go to government with alternative proposals, not just with a list of grievances. They realized that short-term strategies to stop evictions, without a robust long-term solution to build. The Civil Society organization in India adopted slum enumerations as tools to mobilize and strengthen the capacity of local organizations in advancing the concerns of local slum residents. Such example can also be drawn from the Zimbabwean context, where the Zimbabwe Homeless people's Federation has been conducting enumerations in slum areas such as Epworth. Such social movements were meant to protect the rights of slum dwellers, so that they cannot be victims of harsh urban planning decisions.

The concept of urban governance can be defined as the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal arrangements and the social capital of citizens. The Global Campaign on Urban Governance proposes that good urban governance is characterized by a series of principles, which are interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Lange, 2010).

Advocacy has several meanings and explanations. Some definitions of advocacy refer to actual policy change; some refer to the activity, while other definitions refer to who does the advocacy and who is meant to receive the advocacy. Advocacy is a strategy, act or process aimed at bringing about change of attitude, policies, traditions, laws and ideologies for a desired positive result. It can also be defined as an effort made towards decision makers on changing a specific policy or law at different levels. CSOs do policy advocacy for a number of reasons. Social justice is conceptualised as *“concerned both with individual empowerment and also with structural injustice; that is with questions of power and resources available to particular communities or*

sectors of those communities” (Griffiths, 1998, p.13). It is demonstrated that participation of local communities in resource management and urban development empowers that community (Islam, & Mahjabeen, 2003; Jenkins, 2001) and helps in redistribution of natural resources which contribute to improve social justice outcomes (Leuenberger and Wakin, 2007). By meeting the needs of the poor, community participation is also seen as a vehicle to help achieve a socially just city and region (see Davoudi, 2000; Gunder, 2006; Sandercock, 1997).

Method and Materials

This paper is highly descriptive in nature. It provides an outline of the various roles that civil society organizations play in urban planning advocacy in Zimbabwe. In putting together the paper, documentary search and textual analysis were used. Newspapers, journal articles, research reports and other relevant secondary materials were used to produce this article.

Results and Discussion

Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA)

CHRA is an amalgamation of six neighbourhood residents’ groups – some dating back to the 1940s – merged to form the Combined Harare Residents’ Association, CHRA (Chirisa & Kawadza, 2011). In 2005, the association’s chairperson asserted that CHRA is “*an expression of the growing power of residents’ collective action and... is an effective monitor of the activities of elected councillors as well as municipal officials*” (Davies, 2005, p. 8). In 1999, a Trust was formed and CHRA was registered as a civil society organisation. In 2000, the Advocacy Centre was established as CHRA’s secretariat. According to CHRA’s constitution, the aim of the association is “*to promote and protect the rights and interests of the residents of Harare*” (Chirisa, & Kawadza, 2011). Its preoccupation with urban governance is amplified by its slogan: “*CHRA for Enhanced Civic Participation in Local Governance*”. Among CHRA’s local governance-related objectives are:

- *To represent and support residents of Harare by advocating for effective, transparent and affordable municipal and other services and quality facilities.*
- *To make representations to and liaise with the Harare City Council, City Councillors, Central Government or any of its ministries, departments or other public institutions concerning matters affecting the residents of Harare.*
- *To promote and encourage public awareness and participation by residents in local governance issues.*
- *To do all things necessary to protect and promote the rights and interests of the residents.*

In summary, the CHRA has made significant progress in the areas of social justice, municipal and local government policy as well as improvement in municipal services. The CHRA has also created non-partisan space for local communities to engage with policy makers. Through such platforms the CHRA has encouraged residents and other stakeholders to debate about water crisis and other service delivery challenges confronting municipalities. The CSO has is also advocating for changes in urban planning laws such as the Urban Council Act and the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act so that these pieces of legislation reflect changes that have occurred since independence in as far as urban affairs are concerned.

Dialogue on Shelter and its Advocacy Work

Dialogue on Shelter is a civic organization established in 1998 which is also present in Harare (Chitekwe, & Mitlin, 2001). Its core mandate is to support poor urban communities, by planning and implementing their own solutions towards the challenges of inadequate land, housing and infrastructure provisions and advocates for changes in policy and practice by actively engaging local and central government (Chirisa, & Kawadza, 2011).

In addition, it is the mandate of Dialogue on Shelter to ensure that the communities in the urban poor especially Harare participate in the development process to create suitable living conditions through the poor’s own initiatives and self-determination (ibid). In short, it can be seen that this organization is merely concerned with advocacy, civil activism, poverty alleviation and urban development among other things (Chitekwe, 2009).

Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation (ZHPF)

The Zimbabwe Homeless People emerged as one of the networks to push the interests of the urban poor so that their needs and rights can be incorporated in planning and development activities. It is within this context that the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation came into existence in 1998. The movement began in the two holding camps of Hatcliffe Extension and Dzivarasekwa Extension, where the first savings schemes were started in 1997 (Chitekwe, 2009). Working in alliance with the NGO Dialogue on Shelter, the federation quickly grew into a national network and, as of 2007, had presence in 27 local authority areas, bringing together more than 45,000 households, with 22,000 saving collectively to address their common development needs.

Over the same period, these communities, despite the very adverse economic environment, saved more than US\$ 185,000, secured land for 8,500 families, built 1,100 houses, installed piped water and sewerage on 1,200 plots and raised US\$ 1,275,000 in equity through an urban poor fund. The alliance of Dialogue on Shelter and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation is a partnership between an autonomous network of community organizations (the federation) and an NGO, in which the two combine their relative comparative advantages as strengths for negotiation and articulating issues of urban poverty and landlessness. In some ways, Dialogue on Shelter acts as a technical support organization, but is always mindful to ensure that the voices of the urban poor and the identity of the federation are at the fore in all interactions with the formal world.

The Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation has consistently challenged the use of waiting lists for land and housing allocations. Surveys carried out in 15 communities over an eight-year period show that the average number of very poor urban families that register on these waiting lists is less than 10 per cent in communities where no one has security of tenure and all are in need of a house. ZHPF is also involved in a number of initiatives such as Epworth Slum Upgrading Project. In these initiatives the community is involved in the process from planning to implementation (Chitekwe, 2009).

Harare Residents Trust (HRT)

The HRT is a non-partisan institution whose main objective is to empower Harare citizens to lobby and advocate for accountability, offering of quality and affordable services through engaging the council and city fathers in continuous dialogue. The Civil Society Organization continues to lobby for improved urban governance and local government management in Harare. It is the watchdog for urban planning and service delivery in Harare. Together with the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), they continue to lobby for the review of urban planning legislation such as the Urban Councils Act and the Regional, Town and Country Planning Act so that they can provide for effective participation of urban residents in urban affairs. However, besides the efforts by civil society organizations and other social movements, the urban poor continue to be neglected and their needs are not properly accounted for when cities and towns are planned and managed. This is further coupled by the harassment of CSOs by the police and other agents of government. This calls for the need to fully capacitate and strengthen CSOs so that they can effectively represent the urban poor in urban development activities.

The efforts to bring good urban governance by the CHRA and other sister civil society organizations has to a larger extent challenges Harare City Council to think seriously about issues of service delivery, infrastructure development and community engagement in local government affairs. The advocacy organizations have also managed to champion the interests of the urban residents, particularly those that are always neglected in the urban development discourse. Recognizing that the urban poor are particularly affected by urban problems such as shortage of housing land, poor infrastructure and inadequate services, inclusive cities are seen as a concept to counter such developments. Some of the CSOs have been working closely together in order to improve their advocacy work. For example, Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation and Dialogue on Shelter Zimbabwe have been working together in areas such as Epworth to improve on infrastructure development and service provision in the area.

The CSOs have greatly succeeded in putting pressure on the Local Authorities to think seriously about issues of service delivery, housing and infrastructure development. In this context, CSOs and NGOs can play a central role in bridging the poor and city authorities to give the excluded and marginalized a voice. Thus urban planning and management can be made not only more inclusive but also effective by assigning authority to the poor. By now there is a range of

examples, highlighting the potential of inclusive urban planning (Lange, 2010). However, inclusive cities require city governments willing to share power and demonstrating trust. Local Governments need to embrace the concept of democratization if the needs of the marginalized urban communities are likely to be satisfied.

Gweru United Residents Association (GURA)

GURA is a community Based Organisation working with the residents of Gweru for better and improved services from all service providers.

Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association (BPR)

BPR is a CSO that is responsible for representing the residents of Bulawayo for better service delivery by the Bulawayo City Council and other service providers. The BPR has successfully organized protests in the City over issues of water management in the City. The same CSO is also pushing forward the interests of street vendors who are continuously being harassed by the police especially in the Central Business District.

Mutare Resident and Ratepayers Association (MURA)

The major role of this Organisation is to represent the residents of the City of Mutare to ensure that they receive good quality services from the local authority and other providers of services in the city.

Table 1: CSOs and their key roles in Urban Planning Advocacy in Zimbabwe

Main CSO	Key role or achievement
Combined Harare Residents Association	Enhancement of communities in urban local governance issues Improved municipal service delivery
Bulawayo Progressive Residents Association	Lobbying for improved delivery of local government services
Mutare Resident and Ratepayers Association	Representing the Mutare residents for effective local governance
Gweru United Residents Association	Ensuring that the residents of Gweru are protected from unscrupulous activities by the Local Authority
Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation	Making sure that the urban poor has access to housing land Conducting enumerations in Slum areas such Epworth Mapping of illegal settlements and their profiling
Harare Residents Trust	Awareness campaigns to empower citizens with informational needs Organizing protests against poor service delivery in Harare
Dialogue on Shelter Zimbabwe	Providing technical advice to some CSOs

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are instrumental in championing issues of effective urban governance and urban planning in Zimbabwe. In major cities of Zimbabwe, there are certain CSOs that have the mandate of working towards social justice and making sure that the interests of the urban poor are catered for in urban planning and urban development. The voices of such organisations are at the forefront of making sure that the marginalized are well represented in urban planning and development initiatives. Through intense negotiations with central government, other CSO such as the ZHPF and Dialogue on Shelter have learned to manage this set of relationships, build a collective coherent voice across its membership,

build and manage alliances with other organizations working towards the same goals and constructively engage with government on a set of very tangible outcomes, as opposed to abstract demands for rights. Overall, Civil Society Organizations have a major role to play in making sure that the interests of the urban poor are well represented in the urban development discourse. For CSOs to be champions of planning advocacy there is need for effective collaboration with other advocacy organizations that work on different issues as they relate to urban affairs. This paper has also explored how CSOs in Zimbabwe have built working partnerships with Urban Local Authorities and this has led to more inclusive, pro-poor, urban development in the major cities and towns of the country.

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