



# Citizenship in Africa: Exploring Trends And Patterns

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# 1. Introduction

Studies focused on what citizens do with each other and for each other are rare. There is limited empirical evidence of how citizens engage each other outside of the more formal spaces and little is known about the platforms or mechanisms that they establish. The data presented in this paper is based on field surveys carried out across five African countries spread across Central, East, Southern and West African countries. In the study, we are seeking to learn the extent to which citizens engage in different forms of solidarity and resolve issues within the political, economic and social spaces. The objective of the survey was to (i) develop deeper insights into how citizen-led formations emerge, (ii) their methods of operation, (iii) roles played, (iv) the extent to which they have embedded democratic principles with their processes and (v) ways in which they sustain themselves. The country focused papers that follow provide in-depth discussions on the issues listed above. The volume is probably best read alongside the [African Citizenship Index](#) that is also based on similar data sets

Ultimately the volume, as already mentioned in the introductory paper is about democracy. As a way of reiteration, the democracy under discussion goes beyond a fascination with elections and participation in public policy-related processes. It is instead about what citizens do to solve public problems together. Traditional conceptions of democracy focus on how we elect those who ‘steer’ government, how political interests and claims are voiced, processed and ways in which political conflicts are resolved, how citizens are protected by rights from abuses by the state (Briggs, 2008:6). Our approach in this journal and indeed many other works (see for instance Mathews, 2021) is to view democracy as a collective search for better answers above and beyond self-interest, as a way of developing citizenship. According to Briggs (2008:8) the theory and practice of what makes democracy work should necessarily include the study of problem-solving in action and the collective capacity to problem solve. The discussion in this and the papers that follow provide a detailed description of what citizens are doing with each other and the motives behind their collective work.



## 2. Description of Sample

A total of 2085 citizens spread across countries in Central, East, Southern and West African countries responded to our survey as per the table below. The largest number of respondents was from Zimbabwe. The survey was administered in the capital cities of each country.

**Table 1 Size of Sample (Respondents by Country)**

Country	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Cameroon (Yaoundé)	402	19.28%
Ghana (Accra)	413	19.81%
Kenya (Nairobi)	421	20.19%
Malawi (Lilongwe)	403	19.33%
Zimbabwe (Harare)	446	21.39%

Source: Survey Data

We also sought to ensure equal representation across gender. However, eventually, slightly more males participated (55.73% participated in the survey) compared to women (44.27%). It was only in Malawi where we had a greater number of female (52.85%) respondents. The Ghana figures are a bit concerning and may affect representativity. There were 263 (63.68%) males and 150 (36.32%) females responding to the survey. More so in a context where the studies have already demonstrated that there are more females engaged in informal associational life across many African countries.

## Table 2 Sample by Gender

Country	Male		Female		Total sample size by country
	#	%	#	%	
Ghana	263	63.68%	150	36.32%	413
Cameroon	215	53.48%	187	46.52%	402
Kenya	228	54.16%	193	45.84%	421
Malawi	190	47.15%	213	52.85%	403
Zimbabwe	266	59.64%	180	40.36%	446
<b>Total sample size</b>	<b>1162</b>	<b>55.73%</b>	<b>923</b>	<b>44.27%</b>	<b>2085</b>

The majority of the respondents are married (see Table 3 below). However, in Cameroon, the majority (62.19%) are single. This could be due to the youthful nature of the Cameroonian sample (see Table 4 on Age) where close to 70% of the sample are aged between 18–35. The figures suggest that the majority of respondents are members of a married family and their patterns of belonging within an association/ network/ movement could be based on that level of social organisation representing their families rather than as single individuals.

## Table 3: Sample by Marital Status

Country	Single		Married		Divorced		Widowed		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Ghana	81	19.61%	270	65.38%	40	9.69%	22	5.33%	413
Cameroon	250	62.19%	147	36.57%	3	0.75%	2	0.50%	402
Kenya	119	28.27%	255	60.57%	27	6.41%	20	4.75%	421
Malawi	125	31.02%	228	56.58%	31	7.69%	19	4.71%	403
Zimbabwe	201	45.07%	200	44.84%	29	6.50%	16	3.59%	446
<b>Total</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>37.22%</b>	<b>1100</b>	<b>52.76%</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>6.24%</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>3.79%</b>	<b>2085</b>

## Sample by Age

There is an even distribution across age groups in all countries except Ghana where the majority (50.85%) are in the 36–45 age group. There are fewer respondents across all countries that are aged above 56 years. The majority (619) of the respondents are in the 36–45 age range, perhaps this also explains the reason behind the fact that the majority (52.76%) are married.

**Table 4: Sample by Age**

Country	18 – 25		26 – 35		36 – 45		46 – 55		56 – 65		65+		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Ghana	3	0.73%	66	15.98%	210	50.85%	79	19.13%	27	6.54%	28	6.78%	413
Cameroon	154	38.31%	128	31.84%	81	20.15%	34	8.46%	5	1.24%	0	0.00%	402
Kenya	90	21.38%	98	23.28%	109	25.89%	80	19.00%	30	7.13%	14	3.33%	421
Malawi	78	19.35%	138	34.24%	111	27.54%	56	13.90%	16	3.97%	4	0.99%	403
Zimbabwe	141	31.61%	125	28.03%	108	24.22%	49	10.99%	13	2.91%	10	2.24%	446
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>22.35%</b>	<b>555</b>	<b>26.62%</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>29.69%</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>14.29%</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>4.36%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>2.69%</b>	<b>2085</b>

## Literacy levels

Literacy is considered vital to the processes of establishing and sustaining an associational platform. Skills that are required in associations include record keeping, planning, communicating and also providing leadership. Mafeje (1993:17) argued that these loose formations require no special skills, to run them as they are usually small and characterised by face-to-face relations based on mutual trust. However, increasingly there is an emerging argument (see Murisa, 2009, 2013) for certain levels of basic craft competency skills especially in the development and growth of the associational platforms. In our study sample, we found that an average of 95.83% possesses basic literacy skills. Zimbabwe has the highest levels (98.88%) of literacy with Ghana having the lowest (93.22%) but still, this is very high.

**Table 5: Literacy**

Country	Yes		No		Total
	#	%	#	%	
Ghana	385	93.22%	28	6.78%	<b>413</b>
Cameroon	388	96.52%	14	3.48%	<b>402</b>
Kenya	403	95.72%	18	4.28%	<b>421</b>
Malawi	381	94.54%	22	5.46%	<b>403</b>
Zimbabwe	441	98.88%	5	1.12%	<b>446</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>95.83%</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>4.17%</b>	<b>2085</b>

Beyond basic literacy, we were also interested in finding the education levels attained by respondents in more detail. The majority (41.49%) of respondents across the five countries attained secondary education while 1.63% (n=34) did not have any formal education. An analysis by country indicates that Cameroon has a comparatively greater number (75.63%) of those who attained tertiary education than any other country in the sample (see Table 6 below).

**Table 6: Education level**

Country	Primary school		Secondary school		Tertiary education		No formal education		Total
Ghana	27	6.54%	236	57.14%	139	33.66%	11	2.66%	413
Cameroon	23	5.72%	78	19.40%	296	73.63%	5	1.24%	402
Kenya	40	9.50%	181	42.99%	193	45.84%	7	1.66%	421
Malawi	15	3.72%	155	38.46%	227	56.33%	6	1.49%	403
Zimbabwe	14	3.14%	215	48.21%	212	47.53%	5	1.12%	446
Total	119	5.71%	865	41.49%	212	10.17%	34	1.63%	2085

### Monthly income

We sought to understand the economic profile of respondents to the survey. We used the proxy of incomes in order to determine the socio-economic status of respondents. The majority of



the respondents earn less than USD250. Within this cohort, Zimbabwe has the highest number of respondents who earn less than USD \$250. Ghana, on the other hand, has very few (2.66%) respondents earning less than USD250. The majority (49.64%) of respondents in Ghana earn between USD501 and US\$1,000. On the other hand, Ghana is the only country in the sample with more than a third (36.56%) of respondents earning between USD1,001 and USD3,000.00. The figures suggest that poverty is probably more widespread in Zimbabwe compared to other countries whilst Ghana has the wealthiest respondents.

**Table 7: Monthly Income Range**

Country	Under USD 250.00		Between USD 251 and USD500		Between USD \$501 and USD \$1,000		Between USD \$1,001 and USD \$3,000		Between USD \$3,001 and USD \$5,000		Above USD \$5,001		Total
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
Ghana	11	2.66%	18	4.36%	205	49.64%	151	36.56%	24	5.81%	4	0.97%	<b>413</b>
Cameroon	203	50.50%	130	32.34%	51	12.69%	9	2.24%	6	1.49%	3	0.75%	<b>402</b>
Kenya	236	56.06%	125	29.69%	44	10.45%	15	3.56%	1	0.24%	0	0.00%	<b>421</b>
Malawi	161	39.95%	139	34.49%	57	14.14%	32	7.94%	6	1.49%	8	1.99%	<b>403</b>
Zimbabwe	296	66.37%	84	18.83%	33	7.40%	21	4.71%	3	0.67%	9	2.02%	<b>446</b>

*\*Individual country currencies were converted into United States Dollars.*



## 3. Patterns of Membership

All the respondents belong to an association. We grouped associations into 3 clusters, economic political and social. There are more (69.57%) people who belong to associations that focus on social issues compared with 40.77% in associations that focus on political issues and 50.46% that focus on economic issues.

The levels of belonging across all types of association are very high in Malawi, 87.34% in economic focused associations, 72.70% in political focused associations and 77.17% in associations that focus on social issues. Respondents in Ghana on the other hand do not reflect similar patterns. There are very low levels of membership in economic focused associations (5.08%), and also in political focused associations (15.50 %) compared to the socially focused associations (86.20%). As already mentioned, there are high levels of members across all countries in the socially focused association. Zimbabwe exhibits slightly even distribution across all types of associations. Membership is spread evenly (39.69%) for associations that focus on economic issues, (32.51%) for those that focus on political issues and (49.33%) for those that focus on social issues. Ghana scores lowest on membership in political focused associations compared to other countries. Interestingly the two countries that have low levels of memberships in associations that have a political focus are also extreme opposites. Ghana has for years been celebrated as a peaceful democracy with the capacity to hold free and fair elections. Zimbabwe, on the other hand, has developed a reputation of running disputed elections with allegations of rigging. It could be that the citizens in both countries see no reason for participation in politically focused associations but for different reasons. In Ghana, the citizens are probably satisfied with the level of reforms carried out to date and could be at a point of complacency with their as far as political processes are concerned. In Zimbabwe, the reasons for limited membership in political associations could be due to despair. According to surveys carried out by SIVIO Institute<sup>1</sup> and Afro-Barometer<sup>2</sup> many respondents in Zimbabwe do not trust the electoral process. They believe that the body responsible for

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1. [www.sivioinstitute.org](http://www.sivioinstitute.org)

2. <https://afrobarometer.org/>





managing elections is biased and tends to favour the incumbent.

### 3.1 Membership in Economic Focused Groups

There are different types of economic focused groups but as already noted the boundaries we assign to these formations are mostly for analytical purposes. In real life these associations although initially set up for specific and narrow purpose they end up covering other dimensions of life. In our survey, we sought to understand the original intention of coming together to establish an association. The savings and lending association was found to be the most popular formation focused on addressing economic survival challenges.

**Table 8: Membership in economic focused groups**

Association	Ghana		Cameroon		Kenya		Malawi		Zimbabwe	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Savings and Lending Group	12	2.91%	168	41.79%	160	38.00%	167	41.44%	47	10.54%
Labour pooling group	0	0.00%	23	5.72%	17	4.04%	29	7.20%	11	2.47%
Production Cooperative	1	0.24%	12	2.99%	25	5.94%	55	13.65%	21	4.71%
Buying Clubs (e.g., collective group to buy groceries)	0	0.00%	9	2.24%	28	6.65%	170	42.18%	38	8.52%
Marketing Cooperative (involved in jointly selling commodities)	0	0.00%	14	3.48%	19	4.51%	69	17.12%	12	2.69%
Common Property Group (natural resources)	0	0.00%	6	1.49%	19	4.51%	26	6.45%	8	1.79%
Asset Pooling Group	0	0.00%	5	1.24%	12	2.85%	27	6.70%	8	1.79%
Market Group/Platform (a place or network where members sell goods/services to each other)	1	0.24%	64	15.92%	21	4.99%	65	16.13%	63	14.13%
Business Promotion Council	0	0.00%	6	1.49%	12	2.85%	28	6.95%	8	1.79%

There are high levels of participation within these types of formations in Cameroon, Kenya and Malawi. Ghana and Zimbabwe buck the trend. Only 2.91% and 10.54% in Ghana and Zimbabwe respectively belong to savings and lending groups. There are quite a number of plausible explanations for the levels of membership in savings and lending groups amongst Ghanaians and Zimbabweans. First, the survey was carried out in urban



settings that have been penetrated by the formal financial services sector, especially microfinance institutions that provide lending facilities. Second, the Zimbabwean economic space has been characterized by an ongoing crisis associated with inflationary pressure and loss of value of the local currency. In the process the appetite for saving has been severely damaged. Other reasons could explain the low levels of participation in savings and lending groups in Ghana and Zimbabwe. Affluent societies (such as the respondents in Ghana) served by a functioning financial services sector, at times do not see the need to establish savings and lending groups. As already mentioned, Zimbabwe has probably the highest levels of poverty within the five countries under study. The poverty in Zimbabwe is widespread and is part of the broader crisis that has bedevilled the country since the turn of the century. However, poverty should instead be a driver towards associationalism. It could be the instabilities to do with the currency and unavailability of cash that has discouraged associationalism in this space. An earlier study by Murisa (2009) found that in some periods of currency stability many (albeit within rural areas) tended to coalesce around savings and lending groups.

Furthermore, it is also important to note that countries where there are high levels of membership within savings and lending groups are also characterised by growing informalisation and a longer tradition of collective action within these spaces. Overall Malawi exhibits high levels of membership within economic focused associations such as savings and lending groups (41.44%) production cooperative (13.65%), buying clubs (41.18%) and production cooperative (17.12%). Cameroon and Kenya are a distant second and third respectively in terms of levels of membership. The paper on Malawi provides some detailed analysis on the patterns of membership. It is important to note that Malawi has only now begun to expand the formal financial services sector thanks to the growth of the formal microfinance sector. Challenges to do with productive asset acquisition also leads to tendencies towards higher levels of cooperativism. Finally, the economy in Malawi is perhaps the most informal in comparison to the other countries under study and thus creates the need for citizens to forge their instruments to achieve collective synergies.

### 3.2 Membership in Political Associations



There are various ways in which citizens actively participate in politics and these include, organising protests, public campaigns over an issue of concern seeking to take over power, addressing local issues within neighbourhoods, engaging or confronting office/power holders over grievances. In the process, citizens create a number of platforms/associations that include a campaign group, a political party, a neighbourhood watch committee, residents associations and a social movement. It is important to note that economic and socially focused associations also engage in political activities either through advocacy, engaging office holders or defending their rights. The table below provides a comparative analysis of patterns of belonging within associations that engage in political activities. The most common formation for promoting political objectives is the political party. There is a higher number of respondents belonging to a political party compared to other types of organisations; Kenya (20.98%), Malawi (52.62%) and Zimbabwe (20.24%). Membership in political parties is very low in Ghana (6.54%) and Cameroon (10.05%).

Malawi has the highest levels of active membership in political parties (52.62%) and campaign groups (34.01%). There are quite a number of reasons that possibly explains why this is so; first, Malawi was up until the close of the 20th century a one-party state. Multi-partyism is a very recent phenomenon, less than 25 years old. Second, the survey was conducted just after the courts had called for an election rerun. The court had observed that the first round of elections was not 'free or fair'. The decisions of the court should be understood as a culmination of citizen-led protests against the election results announced in May 2019 (and later annulled by the courts in February 2020). The process could have possibly galvanised participation in political processes amongst citizens. Malawi also has high levels of membership in women's groups (25.87%) and youth groups (16.28%). The figures suggest that Malawi potentially has a more politically engaged citizenry compared to other countries.

The levels of membership in political parties in all countries are higher than any other category. Maybe this suggests citizen's growing confidence in political parties as the appropriate platform to bring about political change. There are low levels of membership in resident's associations (average of 3.73%) across all the countries.



Could it be that there are no service delivery issues in the countries under study? Data from elsewhere suggests that service delivery is an acute challenge affecting many of the countries under study. In Kenya for instance there were concerns about urban-based land grabs (especially of parks), in Zimbabwe poor local service delivery remains a topical issue and is constantly raised by officials of residents associations and also the auditor general. Could it be then that the residents' associations that exist are not necessarily membership-based and instead have also gone through 'civilisation' processes promoted by donors through fundraising for essential resources. In the process, the emphasis on membership recruitment has probably been negatively affected. Furthermore, it is also important to note that in many instances when citizens participate in a protest action they do not necessarily see themselves as belonging to an association related to that action.

**Table 9: Membership in Political associations**

Association	Ghana		Cameroon		Kenya		Malawi		Zimbabwe	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Campaign Group	3	0.73%	13	3.27%	31	7.56%	117	34.01%	11	2.62%
Political Party	27	6.54%	40	10.05%	86	20.98%	181	52.62%	85	20.24%
Social Movement	1	0.24%	23	5.78%	23	5.61%	48	13.95%	13	3.10%
Joint Public Petition	1	0.24%	5	1.26%	5	1.22%	13	3.78%	4	0.95%
Local Peace Committee	1	0.24%	5	1.26%	11	2.68%	24	6.98%	4	0.95%
Residents Association	9	2.18%	10	2.51%	12	2.93%	20	5.81%	22	5.24%
Online Based Civic Coalition	4	0.97%	1	0.25%	9	2.20%	9	2.62%	3	0.71%
Women's Group	11	2.66%	37	9.30%	47	11.46%	89	25.87%	36	8.57%
Youth Group	24	5.81%	77	19.35%	55	13.41%	56	16.28%	32	7.62%

**Note: % calculated per sample size**



### 3.3 Membership in Social Associations

Associations that focus on delivery or resolving social problems include churches/mosques, burial societies, sporting associations, communal granaries and even entertainment groups. Perhaps these are the platforms where social interactions are contained. Even though there is a clear focus in resolving social problems these groups also intermittently contribute to resolving economic and political problems. The fellowship/ religion groups (temples, churches, mosques, shrines) are the most popular in almost all the countries under study. For the first time, there are more respondents from Ghana (85.47%) who belong to an entity compared to any other country. Malawi and Kenya also have high levels of membership in fellowship groups whilst Zimbabwe has the lowest (38.33%) of memberships. There has been a consistent evangelical based mobilisation into churches across most of Africa for over three decades now. Different studies have already demonstrated the extent to which citizens in Africa have been mobilised into different forms of religious expression especially the Christian church. Perhaps the project of the colonial era missionaries has been a success given the popularity of the church as an institution and also an associational platform.

The second most popular association within the social cluster is the burial society except in Ghana where the school association of parents is more popular. Burial societies have a long history associated initially with colonial-era based rural to urban migration. In many instances migrants into the city continued to forge relationships with colleagues from the same village or rural area. They would pool together resources over time. These would be used in the event of the death of a member to transport the body to the village and assist with funeral costs. The burial societies although social in nature serve an economic function. Funerals in many of the countries under study are a large economic burden that is usually shared by the community. In some instances, those studying philanthropy tend to include burial societies as part of the complex institutional arrangements that enhance solidarity within communities (see for instance Moyo 2004). It is also important to note the absence or retreat

of citizens from certain associations. Based on the findings very few or no citizens are invested in book reading clubs, service organisations, neighbourhood watch committees and communal granary schemes. The limited participation of citizens in communal granary schemes is perhaps due to the fact that the majority of respondents are based in urban areas.

**Table 10 : Membership in Social Associations**

Association	Ghana		Cameroon		Kenya		Malawi		Zimbabwe	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Fellowship Group /Religious Group (temples, churches, mosques, shrine etc)	353	85.47	188	47.24	220	53.66	230	66.86	161	38.33
Burial Societies	2	0.48	2	8.54	35	8.54	9	8.54	23	8.54
Sporting Association	3	0.73	50	4.63	19	4.63	39	4.63	21	4.63
Entertainment Group (dance, choir etc)	3	0.73	41	5.37	22	5.37	63	5.37	24	5.37
School Association Parent/ Teacher Group	29	7.02	49	4.88	20	4.88	34	4.88	26	4.88
Alumni Association	26	6.30	39	7.07	29	7.07	16	7.07	22	7.07
Book/Reading Club	0	0.00	8	1.71	7	1.71	16	1.71	12	1.71
Community Development Association	1	0.24	32	2.44	10	2.44	20	2.44	7	2.44
Service Organisation or Club (e.g. Lions Club; Rotary International)	0	0.00	1	0.48	2	0.48	15	0.48	8	0.48
Neighbourhood Watch Committee	0	0.00	4	1.19	5	1.19	22	1.19	15	1.19
Communal Granary	0	0.00	1	0.95	4	0.95	2	0.95	5	0.95
Community Feeding Group	0	0.00	1	1.19	5	1.19	8	1.19	10	1.19
Community Foundation	1	0.24	5	1.90	8	1.90	4	1.90	4	1.90



## 4. Benefits of Belonging in Associations

There are a number of benefits that are common in all associational types. These include the organisation of (i) collective security and (ii) welfare support. There is a general consensus that belonging within an association contributes towards enhancing prospects for improving economic well-being, capacity to defend existing opportunities and also helps to amplify voice. Those who belong to Economic Associations identified improved access to financing (42%) as one of the major benefits alongside skills exchange (46%) and additional income (41%). It is perhaps the financial benefits that loom large when discussing associations that focus on resolving economic grievances. These benefits together with the capacity to pool together assets and saving (36%) define the manner in which many African economies function. In the absence of inclusive financial services sector, citizens in the countries under study and indeed beyond have devised mechanisms to (i) finance their ventures by pooling together resources (ii) impose benign peer pressure on each other to save on a long-term basis for the acquisition of assets and (iii) exchange of skills and information. The latter has in most circumstances not been emphasized as one of the major benefits of belonging. In many instances those belonging within associations are also active in the informal economy. There is usually very little formal training that goes into establishing these ventures. The associations established contribute towards information and exchange.

Those in political associations derive a sense of belonging (49%) from their membership. Other benefits associated with political associations include prospects for an improved social order (46%) capacity to defend existing insights (37%) and also possibilities of ensuring change or reforms within the community. It is perhaps the political focused associations that bring to the spotlight the civic mindedness of citizens. Only 28% of the respondents identify with improved voice in engaging with officeholders as a benefit derived from belonging and similar number also identify change of government as a benefit. The other benefits cited do not suggest



engagement or confrontation with power holders except maybe the defence of rights (37%). Does it mean that citizens do not see associations as a site of contestation or drawing benefits from authorities? Could it be that these responses actually provide insights into the kind of politics that citizens engage in. We have stated from the beginning that there is a certain type of politics and democracy with communities. The politics involve erecting a sense of belonging (49%), providing collective security (23%), defence of rights (37%) and involvement towards a better social order (46%). The above are indeed stuff of community politics. In the process associations established to provide these benefits contribute towards developing new sites of nurturing of community embedded leaders and enhance prospects for organising welfare support. David Matthews (2006) has suggested that community-based or driven (bottom-up) collective action largely depends on what he calls leaderful communities. David Mathews (2016:2) has aptly observed that 'democracies need something more than written constitutions, multiple parties, free and fair elections and representative governments. Although he doesn't state what the 'more' contains- we are persuaded that these political focused associations are part of the equation. Furthermore, these associations (alongside economic and social-focused ones) provide benefits that governments or local authorities are unable to deliver further buttressing the importance of problem-solving citizenship in a democracy.

Finally, social focused associations provide the following: (i) spiritual support (58%), (ii) a sense of belonging (41%) and (iii) organize welfare support. Table 10 above has already demonstrated the extent to which citizens are active in religious platforms such as churches, mosques and shrines. It is these religious focused platforms that provide spiritual support to members. Social focused associations also play a key role in enhancing a sense of belonging amongst members. Other unique benefits associated with socially focused associations include entertainment (22%) and physical wellbeing (29%).



**Table 11: Benefits of belonging to associations**

Type of benefits	Economic	Political	Social
Collective security	20%	23%	12%
Improved access to financing	42%		
Pooling together assets/savings	36%		
Exchange information about market opportunities	35%		
Organising welfare support	24%	34%	32%
Improved voice in engaging with officeholders	12%	28%	15%
Exposure to new concept or ideas	39%	39%	28%
Collective ownership of assets	18%		
Skills exchange	46%		
Additional Income	41%		
Sense of belonging		49%	41%
Defence of rights		37%	
Changes/Reforms within community		31%	
Change of government		28%	
Better social order		46%	
Entertainment			22%
Physical wellbeing			29%
Spiritual support			58%
Networking			27%
Improved education outcome/quality of education			5%
Other (please specify)	1%	2%	2%



# 5. Democratic Tendencies within Associations

Other scholars (see for instance Bratton 2013) have argued that associations are sites of micro-democracy. They provide opportunities for the nurturing of a certain type of organic and consultative leadership and also enhancing democratic practises are cultivated. We sought to understand the ways in which leaders are chosen. We found four ways of leadership selection; elections, appointment, hereditary and voluntary. In the majority of instances leaders were elected into office by all the other members (see Table 12 below). The second most popular route is through appointment of members into positions. In some instances, members volunteer themselves for service. These are proxies to understand the extent of participation in leadership selection. Associations almost always have unique backgrounds which defy generalization but suffice to note the elections route possibly provides wider participation compared to other methods. There are very few who utilize the hereditary route in appointing leaders.

**Table 12: Ways in which leaders are chosen in associations**

Ways of choosing leaders	Economic	Political	Social
Elections	32%	47%	35%
Appointment	29%	30%	28%
Hereditary	3%	2%	1%
Voluntary	17%	17%	21%

Beyond the selection of leaders, we also sought to understand the grievances that members have within their associations. The major challenge that associations face has to do with low levels of funding, (economic 36%, political 49%, and social 42%). We consider funding to be an external issue beyond the direct influence of the association. Internal grievances that members have include low



levels of participation (economic 25%, political 33% and social 40%) and gender-based discrimination (economic 11%, political 15% and social 8%). There are also concerns to do with corruption, weak governance procedures within the associations. These findings suggest that associations are inherently problematic and can be sites of frustration for others especially where governance issues and gender-based discrimination are not resolved. If the grievances listed above are not adequately dealt with they may lead to stunting within associations and further weaken participation of members. However, in many instances these problems go unchecked without any external intervention. There is no clear consensus on how these issues can be resolved. Should outside agencies seek to influence or strengthen associations? The question of providing support to associations and or social movement remains highly contentious and unresolved. Whilst there are glaring weaknesses that can be resolved through capacity building initiatives, it is not clear if in the end that will not create totally different organisations either within the association or an evolution of the association. One of the advantages of the association is the perception of ownership and influence that member have. However, when these formations are taken through support to improve governance which normally entails development of constitutions and other internal control measures a new aristocracy within the associations is created. There is a tension between high levels of formalisation and ensuring that members are not alienated. It is perhaps incumbent upon the members to help nurture processes that they are comfortable with. The principle of 'do no harm' must take precedence in instances where donors and other technical partners have to intervene.



## 6. Conclusion

The papers that follow provide a more detailed analysis of how citizens engage with each other. The evidence that we have gathered suggests uneven levels of citizen-to-citizen forms of engagement across the five cities. Across similar sample sizes we found higher levels of citizen-to-citizen engagement in Lilongwe (Malawi) and Yaoundé (Cameroon). Perhaps the political context matters especially when it comes to Malawi and Cameroon. The two countries have been associated with high levels of citizen-to-citizen mobilisation for improved management of electoral processes a governance. That alone however, does not adequately explain the low levels of citizen to citizen mobilisation in Harare. The similarities between Cameroon and Malawi go beyond the recent mobilisations. These countries do not have a long history with multi-party democratic systems. The logic of organisation or political contestation has not always been along political party lines compared to other countries in the study, for example Zimbabwe. Citizens in Cameroon and Malawi have nurtured a level of mobilisation autonomy outside of established political parties. In Zimbabwe high level levels of political mobilisation have been associated with political parties. However, there is yet no adequate explanation for the low levels of citizen-to-citizen engagement in Zimbabwe. The findings from Accra are equally difficult to explain. There are low levels of citizen-to-citizen engagement in the political and economic spaces compared to the social spaces. Does it suggest that as the country becomes more politically stable and affluent citizens retreat from the public space?

The findings in this volume suggest the need to re-invest in deepening our understanding of the relationship that African citizens have with the public spaces. Indeed, the continent has gone through numerous cycles of silver bullet like solutions from the idea of liberation itself, to economic reforms and constitutional multi-party democracies but very little progress has been made in terms of making sure that governments (inclusive of elected officials and the bureaucrats) lifting people out of poverty, ensuring equality of all before the law and all the other benefits associated with democracy. Can public life, meaning intense



citizen to citizen engagement be regenerated to rescue the democracy project? Should the democracy project be broadened beyond the current formulaic approach of elections, rule of law, free media to include bringing back citizens at the centre of public discourse? We are not sure how that will be done, suffice to note that the current formula has only worked for a few.



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