



# Political Inclusion in Local Governance Processes in Zimbabwe: A Contextual Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Current political inclusion studies focus on creating inclusive policies and platforms that aim to support the political inclusion of marginalised people. Although it is known that the socio-political urban governance landscape can impact on real-life experiences of people living in contexts where civic space is politicised, this can be overlooked when exploring and implementing political inclusion policies. This paper addresses an important gap in the literature by exploring the contextual drivers of political inclusion, and exclusion, of citizens in local governance processes and platforms in Zimbabwe. The paper combined informal conversations with a review and analysis of secondary and primary data sources on political inclusion. The data elicited were analysed to construct key themes. The findings were interpreted through a lens of political inclusion and demonstrated how the socio-political local governance environment both enabled and inhibited political inclusion. Based on these findings, the paper offers recommendations for practitioners, researchers and policy makers wishing to promote political inclusion in local governance.

**Key words:** social inclusion, local governance, citizen participation, exclusion, electoral accountability, civic engagement

## INTRODUCTION

This article is concerned with advancing knowledge of inclusion in the context of inclusive citizenship, and in particular, political inclusion. Its analysis is based on findings of a broader project that drew on the principles of Participatory Action Research (Schneider, 2012) to address the issue of political inclusion of citizens in political (elections) and deliberative processes (dialogue and engagement) at local and national levels (Logan & Bratton 2006). The analysis presented below is informed by opinions collected during face-to-face interviews with civil society practitioners and opinion makers and a review of primary and secondary literature on the subject.

Political inclusion is about recognition of difference and the multifarious ways in which civic and political rights and responsibilities are exercised in everyday life (Lister, 2007). This study achieves this by interrogating how local governance processes and structures promote political inclusion and participation in governance processes in Zimbabwe. The paper posits that Zimbabwe has institutionalized political inclusion by embedding and constitutionalizing provisions that promote inclusion in political decision making at local and national levels. In practice, however, political inclusion faces multiple barriers that curtail participation which in turn adversely affects political inclusion in local governance processes and outcomes. The paper begins by foregrounding political inclusion by examining key definitional aspects of the concept. In addition, the paper critiques current policy trends adopted in implementing inclusion. The paper also interrogates the relationship between political inclusion and public engagement processes, contextualizing these processes using

case studies. In the conclusion, it provides a set of policy recommendations, moored on a context driven approach to inclusion, for consideration.

## CONTEXTUALISING POLITICAL INCLUSION

Political inclusion, as a key thought in considering and responding to the experience of participation in decision making has gained increasing currency over the past decade in development, governance, rights and democracy discourse (Mohanty & Tandon, 2006; Hammett, 2008; Meth et al., 2021). Development researchers and practitioners have used it to examine the narratives of marginalized groups (e.g. Virendrakumar et al., 2018) and policy debates (Hammett, 2008) and to highlight the discrimination that marginalised communities face concerning their inclusion in political decision-making processes (Mohanty & Tandon, 2006). Classically, the idea of citizenship is deployed to draw attention to the value of inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups in service delivery conversations (Pavia & Mason, 2012) and respect for human rights in public engagement processes (Sen, 2005). Not all scholars use the language of citizenship, but are nonetheless concerned with cognate matters, such as power relations (e.g. Beard et al., 2009; Behuniak, 2010), political inclusion (e.g. Hicks et al., 2019), and access (e.g. Chakrabarty & Jha 2021).

Some researchers have used the term 'relational citizenship' to study dynamics involving people with disability, women and youth (e.g. Kontos, Miller, & Kontos, 2017). As Pols (2016) explains, relational citizenship assumes that people become citizens through

interactions, whereby they create relations and social spaces, citizenship (thus) becomes a matter of politics. This idea has been used to examine how political identities and context act and produce citizenship and political inclusion or exclusion (Ursin & Lotherington 2018). Such work usefully examines the connections between various agents, including persons with disability; however, it is important not to lose sight of wider society and its organisations. Hence, the notion of political inclusion/citizenship is used in this article. Political inclusion typically focuses on a person's relationship to the "larger structures of rule and belonging, which are often but not exclusively nation states" (Koning et al., 2015: 121).

These dynamics are perhaps most evident in discussions about access to civic and political rights; an area that continues to be regarded by many as a central tenant of inclusive political citizenship (Dwyer, 2010). Dwyer (2010), further surmises that there are two main channels of political citizenship (1) conditionality—the relationship between rights and responsibilities and (2) membership—groups who are included/excluded from political arrangements. Each one is significant for political inclusion and participation in governance processes. For example, a recent public opinion poll on local governance in Zimbabwe conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI, 2019) concluded that (political) inclusion in local government decision making remained critically low despite several interventions by Civil Society Organizations, local and national government institutions and actors. Evidently, a disjuncture exists between policy intent and what happens in practice. Several national studies have reinforced the notion that marginalized groups such as women, youth and people with disability are generally under-represented in political

decision-making processes (Rottinghaus & Escher 2020). Together, this work suggests that conditionality, and membership are major, ongoing problems for political inclusion to thrive.

When conducting research on political inclusion, there is often a lack of consensus on what it comprises (Davey & Gordon, 2017; Taket et al., 2014; Bartlett, 2021); thereby influencing how it is communicated as well as how it can be measured (Simplican et al., 2015). As such, to operationalise (political) inclusion for the present study a succinct review of literature was undertaken. This emphasised the need to understand political inclusion as a dynamic rather than a static process, where ordinary citizens in their diversity, have the socio-political, cultural and material means to be included within all aspects of their communities as well as the agency and unconditional opportunity to access, participate in, and personally grow from, social and cultural experiences and interpersonal relationships that are meaningful to them and where they feel valued (Kabeer, 2005, Hicks et al., 2019).

## A CRITIQUE OF CURRENT APPROACHES

One of the major pursuits of African scholarship has been the attempt to conceptualize citizen agency and inclusion in political decision-making processes. The central question, and answer, concerns how Africans themselves conceive the contours of new political regimes and, particularly, their own roles in political participation, in events such as elections and local governance, and the extent to which their roles, as citizens, allows for inclusion. On the one hand, the rest of the globe seems to have

a structured way of ensuring citizen inclusion by adopting a 'moving with citizens' approach institutionalized in civic engagement processes and platforms at multiple levels (Cornwall et al., 2011). Such approaches ensure citizens have a permanent seat at the bargaining table on issues of governance, service delivery and other socio-political decision-making platforms.

Few concepts have gained as much widespread usage (and disparagement) over the past ten or so years as political inclusion. Its popularity is increasing despite challenges associated with understanding or measuring what political inclusion actually entails. Concepts such as trust, electoral democracy, good governance, democratisation, human rights, inclusion, citizen participation, social networks and service delivery have all become synonymous with, or incorporated under, the process and outcomes of political inclusion (Cornwall et al., 2011). In scholarly literature, political inclusion is conceptualised originally as the involvement of citizens, in their diversity in decision making spaces within liberal democracies marked by the active presence of marginalized and vulnerable groups in the fulfilment of civil and political liberties and voluntary social and contractual arrangements (Cornwall & Coelho, 2006). Conceptually, sometimes political inclusion has been delineated along social, political and religious identities mirroring dominant views prevailing at a certain period (Hammett, 2008; Kabeer, 2005; Chakrabarty & Jha, 2021). This embodiment of political inclusion happens in the broader arena of citizen-state dialogue and engagement (Rich-Dorman, 2001; Mohanty & Tandon, 2006). This conceptualisation of political inclusion still exists. However, in the early stages

of conceptualizing political inclusion, studies focused on citizen participation (Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Cornwall & Coelho, 2006). As the discourse on inclusion developed, the realisation that participation alone did not equate to inclusion ensured the concept of inclusion was 'scaled up' to the role of inclusive citizenship in policy making through participatory governance (Fung & Wright, 2003; Gaventa, 2006).

Moreover, growing attention to the centrality of state-society relations and its impact on inclusion, underlined the assertion that marginal groups cannot be fully-fledged citizens by merely expressing preferences through electoral democracy, as voters, and must participate more directly in decision-making, as citizens (Pavia & Mason, 2012; Virendrakumar et al., 2018; Rottinghaus & Escher 2020). More recently, the prominence of liberal forms of citizen-state engagement have run parallel with the emphasis on rights-based approaches to development which front-load rights as capabilities and not entitlement (Sen, 2005). Mindful of this, rights-based approaches have created pathways for political inclusion to be incorporated as part of the fundamental rights citizens are entitled to, moving away from citizens and marginalized groups as passive participants to active co-partners in political decision-making processes at multiple levels (Pavia & Mason, 2012; Virendrakumar et al., 2018; Rottinghaus & Escher 2020). A bulk of contemporary literature on political inclusion focuses on marginalized groups such as people with disability, disenfranchised women and youth with little investment in understanding inclusion of a political view-point.

## PERSPECTIVES ON THE ZIMBABWEAN LANDSCAPE

Zimbabwean literature on political inclusion remains limited (Rich-Dorman, 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Alexander, 2021) and these have focused on inclusion from a political identity (citizenship) and a state-citizen engagement lens. In addition, other literary content further conceptualises inclusion from a political participation viewpoint, which tends to limit the scope of inclusion to political decision making in electoral processes with little to no attention given to post-election civic engagement and inclusion. Cognizant of the increase in rights-based approaches to development and the prominence of donor funded projects that focus more on gender and political inclusion, Zimbabwean literature on the subject has gravitated towards understanding inclusion as the involvement of citizens and marginalized population in collective decision-making processes (Sivalo, 2019, 2021). Participation and involvement in this case is not limited to numbers, representation, but is understood within the entire governance continuum which underlines the need to include citizens from the input to output (results) stage of service delivery and policy outcomes (Sivalo, 2021). One strategy adopted by development practitioners to promote political inclusion in 'moving with the electorate' has focused on local level/governance service delivery issues using social forms of dialogue, engagement and accountability to increase local leader responsiveness and answerability.

The obtaining policy discourse on inclusive political citizenship is moored on the assertion that while Zimbabweans have ardently supported and participated in electoral politics since 1980, they do not, consider elections as a

means of achieving, and reinforcing, effective political accountability (Logan & Bratton, 2006). Considering this, when it comes to asserting control and influence over elected leaders, in the long intervals between elections, a significant number of Zimbabweans do not see any role for themselves (Sivalo, 2019). For example, a civic engagement and constitutional literacy survey conducted by Pact in 2018 and another public opinion poll conducted by IRI in 2021 confirmed the low levels of civic inclusion and participation in public processes such as budget consultative meetings and community feedback meeting because they feel their voices do not matter (Pact, March 2019; IRI, 2021). To some extent, this is linked to the partisan political landscape and the general landscape of Zimbabwean politics at both grassroots and national level where decisions, and accountability, are usually the prerogative of the governing and not the governed.

Political polarisation and the structure of local and national politics in Zimbabwe further creates a disabling environment for (political) inclusion to be fully achieved. Due to political polarisation, there is a tendency by the state to associate citizen-driven inclusion discourse with opposition politics. This has negatively impacted political will by local governance state actors to support interventions pushing for the progressive realisation of inclusive decision making at various levels of the governance structure. In this light, the depoliticisation of inclusion becomes necessary, including within state institutions themselves to facilitate the emergence of a will to act in support of citizen inclusion initiatives. Overall, then, the dichotomisation of inclusion issues into a hegemony-counter hegemony binary has curtailed the potential of citizen-driven accountability interventions to improve service delivery and promote good local governance.

Given this, citizen inclusion interventions have received more resistance than support from state actors both at national and local levels, due to the perceived threat political inclusion poses on the ruling party's grip on and use of state political and financial power.

The current political settlement in Zimbabwe, with all its illiberal democratic tendencies, is not conducive to building meaningful and effective political inclusion processes and procedures. Partly because of the ongoing semi-authoritarian character of the Zimbabwean state, the state executive remains the pivotal centre of power. As a result, the lower tiers of government are selectively and tactically bypassed at times in the making of critical government decisions, thereby avoiding/hampering collective policy decision making. Further, while the constitution highlights the importance of devolution, it remains unclear if the devolution framework (once finalised) will enhance government citizen inclusion or simply devolve exclusion to local levels, creating a continuation of the current status quo.

The field of power relations that shapes social interactions and popular agency within society plays a crosscutting role in shaping the success of political inclusion. This is particularly apparent in terms of the barriers that inhibit people from undertaking initiatives that demand high levels of participation. In Zimbabwe's polity, approaches to inclusion in decision making at local governance levels usually mirror the bifurcated political setting which strongly influences how political actors view, engage and involve citizens in decision-making. While it is certain that state and non-state institutions and actors are key players in promoting and curtailing inclusion, an assessment of the various approaches, tools and methods employed by these actors is key.

The main actors in Zimbabwe's local governance landscape include the Ministry of Local Governance, Local authorities, political parties, councillors, citizen groups and business. As alluded to above, state actors have, to some extent, embedded inclusive government policies that are, on paper, designed to ensure the inclusion of diverse interest groups. On the other hand, citizen accountability interventions that are driven by CSOs have been geared towards promoting inclusion and inclusivity, particularly of marginalised groups such as women, youth, and people with disabilities (PWDs). What this has done is to promote the participation of these groups in public spaces with the intention of making their voices heard in decision making processes. Civil society social accountability interventions, for instance, have helped bring to the fore the complexity of marginality in development programming as this is shaped by various contextual and experiential factors such as gender, sex, disability, income, and literacy, among others. While noble, the emphasis on participation rather than active engagement of these marginalised groups in both civil society and state centric inclusion initiatives has limited the appreciation of marginality to tokenism. For instance, the inclusion of PWDs has been pursued on a minimalist level, and the role of these groups in social accountability has been for the purposes of consultation without much commitment to ensure their voices influence social change and are reflected in policy.

Due to the current governance architecture, citizens are inadvertently reduced to mere voters whose role in governance is to elect leaders. Reflecting on this, Logan and Braton (2006), argued that while Zimbabweans have transformed themselves from the "subjects" of past authoritarian systems into active "voters"

under the present dispensation, they do not appear to have the space and/or prerogative to fully realise their political rights as “citizens,” to consistently demand accountability from leaders. As such, Zimbabwean politics and political inclusion encapsulates what O’Donnell (1994) characterises as delegative democracy which is at odds with representative democracy which embodies the essence of citizen inclusion or ‘moving with the electorate’. More importantly, the situation described above essentially highlights the challenge of political contexts where political polarization and closing civic space is a key phenomenon. In these illiberal democracies, citizens delegate power to elected political actors and the political landscape inadvertently pushes citizens to the periphery because space to engage, beyond elections, is invariably political and partisan in nature. Given that, most citizens are not only excluded but opt for a broadly delegative form of democracy, granting authority to oversee, account and answer to elected representatives and other political actors diminishing prospects for collective action and inclusion of marginalised voices in critical decision-making platforms and outcomes.

## POLITICAL INCLUSION AND URBAN GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVES

The main premise of local governance in Zimbabwe is the understanding of the inter-relation between democracy and the decentralisation of powers and responsibilities from central to local government tiers. To achieve this, on paper, government has established sub-national institutions, urban and rural councils which are nearer to people and thus promote

political inclusion in decision making and service delivery processes. In Zimbabwe’s local governance architecture, elections remain the main political mechanism and platform available for citizens to select their local leaders who make up a core piece of the local governance system. For both local and national elections, the tendency has been to vote along political party lines which has gradually eroded performance/merit-based candidate selection by political parties and subsequently by the electorate. The inadvertent challenge associated with such a bifurcated political system is a tendency, by the electorate, to delegate (delegative democracy) the power to govern to the elected, to represent their interests with minimal oversight, consultation, dialogue and engagement between citizens and their elected leaders. Considering this, citizens abdicate their oversight and accountability roles to become merely voters and not citizens in local and national political and decision-making processes.

Moreover, elected leaders from both the ruling party and the opposition parties are generally accountable first and foremost to their party rather than voters. As demonstrated vividly in March 2022 when the country had to hold by-elections to fill in 28 parliamentary and 105 local government council seats which fell vacant after mass recalls of MPs by both the Zimbabwe African Nationalist Union (ZANU) PF and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties, elected officials may end up serving the elite interests of their party, rather than citizens they are supposed to represent, in order to save their political skin.

While elections provide an opportunity for citizens to participate and have a voice in electing their leaders, it is critical to note that elections

in Zimbabwe compel citizens to compress numerous preferences, of political identity, competing policies, and retrospective evaluations and future expectations of performance, into singular choices. In Zimbabwe, voting patterns are commonly partisan or regional in nature and party platforms are weak. Elections rarely offer real programmatic alternatives to voters (Ndakapira, 2020). Because incumbent leaders can easily break promises and resort to evasion, elections constitute a blunt instrument for enforcing accountability. The consequence of this manifests itself in the structural and institutional barriers that hinder political inclusion.

Zimbabwe is one of the highly polarised countries that practises partisan masculinity politics. As a result, those who exist outside partisan politics and vulnerable communities, such as women, PWDs, youth and Lesbian, Gays, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups, have largely been marginalised from electoral contests, local authority planning and policy making. Most local government processes are generally configured around masculine politics framed in terms of patriarchal norms and networks. For instance, local government engagement platforms such as budget consultation and feed-back meetings are held during times, usually afternoon, when women are unable to attend due to their gender roles. The absence of collective actions that include pronounced women's perspectives, for instance, undermines the importance of inclusiveness of citizen participation in political processes, thus rendering responses by the supply-side of the chain inadequate due to the absence of the key concerns of marginalized groups. The depiction of marginalized groups, from the perspective of state-citizen engagement, at both central and local government levels, continues to reduce

these groups to "motherly figure" for women, 'troublesome' for youth and 'vulnerable' for people with disability. In this sense, patriarchy systems have in a sense perpetually colluded with state authoritarianism, at local government level, over the years to reproduce marginality and exclusion.

Several studies (Pavia & Mason, 2012; Virendrakumar et al., 2018; Rottinghaus & Escher 2020) have consistently pointed to the fact that marginalized groups have remained on the precipice of political inclusion especially in political decision-making spaces and platforms. For example, the continued exclusion of women in political decision-making, at local government level, processes has hampered the ability of demand side actors (civil society groups) to effectively coalesce as a collective to ensure that local and national authorities are accountable to service users. Addressing questions of gender is central to maximising women's participation, given the double 'burden' that women (especially working-class women) carry as income-earners and care-givers, and the subsequent challenges they face in finding the time and energy to enter a public sphere which tends to exclude them in the first place.

It is noteworthy to highlight that recent literature (Stein & Moser 2014; Broto, 2017) on urban governance has focused on the empowerment of citizens through their inclusion in political processes, such as elections, in the determination of governance priorities and in setting the governance agenda. However, the vulnerability of the urban poor is also recognised. They are regularly exposed to the detrimental implications of specific urban governance policies and processes, but also on the structural conditions that reproduce poverty,



such as economic inequality, lack of political representation, deficient access to services, and lack of participation in decision making platforms (Britt, 2003). Because of this, there is now a wide consensus among urban governance scholars that contemporary urban governance efforts must be directed towards pro-poor forms of urban governance and planning especially in programmes set for upgrading basic social service delivery (Moser & Satterthwaite 2010; Stein & Moser 2014; Bartlett & Satterthwaite, 2016; Baker, 2012).

In the specific case of Zimbabwe, CSOs' efforts to promote inclusive post-election engagement, have focused on creating spaces for marginalized groups, such as women, youth and people with disabilities, to dialogue with elected leaders through social accountability aimed at ensuring citizen driven local service delivery. Such arguments are tempered by the recognition that inclusive urban governance in developing nations is hindered because of the political influence of global trends in politics that act as a determinant of urban governance, which is strongly tied to international aid flows and Western-led democratic urban governance agendas (Broto, 2017).

Enacting political inclusion principles is meant to provide a platform and facilitate pathways for enhancing citizen participation and political inclusion in local governance and thereby entrench representative and participatory democracy (Bartlett, 2021). The form which it takes, and the extent to which it is practiced, is open to considerable temporal and spatial variation. This diversity in part depends upon variations in upward accountability, that

is, the ways in which governing authorities are expected to be accountable to the central state. Because of this, the emergence, development and outcomes that promote and support inclusion are ingrained in urban authority-urban citizen dynamics and urban authority-central state dynamics in complex, contingent and fluid ways. For instance, the uneasy relationship that exists between opposition run urban councils in Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Local Government reproduces political exclusion as the Ministry often issues directives that result in urban councils side-lining citizens in critical decision-making processes especially those regarding the use of public resources. As such, political inclusion in Zimbabwe depends on engaging in (and with) certain preferred communities in Zimbabwe. In some cases, citizens are politically sophisticated and willing to engage in governance but they often experience exclusion from local government processes because of unfamiliarity with the basic principles of political inclusion and the mechanisms which enhance it.

Historically, and globally, political inclusion has emerged and developed primarily through citizen activism and mobilisation, and there is strong reason to believe that this will also be the case if (political) inclusion is to arise in present-day local governance discourse in Zimbabwe. In this light, the presence of a semi-authoritarian state in Zimbabwe alongside incapacitated state institutions does not negate the necessity nor the possibility of citizens constructing and pursuing projects that promote and enhance political inclusion. Though the Zimbabwean state dominates over society, it is not a totalising domination, there are gaps and spaces for citizen pursuance of (political) inclusion.

## AN ASSESSMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE: BARRIERS AND TRENDS

One of the key interests of the paper is to understand the barriers to political inclusion and collective decision making. A review of existing literature, local, regional and global alike, points to the notion that, from a citizen viewpoint, political inclusion primarily involves two issues. There is general consensus in literature, (Moser & Satterthwaite, 2010; Stein & Moser, 2014; Bartlett & Satterthwaite, 2016; Baker, 2012) that inclusion involves both answerability (making power holders explain and give reasons for their actions) and enforcement (increasing the price for people who ignore inclusion). Studies in the areas of social and political inclusivity denote the critical role of supply and demand-side collaboration (Mooji, 2003). Initiatives designed to ensure answerability and enforcement may be demand-side, driven from the bottom-up by non-state actors especially donor-funded CSOs, or supply-side, encompassing legal and fiscal governmental checks and balances. In some instances, interventions may most effectively comprise elements of both.

Sequentially, the practice of citizen-driven political inclusion is broadly shaped by relationships where the state is the custodian of civic space, including certain services, and citizens are recipients of such. In this regard, the state is expected to deliver services to its clients (or citizens) in such a way that it not only delivers goods and services as per its policy promises but is also inclusive of and responsive to citizens' priorities. This contributes to better public service provision while also building a stronger sense of citizenship, promoting inclusion and empowerment. Inclusion, in

this regard, is mainly located within inclusive liberal discourse focused on the achievement of poverty reduction through good governance. At the same time, the specific understanding is that political forms of inclusion are based on a theory of change that does not reflect the contextual realities of governance and development in contexts where civic space is constrained, such as Zimbabwe (Rich-Dorman 2001; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Alexander, 2021). For instance, approaches to gender and political inclusion are borrowed from best practice concepts with limited investment to understanding the local contexts in the application of these concepts. In addition, citizens' understanding of inclusion is conceptualised in instrumental and simplistic terms ways (representation, presence, access and participation), rather than political terms, thereby over-emphasising general inclusion to the detriment of analysis of political context. Considering this, analysis of existing literature and promising global practices suggests that citizens view inclusion processes and approaches as one-off interventions compared to understanding the process as the outcome of longer-term iterative processes of bargaining between social and state actors.

According to Anguelovski et al. (2016), understanding political inclusion requires an appreciation of spatial and temporal context, and of the existing power relations and dynamics – involving urban and rural dichotomies – underpinning and animating inclusion as a complex and tension-riddled social process. Like most constructs, political inclusion is context sensitive and is usually subject to dominant political narratives and identities which in-turn delineate inclusion and exclusion. One of the contributing factors is associated with the duality of Zimbabwe's geographic context where

urban usually represents liberalism, modernity, consent and inclusion while rural is associated with illiberalism, under-development, coercion and exclusion. While rural spaces are sometimes understood as monolithic, in the Zimbabwean case inclusion is further conditioned by dominant political identities at play in communal and resettlement areas. For instance, unlike in the communal areas, most new farmers (in resettlement areas) cannot depend on kinship ties for help: thus, they have formed other social networks to respond to service delivery challenges, taking the form of institutions such as farm committees, irrigation committees and health committees to avert service delivery bottlenecks and to promote inclusive decision making.

It is essential to note that in resettled communities, issues of political affiliation, gender, income and age colour the inclusion and exclusion agenda. Considering the use of land as patronage tool, social formations, agency and inclusion are usually centred around land tenure, in resettlement areas. In communal areas patronage usually takes the form of access to agricultural inputs, food relief and access to markets (Chiweshe, 2011). Moreover, the masculine nature of politics in these areas renders the inclusion of women and youth as decision makers and participants in decision making processes impossible. In urban areas, vertical and horizontal structures of local governance offer platforms for citizen inclusion in decision making processes. However, the participation of citizens usually conforms to the macro-political environment's architecture. Most urban councils in Zimbabwe are predominately run by opposition. In Bulawayo for example, public works programs such as road rehabilitation, cutting of long grass and digging of trenches is

usually coordinated by elected leaders who then prioritize the recruitment of party supporters from their areas. In this instance, political identities determine inclusion and exclusion of an economic nature, contrary to collective action premised on moving with the electorate.

Current literature (Pavia & Mason, 2012; Virendrakumar et al., 2018; Rottinghaus & Escher 2020) indicates that inclusion, as a process, in best cases is mutually driven by the state in collaboration and partnership with non-state actors (Alexander 2021). However, a review of the limited literature on political inclusion in Africa shows that the bulk of interventions and platforms to promote inclusion are those driven and organised by CSOs. For example, in Zimbabwe, the bulk of the interventions focused on issues such as voter mobilization, registration and electoral participation are driven by civil society in response to the minimal efforts to push for such by the state. Moreover, in Zimbabwe the success of inclusive decision-making interventions relies heavily on the capacity of CSOs to mobilise citizens and to network effectively, both within civil and political society. In recognition of this, certain state institutions, like the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), rely on civic actors (including residents' associations) as they realise that they are unable to achieve much by acting alone, and that their capacity to develop alliances with those pursuing similar projects is critical to accumulating the power required to achieve political inclusion.

Considering this, political inclusion platforms in Zimbabwe's context have prompted the evolution of a range of CSOs. The type of civil society that emerges as significant from this study is more politicised (counter hegemonic) and relational than associational (hegemonic),

operating in a distinct sphere from the state. However, the space of civil society in Zimbabwe is not free from the logic of how power and politics operate, as it is a space within which citizens and CSOs often find it very hard to find room to manoeuvre from their projects within the broader politics of patronage, ethnicity, and exclusion. For instance, within the context of civic and voter education initiatives, driven by CSOs, the state disparately closes or opens space based on the perception of direct threat to power. In rural areas, where the ruling party draws popular support, civics face the challenge of entry and access to communities compared to urban areas where voter registration is lower but support for opposition is high (Ndakapira, 2020).

Agency within civil society is closely shaped by the underlying field of power relations, involving forms of inequality and exclusion along economic, social, and cultural lines. Importantly, the capacity of CSOs to be effective in this realm has less to do with their autonomy from the state than with the relationships and networks that they are able to forge with other actors in both civil and political society over time. What appears to matter most is the capacity and commitment of citizens and CSOs to mobilise and act, both individually and collectively, around political inclusion demands.

Review of literature further shows that the complexity of marginality underlines that inclusion of marginalised voices in public spaces alone will not suffice in informing decisions which reflect the diversity of communities. Considering this, programmes and policies that seek to promote inclusion need to be responsive to the different forms of marginalisation and this is currently missing. Given the disparate socio-economic experiences of citizens, in most cases

spaces provided by both state and non-state actors have been insensitive to the various needs of citizens. One of the major issues established in the paper concerns the plight of PWD in public processes in general and accountability platforms. In Zimbabwe, PWD constitute a relatively small proportion of the population and this disparate demographic usually pushes disability inclusion and voices to the periphery of governance processes and platforms, including accountability which seeks to promote inclusion. The worst affected are Women with Disabilities (WWD) who have the least coping and adaptive capacity due to reasons owing to their poverty, physiological challenges and social marginalisation from the societies they live in.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### FROM 'INCLUSION AS REPRESENTATION' TO 'INCLUSION AS RESPONSIVENESS AND ANSWERABILITY'

In conceptualising the alternative political inclusion framework, it is important to bring to the fore how 'inclusion' can be understood and hence experienced differently in different contexts. Typically, what is called 'inclusion' is understood as 'representation' (inclusion as an entitlement) and not demonstrating inclusion in terms of lived experience (i.e., inclusion as a capability), thus understanding inclusion as being answerable for performance against an agreed set of performance standards, or 'inclusion as responsiveness and answerability'. What would be of benefit is ensuring that social forms of inclusive decision making facilitate and inculcate a culture of responsiveness and answerability where solution holders justify and

explain their actions and not merely emphasise representation, through improved services, at the expense of being responsive and answerable to their constituents.

#### MAINSTREAMING PARTICIPATION OF MARGINALISED/EXCLUDED GROUPS AS CHANGE AGENTS

The starting point for interventions in (political) inclusion projects should be the nuancing of the diverse ways in which citizenship, marginality and inclusion manifest themselves in different political contexts. It is these nuances, of political, economic, and social interactions and bargaining processes, that also reveal the agency possibilities, including identifying the interlocution processes and how they can be supported. The participation of women, people with disability, youth and other marginalised groups must be ensured by mainstreaming their issues and concerns in the overall framework and practice of political decision making. Interventions which consider these aspects have deeper potential to contribute to enhanced participation of marginalised groups. Therefore, the choice of services and issues to be monitored should be made in such a manner that it encourages the participation of excluded groups.

#### BETTER DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF POLITICAL INCLUSION INTERVENTIONS

Successful political inclusion interventions require a delicate balance amongst the following tasks: dissemination of accurate, verified, and relevant information; galvanizing and mobilizing citizens; monitoring and evaluation; enhancing citizen oversight of services; and organizing

interfaces between citizens and solution-holders. A full review of practices on political inclusion in Zimbabwe would reveal that, while many initiatives focus mostly on information promotion or mobilization activities, only a few initiatives concentrate on the monitoring of key national government processes, services and outcomes. Striking a balance, in practice, between the technical know-how of using specific inclusion platforms, tools, approaches and political mobilization of citizens is crucial. Interventions which use structured and/or semi-structured tools for monitoring of service delivery for example tend to better identify, articulate, and communicate service deficits to service providers. Given the prevailing context, these tools may also in the medium term serve as viable routes for accessing inclusive and responsive service delivery information for problem solving purposes serving the interests of both service providers and recipients at the hyper-local level. While a rigid and technically sound political inclusion strategy may generate a great amount of citizen feedback and related data in a rather short period, the participation of citizens may be somewhat limited (as passive information providers), unless their participation is factored into the intervention design. Community ownership and inclusion through collective analysis, reflections and action must be augmented.

## CONCLUSION

The chapter provided an analysis of Zimbabwe's current polity, paying attention to some of the contextual drivers influencing political inclusion in local governance processes. Discussions noted the complexity of the relations between the state and citizens and how these continue to

structure and shape citizen inclusion in decision making processes. The chapter characterized existing barriers that pattern inclusion, and juxtaposed these with emerging and existing trends, as a basis of underlining shifting relations in the civic space and how these pattern inclusion. The chapter plays a fundamental role

in setting the context for understanding the tapestry of Zimbabwe's strata in relation to local governance and political inclusion as it provided a presentation of issues central to political inclusion and governance in Zimbabwe.

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