State - civil relations and economic management: the contribution of the institute of development studies, university of zimbabwe

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the Institute of Development Studies, University of Zimbabwe.

Introduction
The erosion of colonial and post-colonial of democratic nation-states in Africa heralds an historical moment, ripe with challenges and opportunities. It is a challenge, because it is a test for Africa’s emerging democratic nation-states of their ability to participate in reshaping the future of civilisation and in redefining it. It is an opportunity for people’s movements and voluntary organisations to represent civil society in more legitimate ways, to marshal their experience and knowledge, and to play a constructive role in national development. The requisite commitment to participate in development-to ending poverty and promoting democracy and human rights has never been more opportune and feasible.

This fundamental perception, that people, participation and democracy must be the handmaiden of Africa’s development mission and vision is a major underpinning of a New development paradigm. African government must recognise this constructive tenet: that development, springs from the collective imagination, experiences and decision of people. In other words, development should proceed from the culture make-up, skills, needs and aspirations of individuals and communities than be grafted upon from above.¹

Ensuring Effective Popular Participation in Development and Governance.
There has emerged a vigorous demand for full and genuine people’s participation in the political, economic and social processes of their countries and for having a meaningful say in the formulation of policies and programmes that affect their lives.

Public policies and programmes have too often been framed without taking the people into account, the specific needs and preferences of the people who are directly affected by them or are supposed to benefit from them. The result is more often than not a failure of those policies and programmes because of apathy and indifference on the part of people.

It is clear that intentions to promote good governance, democratic pluralism and reverse Africa’s economic decline requires a process of broad-based participation and effective citizen’s involvement in decision-making. A democratic political and economic order cannot be built
without the popular support and participation of the people, nor can human conditions improve without the full and effective contributions, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people. To this extent, popular participation in development can be consolidated in several ways:

- creating the political space where people, and their organisations can flourish and by actively seeking people’s input on decisions;
- working with people and their representatives in formulating development strategies with the aim of achieving “self-reliant” and people centred development;
- developing power from the state to the people, adapting governments efforts to people initiatives, and creating an enabling environment which makes genuine empowerment of people a reality.
- allowing people to direct their own socio-economic transformation by giving recognition to people’s organisations and grassroots, initiatives and development cooperative partnership that reflects African priorities; and
- developing creative and mutually beneficial partnerships between local government and institutions and NGOS.²

**State-Civil Society Relations**

The relations between African states and civil society institutions, have hitherto been characterized by invasions of civil space by state and its structures. Typically single-party states neither tolerated nor recognised any centres of power within society apart from the party and government which, become almost synonymous. People’s organisations and other civic institutions were tolerated only as long as they adhered to the state’s definition of development (directed from the Centre through Five Year Development Plans) or existed to provide alternative conducts of foreign aid.

It is true that Africans indigenous organisations can rally people, behind their own common-causes- political, social and economic. As such they already present a substantial challenge to the government who liaise with them with extreme caution especially given the growing conviction that they are a component of a cohesive, purpose oriented, social and organisational people’s base. Some people’s organisations are looked upon in many countries as “anti-government organisations” since they address the causes of the destitute and usually play
advocacy role against the profligacies of most African post-colonial government.\(^3\)

**Partners in Development**

The suggestion that economic reform and socio-economic development strategies would benefit from increased collaboration between government and non-governmental organisations and people’s organisations and in particular development oriented NGOs can advance needed policy reforms had become almost commonplace in recent policy discussions.\(^4\) NGO involvement, it is claimed, ought to increase the impact of programmes in grassroots development and poverty alleviation and contribute to the democratization of the development process. It is important to note that these calls for NGO-government collaboration come from various across the ideological spectrum: on the one hand, from NGO activities and radical economists, and on the other, from the multilateral agencies which are calling for more NGO involvement in programmes that have traditionally been implemented through government organisations. Some perceive NGO involvement in public sector programmes as part of a strategy to reduce inefficient public bureaucracies and to enhance the role of the private sector. Others views, it primarily as a means for making development process more participatory and transparent.\(^5\)

Another contention is that the origins of NGOs vary widely, and are lively to have a strong bearing on the type and extent of potential NGO-GO collaboration. In some cases, NGOs were formed in opposition, to governments which neglected or discriminated against the rural poor, others as a reaction to government support for or indifference to, prevailing patterns of corruption, patronage or authoritarianism. These NGOs have been critical of government and have avoided any contact with it. And the socio-political tensions that surround the relationships between government, NGOs and grassroots organisations are frequently glossed over by those claiming that a relationship between NGOs and governments can be based simply on a division of tasks, building on the strengths of each organisation. However, there is some room for manoeuvre in the relationship, and that some form of NGO-GO interaction could enhance the impact of both without compromising either.\(^6\)

**ASPECTS OF ZIMBABWE’S GOVERNANCE**

An understanding of Zimbabwe’s historical heritage is essential to any understanding of the evolution of the constitutional order since independence:

1. Years of illegal minority rule,
2. A bitter war of liberation
3. The most almost total exclusion of the majority from political participation until shortly before independence, and
4. Finally, the imposition of curious monstrosity of a constitution - unique even among the strange products of the Lancaster House process - all appeared to add up to a bitter legacy - a ready explanation for post independence disasters...

Zimbabwe achieved independence in April 1980. At the same time the leadership was faced with a formidable task at political administrative, social and economic levels. At the political level, freedom had to be consolidated and stability ensured. Robert Mugabe displayed statesmanlike magnanimity in striving for a national reconciliation. He wanted to create a non-racial society which would transcend ethnic and regional differences. The formation of a broadbased government was the first step in translating the concept of multi-racial partnership into action. There was deep-seated mistrust between the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF ZAPU); the two wings contested the General Elections separately. Despite his part’s absolute majority, Mugabe invited Joshua Nkomo and a few other members of PF-ZAPU to join a coalition government which imparted a national character to the administration. The appointment of Rev. Canaan Banana, a Ndebele as Zimbabwe’s first President was a step in this direction. The erstwhile rival Nkomo was appointed Home Affairs Minister. Two other white ministers were also included in the Cabinet in order to allay the fears of the whites. Other interested groups were also given representation.

Another difficult problem was the integration of the ZIPRA, ZANLA and Rhodesia regular army into a single Defence force (ZDF), loyal to the state. Negotiation for the return of nearly 12 000 ZIPRA guerrillas were a matter of contention between the two leaders - Nkomo and Mugabe. Lt. Gen. Peter Walls, the Commander-in-Chief under white rule was appointed Commander for the armed forces to bring about the integration of the guerrilla groups with the national army which included the whites.

Despite the long delay in the achievement of independence, the ZANU-PF government lacked any experience of office. ZANU-PF was faced with the following realities:

1. the armed forces contained many who had fought against the Patriotic Front in the war;
2. the civil service had organised and sustained Ian Smith’s rebellion;
3. the judiciary had condemned a member of the PF leadership to long terms of imprisonment;
4. the police had arrested and tortured them;
5. the racial franchise ensured that the new ministers faced strong opposition in Parliament from their rebel predecessors, the very men who had been responsible for their detention without trial;
6. the commercial farming and mining sectors, the dominant elements in the economy, were entrenched in the private sector dominated by minority or expatriate interests.

The Independence Constitution itself was not a dynamic organisation designed to reflect the changing priorities of a nation in transition or to be an effective instrument of the socialist transformation of society.

However, there was another side of the Zimbabwe’s inheritance at independence, factors which ameliorated the problems set by the “imposed” constitution. The Temporal restrictions on the entrenchment of minority protection emphasised the interim nature of the constitutional settlement:
1. For the time being, the difficult and divisive constitutional issues were put on ice while more pressing problems were tackled.
2. Radical criticisms of government caution in relation to land or to industrial intervention could be appeased by references to restrictions imposed by section 16 of the constitution.

It should be noted that the strong and highly centralised governmental structures of the former regime were inherited intact, along with a cadre of experienced senior administrative personnel who were not the expatriate servants of a distinct metropolitan power but repositories of a fierce, if misguided tradition of local independence. Under the Smith and Muzorewa regimes, government had established tight control of the economy the instruments of which were available to the new government along with the security apparatus. Mr Smith’s Chief “sanctions-buster” was soon happily employed in the promotion of Zimbabwean exports and his Cabinet secretary and security chief continued to serve Robert Mugabe.
Mugabe had no bitterness against the whites who constituted 3.2% of the country’s 7.15 million population. Mugabe assured the white community of Zimbabwe that he wanted them to stay on as an important source of professional manpower. The mass exodus of whites and skilled manpower did not take place; there was no administrative breakdown.

Under the white regime the country’s economy and social structures were on the verge of collapse. On the achievement of freedom, there were about two million displaced persons who were to be resettled. The Zimbabwe economy which had been in recession since 1975 was paralysed by industrial strikes and unrest. There were wide disparities between resources in the country available to black and white communities. The rising expectations of the people had to be fulfilled. The problem of finding jobs for 75,000 blacks leaving the school annually had to be tackled. During the general election ZANU-PF had promised to bring about a transformation of the economy under a socialist programme. Mugabe did not adopt a doctrinaire attitude. He made it clear that socialism did not mean adherence to Marxism-Leninism. He wanted to establish a nationalist, socialist, Pan Africanist and Democratic Republic of Zimbabwe. He tried to achieve stability with growth rather than to move radically towards a socialist set up. It was recognised that private enterprise would have to continue until circumstances were ripe for socialist change. Change was to be gradually built on the base of capitalist economy.\(^\text{11}\)

**Zimbabwe’s post-independence predicament underscores other themes:**

1. A plural society plagued with inter-ethnic rivalries and seeking some form of political and constitutional compromise which would ameliorate ethnic tensions and would allow effective minority participation in the political power game;

2. A regional environment which posed a major threat to the security of the state and which demanded a majority military commitment across the country’s boarders;

3. An agricultural sector which, although one of the most productive in Africa, required a massive exercise in restructuring in order to meet the aspirations of the rural poor, who hoped, and indeed deserved, to be the chief beneficiaries of the war of liberation;

4. **ALL THESE FACTORS AFFECT** an exercise in Constitutional engineering whereby the governing party has sought to remodel the Constitutional order so as to create a legal environment more comparable with the political culture and the social and economic circumstances of the country.\(^\text{12}\)
Mugabe recognised the compulsion of the existing economic and infrastructural links with the Republic of South Africa. He, therefore, announced his government’s intention of following a course of peaceful co-existence with the Republic. Zimbabwe is independent on Pretoria for access to sea routes. RSA had 583 million dollar investments in Zimbabwe. Mugabe tried to lesson economic dependence on RSA. Efforts were made to open trade routes through Mozambique. Diplomatic links were reduced to the bare minimum necessary to hand trade interests.

On September 2, 1980 Zimbabwe announced the severance of diplomatic relations with RSA. At the OAU Conference in Freedom, Mugabe accused South Africa of Working to destabilise the region. He called for the defence of frontline states and practical support for the final goal of freedom and independence in South Africa.

At the end 1980 the problems which still lay ahead for Zimbabwe were probably greater than those faced by any other newly independent country. Moreover, these problems were created by the former regime with the complicity of many Western governments who turned their backs on the continuation of the illegal regime.

**LAND DESIGNATION ACT (LAAN)**

The legal provisions contained in the 1979 Lancaster House constitution that led Zimbabwe to Independence on April 18, 1980 prevented the government from enacting any law that would revoke section 16 of the Constitution, which deals with “protection from deprivation of property” - within the first 10 years of independence. In that period, land needed by government for resettlement purposes or other development projects had to be acquired from the open market on a “willing buyer, willing seller”, basis. Proprietors of nationalised land had to be compensated promptly and in foreign currency, thus limiting the scope of the whole redistribution programme, because of the government’s shortage of funds.

But when the 10 year period expired in 1990, the government promptly asked parliament to enact the 11th Constitutional Amendment Act, thus removing all restriction imposed by section 16 of the Lancaster House Constitution, including the requirement on the part of the government “to
pay promptly adequate compensation for the acquisition of land”.

Under the 1990 Constitutional Amendment, changes were only made to require “to pay fair compensation - before or within a reasonable time” after acquisition of land.

But given the expensive nature of land redistribution programme and due to what the government and its supporters perceived to be lack of cooperation on the part of white commercial farmers in making reasonable offers of land for redistribution, the government was compelled to act constitutionally to use its own discretion in determining which land it should acquire for resettlement purposes.

That is why in 1992 the Zimbabwe Parliament moved to approve the Land Designation Act, which if fully implemented, will allow government to acquire five million hectares of farmland currently owned by large scale commercial farmers - mostly whites.

The LAA allows government to designate land and use its own assessment to determine the amount due for compensation. No recourse to the course is provided should any former consider the compensation to be inadequate.

**INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES PROFILE**

**Historical Note**
The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) was established through Ordinance 36 of the University of Zimbabwe into which it was integrated in 1990. Previously, the Institute had existed as the Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies (ZIDS) formally inaugurated in March 1982. The conception of the Institute was rooted much earlier in the period of independence struggle. It was accepted then that a research and training institute should be
established to provide theoretical and empirical contribution to development thought and policy-making in the post-independence period. The Institute first operated as a Department under the then Ministry of Manpower Planning and Development, before it became a statutory authority under an Act of Parliament. The Institute of Development Studies Act (1984) charged the Institute with the following responsibilities:\textsuperscript{13}

1. to serve through study, research, teaching and the dissemination of information, as a leading instrument for the socialist transformation of Zimbabwe.

2. Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1), it shall be the duty of the Institute.
   a. to study and conduct research into:-
      i. the process of the establishment and development of a socialist society in Zimbabwe;
      ii. the problems of development and underdevelopment;
      iii. further possibilities of regional cooperation in Southern Africa in the political, economic and other fields;
      iv. the role of labour, youth and women in Zimbabwe, and
      v. the role of science and technology in Zimbabwe.
   b. to gather, document, store and provide to Government; statutory bodies and other public agencies, information relating to the application of socialist principles to aspects of the administration of Zimbabwe;
   c. to provide training courses in development studies and to sensitize both the private and public sectors to the socialist objective of the government; and
   d. to publish the findings of its research activities in such a manner as may from time to time be directed by the Minister.

Originally, the Institute consisted of six research departments which have now been rationalised into three namely:

a. Economics and Technology Studies
b. Agrarian and Labour Studies
c. International Relations and Social Development Studies.
These three departments incorporated the former six departments of Agriculture and Rural Development; Industry; Science and Technology, Education and Social Development; History and Politics; Labour Studies; Southern Africa and International Relations.

When the Institute became a parastatal, it was initially under the Ministry of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare, before it operated under the Office of the President and Cabinet. In 1989 a Cabinet decision transferred the Institute to the University of Zimbabwe.

**General Context**

The context in which research in the Institute is carried out in the 1990s is not a replica of that of the 1980s. The new context is one characterised by shifts in global power and relations, with the cessation of the cold war. The emerging global order is also characterized by the formation of regional economic blocks, the widening of the gap between the North and the South, and the advocacy of political pluralism and “good government”. Economic relations between the North and South continue to be dominated by questions concerning debt, terms of trade and structural adjustment.

**The Focus of the Research Plan**

Previous research at the Institute has concentrated on several areas namely agrarian reform and food security, social reform, industrialization and technology, energy studies, the informal sector, labour studies, regional security and economic cooperation. This research resulted in a widely acknowledged body of knowledge eventually published as working and discussion papers, consultancy reports and monographs as well as journal articles and chapters in books.

The current research programmes seeks to build on previous research with the objective of both extending its scope and refining its quality. In that respect, it is aimed that these research programmes will make a definitive contribution to development thought and policy-oriented studies. The research programmes consist of a mix of several categories of research:

a. the refining and presentation of existing knowledge to contribute to debates and policy decisions on development-related issues;

b. fundamental research which would contribute to our conceptualisation of issues pertaining to development strategies.
The present synopsis is a presentation of broad research programmes which encompass the character and implications of the current historical transition. The programmes are broad enough to permit the respective departments flexibility in developing comprehensive and researchable research plans and programmes for the new millennium. In this regard, therefore, the Institute’s Research Plan should be read in conjunction with the departmental research plans.

Institutional Capacity
The Institute has in the past undertaken both basic research in areas of specialisation of individual staff and commissioned research on diverse topics. Some of the external organisations for whom commissioned research has been carried out include the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the United Nations Industrial Organisation (UNIDO), United Nations children’s Fund (UNICEF), the Institute has undertaken commissioned research for both government departments and non-governmental organisations. Some of the notable NGOs served by the Institute include the Organisation of Collective Cooperatives of Zimbabwe (OCCZIM), Employers Confederation of Zimbabwe (EMCOZ), the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) amongst others.

In defining the proposed five research programmes below, the comparative advantages of the Institute (based on previous work) and the present staffing situation have been taken into account.

Broad Research Programmes
Five research programmes have been proposed for the period 1995 - 2000.
These are:
1) Structural Adjustment and Development Strategies.
2) Economic Indigenisation in Zimbabwe.
3) Agrarian Reform in Zimbabwe.
4) Democratisation, Social Transformation and Sustainable Development in Southern Africa.
The Poverty Reduction Forum (A Civil Society Organisation Launched in 1996)\textsuperscript{15}

The Poverty Reduction Forum, based at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Zimbabwe, is a civil society grouping bringing together academics, NGOs, civil society groups, rural communities, the private sector, donors and governments. The Forum was set up in 1996 with the primary objective of influencing policies for poverty reduction by engaging in dialogue with policy makers and by carrying out research and though lobbying and advocacy work around poverty issue.

Forum Structures

The Forum is run by a Management Committee comprising of the groups listed above. The Committee, under the Chairmanship of the Institute of Development Studies, sets out the broad objectives of the Forum and also oversees its programmes. The work programmes of the Forum as well as the areas of focus are mapped out and agreed upon by the general membership at its Annual General Meetings. The day to day programme implementation is carried out by the Project Co-ordinator, who is full time assisted by a Documentalist, who runs the Forum's documentation centre and a Secretary. The size of the PRF's co-ordinating unit has been left deliberately small for reasons I will explain later.

Forum Objectives

The PRF was set up to achieve the following objectives:

- Increase the effectiveness of initiatives to monitor and reduce poverty;
- Debate and analyse issues that will reduce poverty and improve monitoring;
- Provide critical support and complement existing work on poverty reduction.

To achieve these objectives, the Forum seeks to:

- Strengthen partnerships with Government, NGOs, Civil Society, the Private sector and donors in programme implementation;
- Expand dialogue to include the views of communities on poverty reduction;
- Facilitate and carry out research on poverty reduction;
- Encourage national dialogue and action on issues relating to poverty;
- Complement the Government's Poverty Alleviation Action Plan (PAAP);
- Raise awareness on poverty by distributing documentation and disseminating research
findings on poverty reduction, wealth creation and social development; and

- Create an accessible focal point and documentation centre/database on poverty and related issues.

Up until 1997, the Forum operated only from the capital Harare, which meant that rural communities were largely excluded from its programmes. Throughout most of 1998 however, the Forum was engaged in setting up PRF chapters in the country's provinces and districts and now has some 33 Provincial and District in the rural areas where the majority of the poor live.

According to the 1995 Poverty Assessment Study Survey carried out by the government, 62 percent of Zimbabwe's population is poor and of some 75 percent of the poor live in the rural areas. From this it becomes clear that one cannot meaningfully engage in dialogue in poverty reduction without involving the poor themselves. The setting up therefore of the Forum's Provincial and District chapters is therefore critical to furthering the debate on poverty and ensuring that the concerns of the poor are central to the Forum's programmes.

**Who represents the Forum in the Rural Areas**

The setting up the Forum's rural chapters was done in a way that ensured that representation would be at grassroots level. Thus invitations were sent out to the unemployed, the youths, church groups, women's groups, housewives, the disables, farmers' groups, trade unions (were they existed) and to civic leaders such as councillors. At the end of each seminar, groups were asked to choose their own leaders, paying special attention to gender representation. What has emerged are communities representative of the societies they come from.

It is important to go into the detail about the representation of the Forum at district and provincial level because while the groups listed above represent the majority of rural communities and the poor, in the past they have not been given a voice in the national debate on policies.

The broadening of the Forum membership to include representatives from the rest of the country and in particular from the rural areas is critical for the achievement of its objectives. The Forum needs the input of the rural constituency to inform the debate and research on poverty. It is also
from the people on the ground that solutions to poverty will come. It is now widely accepted that solutions to poverty can only come through consultations between the policy makers and those affected by poverty. In other words, the poor are their own liberators.

The PRF’s major achievement therefore has been to create the space the poor need to effectively participate in poverty reduction by influencing policies both at the local and national level through dialogue and advocacy. The broadening of people’s participation in their national affairs is a critical element of governance. It increases people's understanding of their responsibilities and obligations as citizens and also gives them the chance to examine critically the role of government in development; the sustainability of its programmes; the accountability (or lack of it) of their government; how budgetary resources are used and to put under a spotlight the government's priorities and the extent to which these may or may not reflect their own.

The Forum therefore has provided a catalyst to allow civil society, in particular those who have never had a voice in national affairs, not only to make an input into policies, but to start to critically examine issues of governance and how they relate to the poverty crisis facing the country.

**Forum’s Programmes**

The main thrust of the PRF's programmes has been policy dialogue and advocacy. To support this it has included the research component which informs its debate and enables it to come up with positions that are based on objectives facts. As its composition implies, the Forum is an alliance of different groupings all bound together by their interest in poverty reduction. But within that, rather diverse grouping, the Forum is creating partnerships to achieve specific objectives. Thus while in the past the Forum, on its own, commissioned and produced a report on what the national budget should focus on to reduce poverty, last year it teamed up with the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, the Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and consulted rural communities widely to come up with alternative budget proposals that were presented to the government. With the exception of the rural communities, the rest of the organisations listed above have in the past produced and submitted separate budget reports to the government catering mostly for their own sectoral interests.
But consolidating the different inputs into one report has several advantages including:

- Creating a common platform by different groups around issues of poverty;
- Presenting a more united front to the government and therefore a stronger position,
- Facilitating advocacy work by different groups around poverty and building an effective coalition for poverty reduction.

**Three factors which account for success of the Forum:**

1. Broad-based membership, including grassroots participation in the Forum's activities.
2. Relevance of the Forum's debates and Research Agenda.
3. Ability to forge partnerships and create synergies and linkages with organisations involved in similar activities.

**Broad-based Membership**

The PRF believes in the concept of participation and partnerships for poverty alleviation. It is therefore important that its programmes are informed by priorities of its members. The PRF has therefore deliberately kept its secretariat small to remove from them the temptation to carry out their own programmes independent of the membership (which would be the case if the secretariat was large and was trying to justify its existence). The result is that rather than competing with other organisations, the Forum seeks to build alliances that will maximise the use of both its resources and those of partner institutions. A small secretariat also ensures that the Forum's programmes are informed by the priorities and programmes of its members and as long as these are focused on poverty reduction, the Forum is able to adopt them as its own. To this end, at its AGMs, the PRF devotes a large part of the day to deliberations on what priorities members feel it should focus on in the coming year and what is needed to achieve those objectives.

The broadening of the Forum's membership to include rural communities has also brought with it additional needs which the Forum is now trying to meet. These include the need to: capacity building among the rural chapter to enable them to effectively participate in the Forum's activities e.g. understanding the budgets of their local authorities and how they can influence spending priorities at the level; understanding the national budget and how they can influence and participate in drawing up the national budget.
- assisting communities to prioritise their needs, and work together as communities to achieve these objectives
- link communities to national programmes and facilitate their access to available resources earmarked to development.
- assist communities to formulate their own development programmes, including micro-enterprises.
- play a catalytic role and co-ordinate their dialogue forums on Poverty Alleviation,
- assist communities to analyse issues and make an input in the national debate on issues of poverty and unemployment.

**Relevance of the Forum's Debates and Research Agenda**

The formation of the Poverty Reduction Forum acted as a catalyst for several initiatives. It came at a time when the government had just released its Poverty Alleviation Action Programme (PAAP), which among other things, seeks to impart poor communities and enable them to design and execute programmes to better their lives. The government needed a platform where some of the policy issues raised in the (PAAP) document could be freely discussed as well as facilitate the programme's implementation in a participatory manner. The PRF therefore created the space needed by civil society to meaningfully participate in the programme.

The Forum also came at a time when organisations such as the World Bank are paying much closer attention to poverty alleviation as a necessary component in economic reform programmes and are prepared to adopt a more open approach, involving civil society, in designing their programmes.

For the academics, the Forum offered a chance to meaningfully contribute to policy formulation, particularly as it relates to poverty, and to interact with other actors who influence policy, including donors, NGOs and the private sector.

**Main Constraints and how they were dealt with**

As its names implies, the Poverty Reduction Forum offers a meeting place for dialogue and advocacy work around issues of poverty. Its membership is as diverse as the Zimbabwean
society. The major challenge therefore has been for the Forum to find a common ground and language for these different groupings which does not alienate any of the parties and at the same time to remain focused on poverty issues. We have achieved this by operating the Forum at different levels all feeding into each other. Thus rural communities will engage in policy debate through their chapters and within their own communities. Issues raised from these meetings will be passed onto the national committee through reports prepared from the meetings. The national committee will then sift through the reports and separate issues of national relevance from the more parochial issues relevant only at the local level. Follow up action will also have to be carried out at the two levels with chapters following up on local issues, while the national issues will be put forward and the debate will be carried on the national level. Experience has however shown us that most issues that may appear local can be traced to the national level so they need not to be confined to the local (e.g. the collapse of health services at the local level reflect the situation at the national level).

The other major challenge facing the Forum has been how to keep the interest of its membership focused and to get their participation in its programmes. To a large extent this is a reflection of the low capacity of civil society groups and NGOs in the country and can only be tackled by increasing their capacity, both in terms of organisational structures skills and human and material resources.

**Best Practices that emerged from the Forum's Experience**

Part of the PRF's mandate is to collaborate with other organisations doing similar work. At its inception, the Forum collaborated extensively with organisations pursuing programmes similar to its own. The forum has also co-ordinated various activities and programmes, including the production of the Human Development Report. As it broadened it activities, the PRF sub-contracted more work to consultants and specialised agencies to stretch it limited human resources further and take advantage of the wide expertise available from its members and from research oriented institutions such the Institute of Development Studies.

The Forum was set up primarily to co-ordinate the various initiatives on poverty reduction in the country. The number of initiatives it is now engaged in with various partners is growing by the day and is a clear indication that the Forum is achieving it objective. For instance, the PRF was chosen by civil society to co-ordinate the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative,
a global programme spearheaded by civil society to evaluate the impact of SAPs on the poor. The programme is being carried out jointly with the World Bank and Governments. Other countries participating in the exercise include Ghana, Uganda, Mali in Africa, Hungary in Europe, Ecuador in Latin America and Bangladesh in South East Asia.

**Research Contribution to Further Success**

The PRF has set-up mechanisms and programmes for research on socio-economic and political issues on a regular basis. As part of the exercise, the Forum is producing the first National Human Development Report for Zimbabwe which was launched in January 1999. The report, which will be on the theme of Poverty, will make policy recommendations on human development in Zimbabwe and will present a yardstick of measuring the success of otherwise of current poverty reduction strategies. The HDR will be produced on a regular basis from 1998 on topical issues affecting human development in Zimbabwe. The HDR will be distributed widely to policy makers in Government, to multilateral and bi-lateral donor agencies and NGOs, the private sector and civil society. Summaries of the reports will be translated into major vernacular languages of Zimbabwe to make the HDRs more accessible to a wider audience.

**CONCLUSION**

**Recommendations**

There must be meaningful and open dialogue that involves civil society organisations and other key actors such as government that would yield policies that closely reflect and respond to the needs of different social groups in Zimbabwe especially the marginalised masses. Ongoing dialogue among different stakeholders is necessary for creating a common understanding on the important role being played by civil society, government and other key actors in social and economic development.

Civil society is an important partner in social development and is essential to the promotion of broad-based participation in debating development policy, civic issues and constitutional reforms. IDS aims at supporting initiatives that enhance people’s participation in development activities at all levels.
The hostile attitude by government towards civil society is not alarming considering the fact that in the recent past, civil society in Zimbabwe has steadily gained strength in terms of engaging the public in the debate focusing on national development issues, with support from donor agencies and international NGOs. There has been a steady growth in the local NGOs and CBOs that are involved in raising the awareness of the public focusing on important constitutional reforms, human rights, women and children’s rights. It should be noted that some of the NGOs and CBOs particularly those providing social services are performing tasks that should be carried out by government itself (e.g. caring for the with disabilities, supporting orphans and people and families affected by HIV/AIDs). Civic education and human rights activities being carried out by NGOs and CBOs have led to an improvement in the level of awareness of the public and its participation in the development dialogue of this country. Local civil society is increasingly demanding accountability from government and exposing massive corruption in both the public and private sector. It would indeed be doubtful whether any government would play this critical role.

There is need for the Government of Zimbabwe to create a stable political and economic environment that enables civil society in its diverse form to play a meaningful role in the social development of this country. The decline in the economy is negatively impacting on the delivery of important services by local NGOs and CBOs to the marginalised social groups as prices of basic commodities and operational costs such as fuel continue to rise in relation to the current high inflation and interest rates.

The resolution of the current crisis lies in an honest and open dialogue that is based on mutual trust and respect and not on suspicion. The dialogue should involve not only those in government and few selected organisations representing the private sector, but also a wider section of society as represented by various civil society organisations. Civil society also has the potential to play a critical role in promoting national reconciliation and peace in Zimbabwe.

In summary, civil society and the new government in Zimbabwe are faced with the key following challenges which need to be addressed in order to promote sustainable economic and social development:
1) **Building Greater space for civil society:**

There is need for the government to engaged different civil society organisations in an open and consistent manner. The current political environment is mainly characterised by open hostility to civil society by government with some sections being labelled as opposition sympathisers and enemies of the state that are seeking to overthrow the government.

2) **Social and economic empowerment**

More than 75% of Zimbabweans are living below the poverty datum line and indications are that the plight of poor people is deteriorating rapidly in the light of the current economic and social crisis in the country. The sharply declining access to health and education among the majority of households in both urban areas and rural areas is undermining social development in Zimbabwe.

As noted in the Human Development Report 1999 for Zimbabwe, AIDS has placed an additional burden on households. They have to devote increased time, money and resources to medical and patient care, special diets and transport needs for people living with AIDS. The reallocation of productive labour to home-based care tasks and the death of wage earners have had an adverse effect on household incomes.

3) **Land Redistribution and Reform:**

Land redistribution and reform remains a key problem which needs to be redressed through a transparent process that is aimed at directly assisting the majority of poor and landless people and not a few privileged and politically influential social groups.

4) **National Reconciliation**

The implications of the increase in the wave of violence during the recent months before and after the parliamentary elections need to be critically reflected upon by civil society and government. The violence and intimidation targeted at ordinary citizens, particularly in large scale commercial farming and communal areas, has had and will continue to have a negative impact on national integration and public participation in the
development dialogue and political affairs of Zimbabwe. In the past several years, there have been calls by human rights and other civic organisations for the establishment of a truth and reconciliation programme with support from government and civil society. The main aim would be to assist and compensate families and communities affected by violence preceding the elections of June 2000.16

ENDNOTES


5. Ibid; p. 4.


10. Hatchard and Slinn; op cit p121 - 122.


14. For details of the IDS Research and Training activities, see The IDS Strategic Plan 1996-2000.


16. Some of the ideas in the conclusions are based on a paper presented by an MS-Zimbabwe officer at a SAPRI Workshop organised by IDS-UZ in 2000.