



# Investigating Local and Indigenous Traditional Leadership in Local Governance of Rural Primary Schools: A Case of Zimbabwe

Wonderful Dzimiri<sup>1</sup> & Cynthia Dzimiri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Educational Policy Studies and Leadership  
Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>Robert Mugabe School of Education  
Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe

Email: [dzimiriw@staff.msu.ac.zw](mailto:dzimiriw@staff.msu.ac.zw)/[cynthiadzimiri@gmail.com](mailto:cynthiadzimiri@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *The study investigates how the rural local political (elected village chairpersons and/or councillors) and indigenous traditional leadership (chief/ headman, village head/kraalhead [Sabhuku]) are situated in local governance of rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study, undergirded by the interpretive framework, was a case study of three schools purposively selected from one cluster (five schools) in Shurugwi district. Nineteen participants were purposively selected to include three school heads, three deputy heads, three senior teachers and six parents, all legally mandated, to serve on the school development committee (SDC), as well as three kraalheads/[sabhuku] (also called village heads), and the one local traditional headman/[Sadunhu] as traditional leaders. With ethical protocols observed, data were generated through interviews, observation, and document analysis. Analysis of data entailed identifying emerging themes and categories and their patterning constituents. Findings revealed a convergence of different stakeholders, including local and traditional leaders in the school governance matrix. Local traditional leadership participated in planning and organising villager efforts for school development, ceremonies, enforcing compliance to SDC resolutions, and in mediating and resolving local conflicts. Indigenous, traditional knowledge, organisational practices, power and control were brought in to complement modern management practices in local school governance. Implications of the findings are that school leaders must, therefore, break legally prescribed boundaries of the SDC, and establish relationships with local and traditional structures in school development efforts.*

**Keywords:** *School governance, Traditional leadership, School development committee, Participation, Involvement, Conflict resolution, Mobilising villagers*

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## 1. Introduction

The establishment of the school development committee (SDC) as a local school governance structure in Zimbabwe's government-aided schools (the majority being rural schools) in 1991 came as a milestone reform

in the country's education landscape, mandating the participation of local communities/parents in local school governance (Chikoko, 2008; Dzimiri, 2018). The Education Act Amendment Number 26 of 1991, later operationalised through Zimbabwe Government Statutory Instrument (SI) 87 of 1992, legalised the participation of parents in local school governance

through the SDC structure. The reform policy framework prescribes the composition of the SDC as: (a) five persons (parents with children at the school) elected at a general assembly by parents of pupils at the school; (b) The school head; (c) The deputy school head; (d) a teacher at the school; and (5) a local councillor of the area appointed by the local government authority (Government of Zimbabwe, Education Act Amendment Number 20, 1991; SI 87/1992). Notably, an analysis of legislative documents regulating local school governance through the SDC structure reveals an absence of local traditional authority from the legally sanctioned actors in local school governance. According to Part II of Section 4 of SI 87/1992, the objects of the SDC are: (a) to provide and assist in the operation and development of the school; (b) to advance the moral, cultural, physical and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school; and (c) to promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils, their parents and teachers. Not surprising, recent research on SDCs in Zimbabwe by Gutuza (2015) focused only on teachers and parents as members legally sanctioned to serve on the SDC's school development efforts. Just as Musarandega et al. (2018) observe in a study on harnessing traditional authority in combating the vagaries of climate change in Zimbabwe, the role of indigenous traditional authority is overlooked in community development efforts.

Local school governance reform as legislated in Zimbabwe creates a structure that brings together professionals (educators) and local parents or community into local school governance through the SDC structure. Admittedly, different community structures, powers and interests converge in local school governance, which requires people to accept different forms of authority in flexible ways. In the Zimbabwean scenario, traditional leaders are custodians of the land, its inhabitants and culture. On the other hand, local government in the name of rural district councils provide services to the people who are represented by local ward councillors. On council also sit representatives of government ministries such as Primary and Secondary Education who prescribe the curriculum, and Public Service (ex-officio members of council) who are the employer for all government employees (educators included) and thus provide employee operational frameworks. Visibly absent from the official or formal matrix of local school governance are the local and indigenous traditional leaders. On this basis, we argue that local and traditional leaders play an important role in the governance of rural primary schools in Zimbabwe, thus rendering themselves as a key constituency or major stakeholder in the process. Studies on SDCs as local school governance bodies in Zimbabwe (Chikoko, 2008; Gutuza, 2015; Oyedele & Chikwature, 2016) focused on teachers and parents, leaving a gap relating to local and traditional leaders as stakeholders in the local governance of primary schools. Given that the place of local and traditional leadership in local school governance remains unexplored in scholarship (Mbokazi

& Bengu, 2013; Mbokazi, 2015), this study sought to locate local and indigenous traditional leadership in the local governance of rural primary schools and thus, adding literature that is Zimbabwean-specific to the growing body of literature on traditional leaders and rural local school governance.

The study sought to understand local and traditional leadership in local school governance of rural primary schools. This entailed interrogating how local and traditional leadership infused into, and/ or complemented the modern (formal, legislated) organisation practices in the governance of rural primary schools in Zimbabwe. The guiding questions were:

- a. What is the local leadership context of rural primary school governance?
- b. How is local and traditional leadership infused in the local school governance of rural primary schools?

## 2. Literature Review

The current Zimbabwe legislation on the establishment and operationalisation of SDCs implies advantages accruing to cooperation between government, local parents and educators. Thus, the state shares the burden of financing the education and the development of schools. Referring to the South African legal frame on school boards, Oosthuizen, Rossouw and Smit (2009) note benefits that accrue, which include (a) democratisation of education whose form of governance rests on principles of representation, equity and participation, ultimately impacting positively on school improvement; (b) improved school climate and learner achievements arising out of increased participation of parents in education processes; (c) meaningful expertise brought in by parents as a result of their background, professional experience (for example in the area of heritage studies and indigenous knowledge systems); (d) saving education time and relieving educators of duties that parents can perform by virtue of their expertise in certain areas; (e) improved communication between home and school, and improved learner performance and achievement for some parents' children; and (f) fulfilment of parental duty of love and care for their children through parental involvement in school activities.

While Zimbabwe's legal frameworks on local school governance place emphasis on players such as educators, learners and parents, there is notable silence on local and traditional leaders who form part of the lived contexts of rural schools. Evidently, the legislation framing school governance reform in Zimbabwe (Education Act Amendment Number 20 of 1991 and its attendant SI 87 of 1992) is silent on the place of indigenous local structures and leaders who continue to exist but seem ignored and unacknowledged. Evidence from a study by Mashau et al. (2017) revealed that traditional leaders and

local councillors in Limpopo Province of South Africa were not involved in education since no legislation stipulated their role therein. Yet, Tshitangoni and Francis (2014) earlier acknowledged the effectiveness of traditional leaders in engaging communities and attending meetings on development matters in Vembe District of South Africa. Given the growing attention on local indigenous knowledge and that local and traditional leadership form part of the context of schools and their governance (Mbokazi & Bhengu, 2008; Mbokazi, 2013; Mbokazi, 2015), we argue that local school governance does not take place in a vacuum. As such, local indigenous traditional leaders form part of the school context and governance.

Zimbabwe has a very powerful differentiation of political authority, with legislated recognition of the powers of traditional leaders as custodians of the land and people within the geographical boundaries of their traditional and local government authority and are custodians of traditional customary law as mandated in Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment number 20 of 2013. Chigwata's (2016) study, questioning whether the traditional leaders in Zimbabwe were still relevant, acknowledges that traditional leaders deliver various responsibilities of government in parts of Zimbabwe where there is little or no presence of the state and thus, recognised by the 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution, operate alongside modern state structures in rural areas. The disregard of local and traditional authority and respective leadership in local school governance in literature could be an oversight because these remain indispensably important and with widespread influence in organising life at the rural community level (Lutz & Linder, 2004; Chigwata, 2016). Thus, schools should be included automatically as they are society's institutions located in socio-geographical jurisdictions of both local and traditional authorities under a chief (*Mambo*) or Headman [*Sadunhu/ VaShe*], and rural district council respectively.

In the South African context, Mbokazi and Bhengu (2008), Mbokazi (2012), and Mbokazi, (2015) view local traditional leadership as one partner in the sphere of educational collaborations necessary to effect reforms at the local level. The collaborative roles relate to school governance, community-school relations, infrastructural development and curriculum delivery. Similarly, studies in Zimbabwe and Malawi evidence the important role played by traditional leaders, which includes mobilising communities in development projects and programmes such as infrastructural development, local governance, dispute settlement, health and other public services, at the same time ensuring that people use public properties, schools included, appropriately (Makado et al., 2015; Rugonye and Rupande, 2016). Notably, the Zimbabwe education legislation does not include local traditional leaders in its delineation of membership and functions of the School Development Committee as a local school

governance structure. A few conceptual clarifications need to be placed into perspective.

It is important to clarify the concept of traditional leadership and how local traditional leaders can be positioned in the discourse on local development efforts generally, and their potential to drive also local rural primary school development. At a very simplistic level, leadership can be viewed as whatever or whoever contributes to the group's performance (Bass, 1990). Baldwin and Munyengwa (2014) cited in Musarandega et al. (2018) explain that traditional leadership in Zimbabwe's rural areas is a three-tier hierarchy with the highest level being that of chief [*mambo*], below which is the headman [*sadunhu*] in the middle. At the lowest grassroots level is the village head/kraalhead [*sabhuku*]. According to Musarandega et al. (2018), because these local indigenous traditional leaders have authority and respect vested in them and have power to manage grassroots communities, chiefs, headmen, and village heads/kraalheads have potential as drivers of local development projects. Indigenous traditional leadership can be conceived of as a native interconnected system whose values are cooperation, collective endeavour, patience, and sharing (AhNee-Benham, 2002). Such values remain indispensable given the objectives set for local school governance bodies, or specifically the SDC, in rural government-aided schools in Zimbabwe. Besides, rural communities in Zimbabwe, as in South Africa and other African countries, have traditional leadership structures who are the custodians of the land on which schools are built, and have final decisions on how the school might use the land (Mbokazi & Bhengu, 2008; Mbokazi, 2012; 2015). They are also responsible for land allocation for homesteads and agriculture use in their areas (Rugonye & Rupande, 2016; Musarandega & Chingombe, 2018). Importantly, this scenario renders traditional and local leaders as part of the school community and needing to be afforded opportunities to participate in local school governance (Mbokazi, 2012).

Arguably, for rural primary schools to execute their legislated duties effectively requires meaningful engagement and dialogue with traditional leadership regarding infrastructural development and other related decisions (Mbokazi and Bhengu, 2008; Mbokazi, 2012) because, as Rukonye and Rupande's (2016) study found, traditional leaders in Zimbabwe are the entry point for developmental projects and initiatives. The creation of relationships between the school and the local community leaders should engender meaningful conversation on social issues, which should contribute to effective realisation of school development objectives and strengthen collaborative platforms where the school community, local and traditional leaders included, influence local school governance decisions (Mbokazi, 2012; 2015). According to Center for Conflict Management and Transformation (2014), the Zimbabwe 1998 Chiefs and Headman Act Chapter 29:17 gives the Headman (*Sadunhu*) a law enforcement function. While

Chikoko (2008) uncovers the existence of administrative control by professionals (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education) and political control by councillors (Ministry of Local Government and National Housing), we argue the presence of local indigenous traditional leaders' influence and control in the matrix of authorities for meaningful dialogue and development to ensue. In this regard, principles of equalisation, participative decision making and community engagement, and learning and leading processes are fundamental to how people think and go about their life at the local level (AhNee-Benham, 1990 cited in Bass and Bass, 1990). We need to acknowledge the collective values emphasised in, and that characterise, indigenous African communities. Admittedly, such collective values stress commitment, involvement (and attendant participation), and loyalty where members or participants view themselves as members of an extended family group protective of their interests in exchange for loyalty (Bass, 1990; Makado et al., 2018). As AhNee-Benham (2002) argues, local indigenous authority is given by virtue of community recognition, values of generosity and service, and groups collectively engage in community leadership.

Although indigenous traditional leadership and their modernising societies do not necessarily have to be connected, these authorities "co-exist ... and might compete with each other" (Lutz & Linder, 2004, p. 3). Ideally, conflicts and contradictions are inevitable between modern and traditional structures yet, all these have a common stake in the schools and school development. Ray (1997) cited in Augustine (2016) notes that the legitimacy of traditional leaders in African countries, Zimbabwe included, is about why people respect and obey such authority, and not about a monopoly of force. Thus, legitimacy of the state and traditional authority must enhance cooperation with local citizens and development of certain areas. This implies that for development to take place in local communities, government and local traditional authorities should jointly work together (Augustine, 2016). Notably, Lentz (2000) observes that in Ghana, traditional chiefs maintained power and commanded respect at the local community level in rural areas. Similarly, Dodo (2013) observes that in Zimbabwe, elected traditional leaders chosen by their families through succession rules and procedures do command profound respect and compliance among their subjects. A study in Zimbabwe by Makado et al. (2015) found that traditional leaders possessed attributes associated with morality, ethical personal qualities, noting that those traditional leaders who were more educated tended to influence school education positively. If such observations are anything to go by, the involvement of traditional leaders in local school governance and development issues should provide added utility value.

The Zimbabwe 2013 Constitution, Section 16 and The Traditional Leaders Act, Chapter 20:04 accord chiefs the

primary authority over communal (rural) communities. (Center for Conflict Management and Transformation, 2014). Specifically, Zimbabwe's 2013 Constitution grants traditional leaders "authority, jurisdiction and control over land and persons within their area" (p.14). In agreement, Augustine (2016) delineates traditional leaders' roles in local governance and development as being "custodians of natural resources such as land, fighting for social development of their people, dispute resolution in communities, and guardianship of traditional heritage as norms, values and principles" (p. 4). However, Tshitangoni and Francis (2017) and Center for Conflict Management and Transformation (2014) acknowledge the existence of conflict between traditional leaders and local government authorities in development initiatives. Yet, the relevance of such legally mandated roles of both parties in local school governance becomes indispensable if SDCs are to accomplish the school development agenda. As such, the involvement of traditional leaders and local government grassroots representatives in the matrix of local school governance becomes defensible.

Arguably, greater participation in governance leads to greater responsiveness to pressing needs and better-quality service provision, which taps on the human capital (knowledge, experience, technical expertise, and proficiency) that different participants bring to play (Popoola, 2013). Importantly, Rugonye and Rupande (2016), exploring the role of traditional leaders in infrastructure development in Zimbabwe, posit that "participatory governance entails involvement and participation of the people in the processes that affect them. Through participation, individuals influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect them" (p.1091). The implication is to broaden participation by being more inclusive. Where do we see local and traditional leadership in school governance in Zimbabwean schools, and what is the nature of their participation in local school governance? Importantly, given the dearth in literature on participation of traditional leadership in school governance at the local level, this study adds to the emerging scholarly dialogue on school governance reform policy implementation. At the same time, the study provides also a Zimbabwe-specific perspective to the growing literature on indigenous knowledge generally, and particularly the place of local and traditional leadership in the school governance matrix in rural African contexts relative to their roles in line with their legal-traditional authority and power.

### 3. Methodology

The interpretive framework underpinned this study because of its focus on process, meanings, experiences and actions (Charmaz, 2001; Silverman, 2013), which facilitates the researcher's effort to 'get into the heads of the research participants' in order to understand

contextual meanings and experiential realities (Kuyini & Kivhunja, 2017). As such, a constructionist epistemology and its emphasis on multiple socially constructed realities (Merriam, 2009) and the aim to seek understanding (Packer, 2010) guided the methodology employed in this qualitative study. Thus, we had to contextualise the study by entering the field (schools and rural community setting) so as not to isolate participants from their social context as Alverman and Mallozzi (2010) advise. We employed case study methodology to study one school cluster in the district and also because, going by Stake's (1995) notion, the SDC, which is the local school governance structure, is a bounded and functioning specific. Three of the five primary schools in the cluster falling under the jurisdiction of a single traditional leader *Vashe/Sadunhu* (Headman) were identified as researchable and accessible research sites. Nineteen participants were purposively selected, who included three school heads, three deputy heads, three senior teachers, three village/*Sabhukus* (kraalheads) of the areas under study who are traditional leaders under the local Headman (also a participant), and six parent members of respective SDCs.

In line with the qualitative research approach and following Wolcott's (1992) notion that data collection is about asking, watching and reviewing (cited in Merriam, 2009), we adopted qualitative research techniques where we employed open-ended interviews, non-participant observation, and document analysis of past SDC minutes and office documents to generate data, which, together with use of multiple sources provided for triangulation to enhance trustworthiness as well as richness of findings (Shenton, 2004; Cresswell, 2017). Ethical principles were observed, which included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, right to withdraw participation, and anonymity. Negotiating access involved seeking permission from education office, local *VaShe* (Headman) and the main gate keepers – the school heads. To protect identities of participants, any names where used in this article are fictitious. In other instances, participants are identified by the positions they occupy or their formal titles.

To analyse data, we adapted thematic analysis procedure as put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012), for its flexibility and the choices the procedure provides a qualitative researcher in “making choices about how to shape and craft their piece of stone (the raw data) into a work of art (the analysis),” (Braun and Clarke, 2012, p.11). This is a procedure that renders insight into patterns of meanings and ability to identify what is common yet important relative to the study's topic and research questions. Thus, we used both inductive and deductive analysis where we used ideas from data as well as deriving thematic ideas from concepts brought from the data and/or concepts from literature reviewed.

## 4. Results and Discussion

Adapting thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2012), the results and discussion are organised as themes derived from data and/or concepts brought to the data. We coded the data and reorganised findings that patterned around six themes, starting with the ‘The local leadership context: types of leadership,’ which identifies and defines local leadership actors in local school governance. Second is ‘Representation: meaning and operationalisation,’ which characterises participants meaning and characteristics of representation on the school governance structure (SDC). Third is ‘Mobilising villager efforts: drivers of school development.’ Next is ‘Enforcing compliance to resolutions’ followed by ‘Mediating and resolving conflicts and fights: making peace’ in school governance and development. Thus, themes three to five depict the place of local and traditional leadership in school governance matters. The sixth and last theme is ‘Desire to get involved’ as expression by local traditional leaders to participate in local school governance issues.

### 4.1 The local leadership context of school governance: Types of leadership

The first theme concerned the various types of local leadership that formed the context of local school governance one way or the other. Evidence generated through interviews with school heads who participated in this study indicated the presence of types of local leadership that the schools studied have involved at one time or the other in school governance. The first type was political leadership.

#### 4.1.1 Political leadership

Political leadership was in the form of the village chairperson (popularly called ‘chairman’). For example, asked on the leadership in SDC meetings, School head A explained,

*You see the local ward councillor who is ex-officio member of the SDC is usually represented by the village ‘chairman’ who reports to the councillor. In other words, the village chairman comes in representing the local ward councillor, or district council if you like. Remember, to be village chairman you have to be elected or voted in by parents or adult villagers.*

Notably, the village chairperson is a local government ministry grassroots incumbent elected by a village through a democratic, political process and the incumbent works at the village level under an elected ward councillor who sits on the rural district council. As Center for Conflict Management and Transformation (2014) observes, the village chairman is elected by the

village assembly and manages affairs in their respective area (village). The number of village chairpersons around each school studied varied with the number of villages that formed each school's local community or catchment area. As School Head B said, pointing to a chart in the office bearing names of village chairpersons,

*My school has a very large catchment area and we have about 7 villages around us. We make sure each village chairman attends the SDC to facilitate communication, especially when planning big functions and construction projects. You see, these village chairmen or chairwomen are very important in mobilising villagers.*

Even though absent from the legal mandate on composition of the local school governance structure (SDC), evidence suggests that village chairpersons as representatives of the local government authority and ward councillor, took part in local school governance planning meetings in areas of infrastructure development and school functions. Justification for their inclusion rested on their position power to communicate and mobilise villagers (Rugonye & Rupande, 2016) for school development because, through participation, individuals influence and share control over development initiatives (Tshitangoni & Francis, 2014; Makado, et al. 2015).

#### **4.1.2 Indigenous traditional leadership**

Data pointed also to local indigenous traditional leadership in the position and role of *Sabhuku* (Kraalhead) sometimes referred to as village head, legally sanctioned under Zimbabwe, Traditional Leaders Act (Center for Conflict Management and Transformation, 2014). The *Sabhuku* falls within the traditional African organisational structure of society. The incumbent of this position, normally installed by the traditional chief through the Headman (*Sadunhu*), and confirmed by the Ministry of Local Government, is normally someone connected by blood and totem to the ruling chieftainship of the area, and selected through a succession rule in the ruling family. The traditional leadership hierarchical organisational structure has the Chief (formerly *Ishe* but now commonly referred to as *Mambo*) at the top under whom are a number of headmen. The Headman (*Sadunhu*), now commonly referring to themselves as *VaShe* has kraalheads (*sabhukus*) under him/her, and the kraalhead (*Sabhuku*) rules over a number of households or village. As *sabhuku* China, explained,

*You see my brother, the school is ours and for our children and grandchildren. We support the SDC because the SDC is us. School development is development of our area. So we make sure our households do their duty to work*

*at school, maybe moulding bricks, carrying water for builders ... see many things parents do at school. We support by encouraging our people to report for duty and even pay money agreed.*

Another area of influence by the *sabhuku* that emerged related to settling family disputes emanating from school development undertakings and arrangements made by the SDC. *Sabhuku* Todo clarified thus,

*You see these men and women, when it comes to work commitments at school development, they sometimes fight and hold grudges. So as 'sabhuku' you step in, talk to them to gain a ceasefire kkkkk [laughter] ... especially the women. We need harmony when working on development because when the school develops, we develop as an area. Tichida tisingadi [whether we like it or not] we are part of the SDC when it comes to action.*

Even though legislative frameworks on local school governance reform are silent on the place of local government or political leaders (village chairpersons) and indigenous traditional leaders (village heads/kraalheads/*sabhuku*), data reveal a convergence of different leadership forms or types constituting the leadership context of local school governance, with potential for broadened representation and participation, as Popoola (2013) argues, which should produce improved spill-over benefits such as better quality of service. Expressing ownership of the school and desire for development, local and traditional leaders around schools studied were involved in local school governance processes through participation in development initiatives that affected them and their communities, as Rugonye and Rupande (2016) observed. Similarly, as Makado et al. (2015) found, the more the traditional leaders supported school programs, the more positive influence they had on school education. With the evident convergence of different types of leadership in local school governance matters going beyond the legally prescribed membership to include political and indigenous traditional leaders, issues of representation kept coming up.

#### **4.2 Representation: Local Meaning and Operationalisation**

A second recurring pattern from the data centred on issues of representation. From interviews with parent members of the SDCs, the village chairpersons and *Sabhukus*, a major concern for local and traditional leadership was representation of communities on the SDC. Both the *Sabhukus* (kraalheads) and village chairpersons indicated their interest in ensuring that their respective villages were well represented on the SDC. The words of *Sabhuku* Masinire of School A summed it up thus,

... *tinotogara pasi ku village totaurirana tosarudza watingandovhotera kupinda muSDC* [when time comes to elect a new SDC, we sit down at village level and discuss to see who we can vote for to get onto the SDC] ...*It must be someone with the voice, someone trustworthy, someone who can work well with people and has the energy and 'ane rudo' ne* [with a passion for] *development at heart. It must be a person who can represent our interests, and who attends all meetings and reports back to the people.*

In another conversation with village chairperson Rureri “... *villagers must choose a person who can unite parents and the school ... a bridge connecting us and the school, you see that is important.* As one woman-

**Table 1: Characteristics of Representation**

Representation as Someone:

- with a voice;
- energetic;
- trustworthy;
- with people skills;
- passionate about development;
- who attends meetings;
- who feeds back to the people;
- a unifier of parents;
- who is a bridge connecting parents and the school;
- who protects and serves interests of each village community; and
- who facilitates communication.

The above attributes depict a desire by local and traditional leaders for a parent member of the SDC with a drive for cooperation, connectedness of stakeholders, development and collaboration, value for community, and someone trusted to provide what Popoola (2013) and Rose (2003) term ‘genuine representation,’ and able to work with the people on collective agenda in school development. Agreeably, some of the attributes are depicted in Makado’s et al. (2015) investigation of intercessory attributes of traditional leaders in and their influence on school education.

*Mobilising Villager Efforts: Local and traditional leaders as drivers of school development*

Evidence from interviews with all three school heads revealed their consideration of local and traditional leaders as the custodians of the land and the villagers, and as gatekeepers to the local communities (villages). The school heads in this study respected the traditional and political authority of kraalheads and village chairpersons respectively, and thus actively involved them in school governance (SDC) issues. As school head A put it emphatically,

*Without the ‘sabhuku’ and village chairman [/chairwoman], ‘hazvifambi’ [nothing moves] – no plan can succeed because these leaders are the powerhouse of development and the*

kraalhead [Sabhuku], Ms Shumba emphasised, “*Representation [humiririri] is a communication mechanism.* Findings also revealed that geographically dispersed and large village communities had two representatives on the SDC. This was the case around one school in the resettlement area as documented on a chart of SDC members in the school head’s office at School C.

In the above evidence, both the local village chairpersons and traditional leaders considered social-relational qualities or attributes of village representatives on the SDC. Of particular interest to the researchers was the meaning participants attached to the concept of ‘representation’. Interview data revealed a generally held view of what representation meant to participants, as summarised in the table below.

*people. We actually call [invite] them, the sabhukus and the village chairmen [/chairwomen], alongside the SDC to brief them on school plans that require their input.*

We observed one SDC meeting at school C, and among members introduced to us were four *sabhukus*/kraalheads and two village chairmen. One of the kraalheads was a woman who felt quite comfortable and assertive among male members, although there was another woman member of the SDC in her sixties. The main agenda of the SDC meeting was planning for an upcoming speech and prize giving day that was to come in four months from the time of the study. The contributions made in the meeting, it emerged, emphasised the fact that the *sabhukus* and village chairpersons were forces to reckon with when it came to SDC planning sessions and mobilisation of the villagers. One village chairperson, Mr Chirinda [not his real name], assured us after the meeting saying, “*Here in rural areas ‘tine nzira dzedu’ [we have our own ways] of making things move to support the school.*” One of us later had a follow-up conversation with this village chairperson on what their “*own ways of making things move*” were or meant. He indicated that after meeting the SDC and school head, they held meetings at the village level to deliberate on logistics and the role each parent or household should play, or contributions required.

Anyone who failed risked being brought to the village court for a hearing. Similarly, one *sabhuku* bluntly said,

*Asingadi kushanda nevamwe anobuda zvake mubhuku mangu ondotsvaka kwekuenda [meaning anyone who refuses to work/cooperate with others will leave my kraal (book) and look for elsewhere to settle]. Serious cases we call them to the dare [Sabhuku's court]. If the person remains hard-headed, we report him/her further up 'kudare kwaVaShe kana kwaMambo' [to the headman's or chief's court for trial].*

Acknowledging the support of local and traditional leaders on school development issues, School Head C underlined thus, “*Once convinced, they sell our ideas and mobilise the village forces back in the villages, and everyone plays their part.*” As soon as ideas were sold to them and they were convinced, local and traditional leaders “*take the lead to plan functions or activities where parents take active roles,*” further explained Mr Mukono, a parent SDC member. Further probing revealed that such functions and activities planned for included speech and prize giving days, council-back-to-church authority school-handover ceremonies, food preparation, school feeding scheme, moulding bricks, carrying river sand, gravel, et cetera. In these activities, as participants indicated generally, local and traditional leaders motivate, energize the villagers, and they model meaningful support, participation and leadership. These findings resonate with observations made by Mbokazi and Bhengu (2008), Mbokazi (2012; 2015), and by Musarandega et al. (2018) on the collaborative role that local traditional leadership in South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively can play in local rural school governance and school development. Their authority and power to influence echoes Rugonye and Rupande's (2016) finding that local and traditional leadership are the entry point of development projects and programmes in rural Zimbabwe.

### 4.3 Enforcing Compliance to Resolutions

Another recurring theme depicting the place of local and indigenous traditional leadership was the part they played in enforcing resolutions adopted/made at SDC meetings and parents' general assemblies. From the evidence generated through interviews with school heads and parent members of the SDC, the *Sabhukus*/kraalheads and village chairmen were very active in enforcing implementation of resolutions. One village chairman at school B explained,

*Everyone respects agreements reached. Remember, we will have debated and agreed. Anyone with a problem has to approach the SDC and alternatives are explored. Say its failure to pay money contributions towards a function like we were planning today [they*

*had held a meeting together with the SDC to plan for the speech and prize giving day], a parent can do a piece job at the school and we record that as payment.*

School heads were in agreement that local and traditional leaders owned the communities and had control mechanisms and strategies that enhanced realisation of resolutions made by the SDC. When asked what mechanisms were employed by local and traditional leaders, school head at school B indicated, “*kkkkk [laughing]... vanosotana uye vanozivana. Vanenzira dzavo [they sort each other out, these people know one another well. They have their ways].*” Evidently, success of school governance depended in part on, and got support from local and indigenous traditional leaders.

Data also revealed that decision making in local school governance followed a democratic process of debate (involving the parents, local and traditional leaders and educators) and consensus, resulting in adoption of resolutions. As Popoola (2013) argues, greater and broader participation involving also traditional leaders brings together experience, knowledge and technical know-how into better service. With ‘*their own ways*’ of enlisting compliance, collective community values, instituting reprimands and providing due process through hearings, traditional leaders enhanced the role of the community in school governance and development through their involvement in school governance issues. Aware of their powers as traditional custodians of the land, local culture and values, and the people, findings showed that traditional leaders had traditional authority and structures, as well as ‘*their own ways*’ of controlling and enforcing compliance among the community members. This aligns with Mbokazi's (2012) findings where traditional leaders in South Africa invoked their powers and authority towards ensuring safety and security of school property, and against bringing of weapons to school by learners. In Zimbabwe, as sanctioned by the New 2013 Constitution Amendment Number 20, and in line with Agustine's (2016) observation, traditional leaders as custodians of the land and its natural resources have legal authority to control people under their jurisdiction. As Musarandega et al. (2018) found, chiefs, headman and village heads/kraalheads [*sabhukus*] have power to manage grassroots communities on the basis of authority and power vested in them. Thus, they play significantly into the matrix of school and community development initiatives. Arguably, their participation in school development efforts under the auspices of the SDC remains a legal obligation and part of their role.

### 4.4 Mediating and Resolving Fights/Conflicts: making peace

Evidence from documents and interviews indicated active participation of local and traditional leaders in school-community conflicts and making peace between

fighting parties in school governance and development. Such conflicts could be staff-parent, school-community, or parent-parent in relation to school governance and development issues. As one parent member of the SDC acknowledged, conflict in school governance was inevitable. *“Hakuna kusina nhenhe kana kuti zvigogodza,”* he said, [meaning ‘every organisation or community will always have misfits, hard-headed, trouble makers’]. At school A under study, a local kraalhead, Mr Hore, narrated thus,

*We had a case where one sabhuku [kraalhead] pegged stands on school land. We tried as kraalheads in the area together with the SDC to restrain one of us and we failed. We called in the local councillor, and she failed. The case had to be taken to the District Administrator (Ministry of Local Government and National Housing) who resolved it. You see, one sabhuku somewhere even pegged stands within growth point area.*

The above scenarios evidence school governance issues permeating the physical boundaries of the school and SDC outward into involving, naturally, the local government and traditional leadership in school governance issues. The above excerpt points to inevitability of conflict in some instances, between local traditional leadership and local government authorities, as Center of Conflict Management and Transformation (2014) observes. According to Tshitangoni and Francis (2017), tensions and conflict characterise relationships between local political (democratically elected) leaders and traditional leaders in some instances. Similarly, there was evidence too of conflict between local parents and the school heads of schools studied. Interviewing parent committee members of the SDC at school B, data revealed that a local female parent blackmailed the SDC and school head alleging misuse and embezzlement of SDC funds. When probed on how it happened, one parent explained,

*This woman lost election onto the SDC and was very angry. She really wanted to be on the SDC and people did not vote her in. She then wrote a letter and took it in person to the Provincial Education Director (PED). See, government is very good – the PED sent the letter back to the school head. The SDC deliberated and invited her [the complainant and author of the letter] and her sabhuku to a meeting. She had no evidence and she kept shouting allegations. You see, she had no respect for authority and always causes confusion at meetings even today. She wants to be everywhere and in everything. Eventually, the meeting resolved to refer the matter to the Headman [VaShe] who intervened. She was strongly reprimanded and told to apologise. So, the school head, on*

*behalf of the SDC, later wrote and sent a report to the PED.*

In a conversational interview, the local headman, VaMurambwi cited the above case as illustration of how the headman as a traditional leader gets involved in local school governance issues. Asked how he responded to the case, Headman Murambwi said, *Of course I warned her strongly and instructed her to apologise to the school head and SDC. I told the woman that I won’t tolerate such mischief in my area and that next time, I will impose a fine as penalty.* From the findings, as is the case with South Africa’s traditional leaders (Mbokazi, 2012), local traditional leaders invoked their legal and traditional authority in resolving conflicts in matters of, and affecting, local school governance thus, using ‘their own ways.’ Their power base lies in the authority and respect vested in them as traditional leaders (Musarandega et al., 2018).

#### **4.5 Willing Desire to Get Involved in Local School Governance**

In a separate interview, the area Headman/Sadunhu/VaShe, Murambwi (a retired school teacher himself) confirmed intervening in resolving school related issues. Headman Murambwi further indicated that he intervened only in extreme cases where the *sabhuku* failed to reconcile conflicting parties and the matter is referred to his court, or where one party felt unhappy with the position or ruling taken by *sabhuku*, or a villager fighting the SDC or the school. Asked whether he desired to be involved in school governance issues, Headman/Vashe Murambwi’s response was,

*Kwazvo (Absolutely), that is how it should be. I want to be involved more and know the schools’ agenda especially on school development issues and problems encountered by my people. The schools are ours ... our future, and we must support their development*

Further exploring school-related matters where local and traditional leadership got involved, data from observation, documents (SDC minutes) and interviews showed that the kraalheads/village heads [*sabhukus*] and village chairpersons were actively involved in infrastructure development plans, learner welfare issues, determination of levies, budgeting for specific school functions such as prize giving days, setting up village task forces or subcommittees to prepare for functions, perform tasks at school, providing construction material or moulding bricks for school construction projects. As such, local and traditional leaders actively participated in meeting legislated objectives of the SDC enshrined in Statutory Instrument (SI) 87 of 1992, and Zimbabwe Education Act, *Revised Edition*, 1996. Findings in this regard point to the importance also attached to the role that local traditional leadership plays in meeting the mandate of local school governance bodies in South

Africa (Mbokazi & Bhengu, 2008; Mbokazi, 2015). While the South African legislation on composition of local school boards includes local traditional leaders in school governance at the local level (Mabasa & Leyane, 2002; Mbokazi & Bhengu, 2008; Mbokazi, 2012; 2015), the Zimbabwean legislation on education is silent on the place of local and traditional leaders in local school governance. Yet, data in this study revealed a desire by the local Headman/*Sadunhu/Vashe* to be involved in school-level issues, further confirming Makado's et al. (2015) findings. As the headman/*sadunhu/VaShe*, a former schoolteacher himself, said in a conversational interview,

*I want to know their problems, and I will always come in and help ... they are my children too. You know, like provision of borehole water ndinobatsira [I can assist/help] from allocations dzatinenge tapiwa kwaDA [we will have been given by the District Administrator (DA)].*

As observed in a study in Zimbabwe by Makado et al. (2015) on personal attributes of traditional leaders, educated traditional leaders played a supportive role when it came to school education issues. Similarly, we find the lowest level in the traditional leadership hierarchy (village head/kraalhead/sabhuku) participating in implementation of school programmes and projects. Arguably, bringing in local and traditional leadership into the matrix of local school governance broadens and increases genuine participation (Rose, 2003), and leads to improved service provision (Popoola, 2013; Rugonye & Rupande, 2016).

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Evidence in this study points to a convergence of different authorities that include local political and traditional leadership that played into the matrix that formed the context and stakeholder constituencies of rural primary school governance at the local level. Even though their participation is not legally sanctioned in Zimbabwe's education laws, participation of local government's grassroots political and traditional leaders in local school governance depicts active involvement in areas such as, first, planning and mobilising local villager efforts towards school development; Second, using their traditional and political authority, traditional leaders and village chairpersons respectively, had their 'own ways,' and power bases that form part of traditional knowledge and social control mechanisms for enforcing compliance with school governance resolutions by parents or villagers. Their role is seen also in utilisation of traditional structures (Headman's and Kraalhead's court) for mediation and conflict resolution in matters relating to school governance and school development projects. As such, and even though not legally sanctioned, local

school governance infused both local political and indigenous traditional leadership, which evidently emerge as indispensable in the local governance matrix of rural primary schools.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Findings from this study point to the need for sustained research and documentation towards building a body of literature that acknowledges the place of local political and indigenous traditional leadership in the rural school governance matrix for use in school leadership preparation and induction programmes. In the absence of legal frames mandating their involvement in local school governance, findings suggest the need for formal co-option and representation of kraalheads, headmen and village chairpersons onto the formal SDC structure as a way of broadening participation in local school governance to rope in benefits that accrue from their legal/traditional authority and power in realisation of the rural school governance and development agenda. Furthermore, school heads and SDCs must provide leadership that reaches out to, and strengthens relationships with, local and traditional leaders on school governance matters through selling the school development agenda as well as inviting local and traditional leaders to general parents' meetings and SDC development planning meetings.

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