Opportunities and Challenges for Local Government Institutions in Localising Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe

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15 Opportunities and Challenges for Local Government Institutions in Localising Sustainable Development Goals in Zimbabwe

Cowen Dziva and Itai Kabonga

Abstract

The post-2015 development Agenda is premised on 'leaving no one behind' in its quest to realise sustainable development. Consequently, there have been increasing clarion calls for the localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This qualitative study interrogates the potential of key governance and development institutions in localising SDGs in Zimbabwe. Data were gathered through literature review and key informant interviews with 25 purposively and conveniently sampled leaders and experts in local development. With a focus on traditional leadership and the Rural District Councils (RDCs), the chapter unearths a wide range of opportunities for infusing SDG targets into by-laws, policy and development plans; forging of partnerships for community and resource mobilisation; and funding of SDGs, conflict management, service provision and ecological resource management in rural communities. In practice, however, the potential of local government institutions to localise SDGs is limited by institutional incapacity, resource constraints, limited autonomy and imperfect flow of information and data on SDGs, political patronage and corrupt tendencies. Resultantly, the implementation of SDGs by a majority of local institutions has been piecemeal and insignificant. The chapter vouches for capacity building and resourcing of local institutions and their leaders to understand and effectively localise SDGs.

Keywords

Traditional leadership · Local institutions · Localisation · Development

1 Introduction

The expiry of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 saw the United Nations General Assembly (2016) adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as the new global development policy. Unlike the MDGs which had 8 goals, the adopted framework is guided by 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 168 targets and 247 indicators meant to eradicate poverty and guarantee a secure and sustainable future for the world by 2030. The Agenda for Sustainable Development has been hailed for taking into cognisance the core

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dimensions of sustainability, namely, social progress, economic growth and environmental protection (Nabarro 2016). The 17 SDGs are grouped into five categories, namely people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership (Vaggi 2016). This clearly shows the determination of drafters to deal with real challenges affecting humanity on the globe. Thus, many regard Agenda 2030 to be transformative in nature as it seeks to 'end poverty and hunger, while safeguarding the planet' (Nabarro 2016, p. 23). The former UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, further touted the Agenda as 'a to-do list for people and planet, and a blueprint for success' (Wills 2016, p. 3).

Of the 17 goals, many UN member states, including Zimbabwe, have prioritised certain goals for implementation. In Zimbabwe, the government prioritised the following ten goals: 2–9, 13 and 17, as italicised in Box 15.1. The ten SDGs prioritised by Zimbabwe impact the jurisdiction of local institutions in relation to the provision of basic services including health, education, water and sanitation, food, proper management and harnessing of ecological resources for sustainable community development.

As good as the vision of the SDG framework seems, it takes strong and committed local institutions to implement and work towards the realisation of sustainable development at grassroots levels. Indeed, the persistence of development challenges in the world is not only a result of poor policies and plans, but more too a result of the failure to translate plans into firm action, results and reality for communities. Of late, the failure of global policies to change lives has been a result of limited buy-in and support at grassroots level. Resultantly, the post-MDG framework has increasingly called for the localisation of SDGs, which denotes the 'process of defining, implementing, and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national and subnational sustainable goals and targets' (UNDP 2014, p. 3). Localisation relies on varied local stakeholders harnessing their resources for local development. For these reasons, RDCs and traditional leadership institutions' partnerships with communities and private and public actors remain at the heart of SDG localisation processes in Zimbabwe. By their nature, RDCs and the institution of traditional leadership are well positioned to engage and involve more stakeholders to work towards the realisation of Agenda 2030's aim to 'leave no one behind' in society.

Many studies that support Agenda 2030's localisation at grassroots level where poverty remains pervasive have been documented (Reddy 2016; UNDP 2014). Yet, limited studies exist after the Agenda's launch to untangle how local government institutions have fared with SDG localisation in Africa. This study unearths the opportunities and limitations of RDCs and traditional leaders in localising SDGs in Zimbabwe. It is now 5 years after the adoption of the framework, and many local institutions' experiences remain undocumented even though these experiences can be useful in informing policymakers on the course of action to take towards the realisation of SDGs (Fenton and Gustafsson 2017; Reddy 2016; Gustafsson and Ivner 2017). Fenton and Gustafsson (2017) aver that the knowledge gap related to localisation of SDGs into municipalities' existing strategies, policies and practice needs to be elucidated by research to enhance effective and rapid implementation. Therefore, the chapter builds a case for strengthening the localisation of the Agenda 2030 discourse in Zimbabwe and other global South nations.

Box 15.1 : The Sustainable Development Goals Prioritised by Zimbabwe

- SDG 2: Zero hunger
- SDG 3: Good health and well-being
- SDG 4: Quality education
- SDG 5: Gender equality
- SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation
- SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy
- SDG 8: Decent work and growth
- SGD 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- SDG 13 Climate action
- SDG 16: Peace and justice

Source: Authors

The chapter has five sections. It starts with this introduction and background which provide a synopsis of SDG framework and the localisation mantra. This section is followed by a review of literature on the composition and structure of traditional leadership and RDCs in Zimbabwe. Thereafter, the chapter explains the research method used which is followed by the presentation and discussion of findings regarding the opportunities and challenges of local government institutions in localising SDGs. The chapter ends with a conclusion and policy options for effective localisation and realisation of SDGs.

2 Literature Review

There has been growing consensus that the implementation of global development goals is largely hampered by limited grassroots support in the global South (Reddy 2016; Jime´nez-Aceituno et al. 2020; Chirisa 2012; Fenton and Gustafsson 2017; Moallemi et al. 2020). Thus, studies have been calling for strengthening of bottom-up initiatives to improve local knowledge, ownership and, ultimately, localisation of global development goals (Reddy 2016; Moallemi et al. 2020; UNDP 2014). By its nature, the localisation process involves concrete tools, mechanisms, innovations, platforms and processes for effective translation of development agenda into results at grassroots level (Reddy 2016). The localisation process thus places local governments at the centre of all efforts through which global development ideals and targets can be fulfilled (United Cities and Local Governments 2016).

In Zimbabwe, the key local government institutions in rural areas include the RDC and traditional leadership. This chapter deliberately excludes the DA from the focus of the study as this office directly works with RDCs and traditional leaders in varied ways. There exists over 60 RDCs established by the Constitution of Zimbabwe, and operationalised by the RDCA to represent and manage the affairs of rural communities (Chigwata 2018). The specific roles of RDCs include making by-laws on numerous issues that impact the realisation of SDGs, including bush fires, fisheries, fences, agricultural and related services, animal diseases and obstruction of water flow (RDCA 1988). RDCs implement their mandate through the elected Council and its administrative arm comprised of experts in socio-economic development fields. As the highest decision-making body, the Council is made of councillors, each democratically elected by voters to represent, foster accountability and, above all, enhance the performance of the local authority. The councillors sit and participate in five mandatory committees (Finance Committee, Town Board, the Roads Committee, Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) and the Rural District Development Committee (RDDC)) and other committees and subcommittees as may be created by the RDC. Some of these committees have oversight and policy development roles, while others have implementation roles which they undertake with supervision from the Council (Chigwata 2018). While councillors participate in many of these committees as a group, each of them has the chance to chair the WADCO in their respective wards.

The traditional leadership institution remains another key local government institution for SDG localisation in Zimbabwe. It is composed of 271 paramount chiefs, 452 headman and 2500 village heads who are the custodians of religion, culture and agents of development in their respective areas (Chigwata 2018; Musekiwa 2012). The village head chairs the village assembly, which brings together all inhabitants of over 18 years in the village to partake in development planning and implementation (Chigwata 2018). The village head reports to the headman—a sub-chief—who then reports to the paramount chief of an area (Chakaipa 2010; Musekiwa 2012). The headman, together with the local councillor and village heads, also oversees the work of the village assemblies and reviews their plans before their incorporation in rural district development plans. By their nature, the traditional leadership institution and the RDC are well positioned and capable of spearheading local development in Zimbabwe (Chigwata 2018; Musarandega et al. 2018; Ringson 2017).

Although various studies have examined RDCs and the institution of traditional leadership in relation to spearheading development from below (Chirisa 2012; Chigwata 2018; Musarandega *et al.* 2018; Ringson 2017), their potential in localising global development ideals has received less attention. A study by Chirisa (2012) focused on the potential of African local governments to localise MDGs. While the study's results remain key in ensuring a better understanding of the opportunities and pitfalls in localisation of global goals in the global South, the study was concerned with MDG framework, and was only focused on looking at urban and rural councils at the exception of traditional leadership institution. Thus, there exists a paucity of literature on the efforts of local government institutions to implement SDGs in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular.

The scarcity of studies on SDG localisation persists despite a burgeoning global literature that largely speaks of local government institutions' cutting-edge advantages for fulfilment of this cause (Reddy 2016; Bowen et al. 2017; Fenton and Gustafsson 2017; Florida 2015; Gustafsson and Ivner 2017). Many of these studies unravel the broader spectrum of responsibilities and institutional opportunities, conditions necessary and challenges for SDG localisation (Florida 2015; Morita et al. 2020). One cutting-edge advantage of local governments remains the coincidence that many of the SDG content and targets speak directly to local institutions' mandate in community development (Kemp, Parto & Gibson 2005). For Gustafsson and Ivner (2017, p. 302), this alone is enough evidence that 'many of the goals will have to be dealt with locally'. As they are domiciled in local contexts, local governments are strategically positioned to identify the poor and direct resources towards poverty alleviation and enhancing local people's access to food, training and education, health and other necessities for improved well-being of local communities (Reddy 2016; Kemp et al. 2005).

Reddy (2016) further speaks of local governments' abilities to effectively manage collective resources, and to reform land tenure in ways that protect the rights of the poor (United Cities and Local Governments 2016). They are also strategically positioned to combat climate change, protect the environment and support agricultural production for greater food security of their inhabitants (Morita et al. 2020; Florida 2015). Local governments' improvement of infrastructure attracts investment and development of industries that result in local production, economic growth, access to markets and ultimately employment creation, and local food chains (Morita et al. 2020).

In many studies for localisation of global goals, local governments are increasingly viewed as models for gender equality and women empowerment through non-discriminatory service provision and fair employment practices (Hendriks 2018; United Cities and Local Governments 2015; Reddy 2016). As the major service providers, 'local governments can have a significant impact on women's lives by using fair employment practices and ensuring non-discriminatory service provision to citizens' (United Cities and Local Governments 2015, p. 6). Gender-balanced local government structures are poised to prioritise and mainstream gender equality, and above all challenge gender stereotypes, thereby becoming role models to young women and girls (Hendriks 2015). With their proximity and wielding power in local communities, many local government institutions are strategically positioned to combat violence and other harmful practices that are detrimental to the realisation of equality and sustainable local development ideals (United Cities and Local Governments 2016).

Local governments also remain key in resource mobilisation through public-private partnerships and revenue collection for pro-poor service delivery (UNDP 2014; Reddy 2016; Hendriks 2018). According to Gustafsson and Ivner (2017, p. 301), local institutions are 'constant local actors close to citizens and they can also influence other actors through their strategies' to fund local development efforts. In many developing countries, Zimbabwe included, however, funds generated by local institutions have been marred with accountability challenges (Chirisa 2012; Chigwata 2018). These corrupt and accountabil-

ity challenges can heavily affect prioritisation of SDG goals and targets (Hendriks 2018). Coupled with underfunding from central government, many municipalities cannot function properly and look after the needs of the poor and special interest communities (Hendriks 2018; Chirisa 2012).

Other identified challenges for localisation of global development ideals include weak governance systems, policy and institutional inconsistency, competing local interests, resource constraints, limited access to information about development strategies and models, and technology (Moallemi et al. 2020; Chirisa 2012; Stafford-Smith et al. 2017; Reddy 2016; Bowen et al. 2017; Gustafsson and Ivner 2017). In a study by Morita et al. 2020 in Japan and Indonesia, a weak governance and institutional system was found inhibitive to the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of SDGs at the local level. Similar sentiments are deduced from Weymouth and Hartz-Karp (2018), who found strong governance and accountability to be key in localisation of SDG targets. With regard to localisation of MDGs in Africa, and Zimbabwe, Chirisa (2012) identified gaps to include human and financial resource challenges.

While there is growing consensus that local governments are potentially well positioned to localise SDGs, it is less clear how they are faring in practice. Many emerging global experiences on the subject are generally symptomatic of local governments' potential (Hendriks 2018; Reddy 2016; Gustafsson and Ivner 2017) without a deeper interrogation of their localisation of SDGs in practice. It therefore remains important that this study rigorously analyses local governance systems with a view to understand their performance and effectiveness in implementing SDGs from below.

3 Materials and Methods

The study is premised on a qualitative research approach to understand the opportunities and challenges of the localisation of SDGs in rural Zimbabwe. Data for the study were gathered through a review of extant literature and key informant interviews with 25 respondents working in local governance and development. Of the 25 respondents, 18 were purposively and conveniently recruited from local institutions and non-state actors from Mwenezi and Chiredzi districts of Masvingo province while the remainder 7 were from Mberengwa district in the Midlands province of Zimbabwe. In many instances, the study relied on the contacts of CEOs of RDCs and DAs to reach out to local leaders, and experts in their respective districts for interviews. For state institutions, the study reached out to five traditional leaders (mainly chiefs), three councillors, two chief executive officers and three DAs of the selected districts. The study further interviewed nine officers for government departments including for rural agricultural extension officers, environmentalists and general healthcare providers. Their diversity and the varied socio-economic sectors they represent made them strategic informants with insights on SDG localisation in Zimbabwe. The study further reached out to three local development experts from disadvantaged groups and civil society organisations working to advance local socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. It is from these experts that the researchers gained insights on the mandate, practices and prevailing challenges of RDCs and traditional leadership institutions in localising SDGs.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the study utilised phone and skype interviews. The researchers reached out to the participants to seek consent and make arrangements for the interviews, which were normally conducted a few days from the notification date. With consent from participants, some interviews were recorded for later transcription.

Primary data were triangulated with extant literature on local governance and development. Documents that were reviewed with the aim of understanding the opportunities and gaps in localising SDGs included laws and policies regulating local government institutions, as well as the Constitution of Zimbabwe, the Traditional Leaders Act and the Rural District Councils Act (RDCA). The study also utilised white and grey

literature from books, journals and newspaper reports on the efforts and challenges of local government institutions in Zimbabwe.

Data were analysed in accordance with the opportunities and challenges of local government institutions in localising SDGs. With the thematic analysis technique, the study managed to extract the sentiments of participants and documented views in the extant literature on prospects for the localisation of SDGs in Zimbabwe.

4 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.1 Opportunities and Practices of Local Government Institutions

Local government institutions are presented with various opportunities to translate SDG targets into firm action and concrete results for local communities in Zimbabwe. By their nature, local institutions have a broad community development mandate, possess legal power, command respect and are closer to the grassroots, something that makes them indispensable in the localisation of SDGs. This section untangles the wider opportunities available for RDCs and traditional leadership to localise SDGs through policy formulation, coordination, resource and community mobilisation, service provision and, above all, peace building.

4.2 By-Laws, Policy and Development Plan Formulation

Local institutions are involved in legal reform, policy formulation and implementation for community governance and development. While many of the laws and policies are made by central government, by-laws and financial and development plans are made by local institutions. Besides, local leaders such as councillors, headmen and village heads sit in various committees and, together with locals, draw financial and development plans for implementation while taking cognisance of the prevailing geopolitical environment in their respective communities. These processes present opportunities for local leadership to infuse and mainstream gender and other critical issues as advocated by the SDG framework. Cognisant of the need to localise SDGs, local leaders are poised to come up with development policies and plans infused with SDG targets. Upon adoption, the SDG infused policy and development plans are relayed and cascaded to grassroots by local leaders, mainly councillors and their respective communities, for onward implementation. The inclusive nature of the process allows for community buy-in and understanding of SDG infused policies and development plans for effective implementation and realisation.

Another opportunity to integrate SDGs presents itself when traditional leaders and their advisors draft guidelines for governing their communities in line with national laws and policies. The guidelines include those for determining fines for diverse crimes committed by community members. Accordingly, leaders come up with fines for varied issues that, if kept unchecked, affect community development and realisation of SDGs. It emerged from this study that for wanton cutting down of trees, streambank cultivation and other practices that damage the environment or affect community harmony, one is liable to pay a fine in the form of cattle, goats, chickens or monetary equivalent, depending on the gravity of the matter. In some instances, the guidelines stipulate that the offender pay a fine to the traditional leader as well as restitution to the complainant.

The institution of traditional leadership is also strategically positioned to lobby and advocate for modification and abolishment of inimical and harmful practices which violate human rights and limit the realisation of SDGs. With the 2013 Constitution having outlawed harmful traditional and cultural practices such as child marriages, child pledging and domestic violence, traditional leaders are also amending their guidelines to stipulate fines for these anti-SDG practices. While some leaders have been accused of fanning inim-

ical practices such as virginity testing and child marriages (Sithole and Dziva 2019), many traditional leaders interviewed for this study are reliable actors in ending many of these harmful practices. In their explanations, traditional leaders confirmed using varied forums to discourage societies from harmful practices. The actions by local leaders are commendable considering the prevalence and implications of harmful practices that militate against gender equality, educational attainment and ultimately social development. If left unresolved, practices such as domestic violence often result in family disintegration and destitution on the part of children, injuries and even death on the part of the victim (Dziva et al. 2020). When this happens, the realisation of many SDGs will largely remain a pipe dream.

4.3 Coordination of Local Development

The local government structures have the opportunity to localise SDGs as they coordinate planning, implementation and monitoring of community development projects in each district. Critical in this coordination is the fact that technical experts (DA, the Council and its secretariat) are involved most in the process at district level. For instance, the legal requirement that the DA coordinates the RDDC and subsequent community development in a district allows for this office to direct development opportunities to where they are needed most. Discussion with some DAs also confirmed how they utilise this opportunity to direct local investors and NGOs to areas where they have comparative advantages to leave a mark in the realisation of SDGs and wider community development. Because they possess knowledge of their districts and development issues, the DAs can critically assist in the localisation of SDGs.

The decentralised structures of RDCs and traditional leadership make such institutions integral players in the endeavour to complete the localisation of SDGs in Zimbabwe. Owing to their decentralised structures and platforms, local institutions can effectively relay SDG targets to communities, and make them participate in identifying local opportunities and strategies for the realisation of SDGs at the lower levels of the society. With so much local participation and flow of information, there can be mutual agenda setting and a shared vision in SDG implementation. This is likely to result in the smooth implementation of SDGs, whereby leaders understand contextual and first-hand challenges and opportunities to tap into for the realisation of SDGs in their communities.

4.4 Enforcement of By-Laws and Policies

Local institutions use various means to enforce laws and policies in their respective communities. The power that local institutions wield in enforcing mechanisms remains an opportunity for the effective implementation of SDGs. With their local courts, traditional leaders preside over cases and fine community members who are found guilty of anti-development actions and practices. For grave criminal cases, traditional leaders directly refer to police and magistrates' courts. In relation to environmental protection, the leaders confirmed to be fining guilty community members for causing veld fires, deforestation and stream-bank cultivation and triggering erosion through the use of sledges.

It also emerged from discussions with environmental health technicians that traditional leaders are playing a key role in enforcing COVID-19 health regulations. All those who disregard social distancing by holding their cultural and traditional functions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic are fined by local chiefs. The EHT further explained how traditional leaders' enforcement of rules can help reduce infant and maternal mortality as families of women who give birth at home and not at clinic are made to pay a goat as fine. This resembles the Malawi scenario in which mothers were fined 500 to 3000 Malawian kwacha (US$1–$5) for giving birth at home instead of going to the clinic (Walsh et al. 2018). It also emerged from the study that failure to have one's children immunised during a

national immunisation programme attracts a fine for the household. Due to the respect, power and coercive means of traditional leaders, many communities choose to comply with set guidelines, thereby working towards the realisation of SDGs in communities.

Three of the five traditional leaders interviewed for the study, however, complained of resistance from locals and of limited means to enforce their court decisions. In most instances, the failure to pay fines and comply with local court orders will see the chiefs' court instituting other measures including threatening to forcibly evict the offender from the community. In one case scenario, a chief in Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe presided over a case where a villager allegedly caught his wife having sex with another man in their matrimonial home. The chief banished the woman from his community. When the woman refused to leave the area, the chief in question asked his subjects to evict the couple by getting rid of the fence surrounding the homestead and cattle kraal (Mashundu 2019).

It is such radical actions by traditional leaders in compelling non-complying members that result in leaders violating human rights and defeating the SDG spirit. Even though the chief was practising his culture, his actions largely violated the family's wider rights, including their right to property. The case confirms how some traditional leaders, if unmonitored, may violate the rights of their subjects. Relatedly, some communities accuse traditional leaders of using their powers to discriminate and punish their perceived enemies and to extort people's livestock in frivolous and trumped-up charges. As Rukuni et al. (2015) aptly captured, the partiality of traditional leaders when adjudicating cases is most evident in politically sensitive matters, or where these leaders have interests which involve their relatives. The plight of aggrieved persons is made worse by the fact that justice by most traditional leaders lacks proper appeals and review mechanisms. When this happens, the SDG framework's spirit of fairness, inclusivity and justice is compromised.

Nonetheless, traditional leaders make use of traditional and cultural values and norms to ensure community development, and the subsequent realisation of SDGs. As the custodians of culture and tradition, local leaders control, oversee and ensure the sustainable utilisation of ecological resources by their communities. Using cultural and traditional norms and values, communities are often encouraged to practise sound utilisation of 'sacred places' within their areas including ancestral lands, heritage, mountains, rivers and forests (Musarandega et al. 2018). Traditional leaders often instil fear in their communities by telling them that vandalising 'sacred places' comes with severe punishment from ancestors or the gods. In most instances, the punishment manifests itself in different ways as the accused can, for instance, get lost, confused or rather stranded for hours, if not days, while in such forests, mountains and other sacred places.

The need for sustainable utilisation of sacred places also applies to private investors coming into the community. Accordingly, investors are forced to follow proper guidelines and produce clear plans for the sustainable usage of the resources in line with local cultures. It is upon fulfilment of these requirements that leaders can conduct rituals to cleanse and clear such sites for development investments to commence (Musarandega et al. 2018). Courtesy of these cultural and traditional norms, rural communities have seen less anti-SDG ecological damages (Marango 2017). Progressive chiefs also take advantage of such platforms to inculcate environmental sustainability and, above all, demand for their communities to accrue greater benefits and employment from the investment in their area. During the Dande Dam construction in Mashonaland Central Province of Zimbabwe, however, traditional leaders objected to the project and this stalled progress (Dodo 2013). While some blame this for stalling investment, it also results in greater local inclusion and participation in planning and utilisation of their locally found resources for poverty reduction.

4.5 Community and Resource Mobilisation

The localisation of SDGs depends on the availability of financial, natural and human resources. Local institutions are integral in mobilising communities and resources towards the implementation of SDGs. Rural based local institutions often source the greater part of their income from central government to supplement what they get from levies (Chigwata 2018). In addition to these sources, local institutions engage in private, public and local partnerships to fund community development and ultimately the realisation of SDGs. Such partnerships are echoed in SDG 17: 9, specifically targeted to 'enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all sustainable development goals, including through NorthSouth, South-South and triangular cooperation'. Courtesy of these partnerships, local government institutions have improved their financial muscle to execute life-long projects, including the drilling of boreholes and wells, and construction of small dams, bridges, schools, health facilities and communication networks in their communities. In areas where projects of this nature were implemented, they are improving local people's lives through advances in waste management, infrastructural development and access to basic services.

Local leaders are marketing investment opportunities that are found in their areas to small and medium enterprises. This helps in the development of local economies with the potential to provide services, create employment and increase the tax base for RDCs to effectively respond to community problems. Local leaders' proximity and respect in communities make them appeal to wider social, religious, economic and political groupings for increased participation in development initiatives. As diverse groupings partake in community development, they bring with them varied and key skills, interests and experiences for effective and efficient implementation of cutting-edge projects for sustainable development.

Local institutions raise awareness on the strategies needed to combat community development challenges including climate change, environmental degradation and communicable diseases. In this study, traditional leaders and councillors were found to be using their community gatherings to raise awareness on anti-SDG practices such as gender-based violence, climate change and ecological damage. In the wake of COVID-19 disease, the President of Zimbabwe Emmerson Mnangagwa pleaded with traditional leaders to sensitise their communities and combat the spread of COVID-19 in rural Zimbabwe (Machivenyika and Mugabe 2020). As a way of complying with the president's call, some local leaders utilised their community platforms to raise awareness on the novel virus' preventative measures by emphasising and encouraging communities to practise social distancing and good hygienic measures. All these efforts remain critical in the localisation of SDGs, particularly SDG 3.

It also emerged from the study that many of the external organisations operating in rural areas rely on traditional leaders as link persons to reach out to local communities. It is a norm in Zimbabwe for organisations coming to work in rural areas to notify the local leaders of their envisaged intervention. Consequently, local leaders congregate relevant committees and inform the wider community of the intended intervention. As shown by Walsh et al. (2018) in Malawi, health experts and organisations heavily relied on traditional leaders for the mobilisation of communities for campaigns and activities that discourage overreliance on traditional birth attendants. Likewise, this study found local leaders to be working hand in glove with outside organisations operating in rural areas. The outsiders often leave their flyers and pamphlets with local leaders for onward distribution and information dissemination to all corners of their communities. With the assistance of headmen, village heads and messengers, chiefs easily cascade information, distribute IEC materials and place posters at strategic places such as community water sources and service centres to easily catch the attention of and reach out to wider

society. It is under these circumstances that the study found local leaders to be reliable partners in the localisation of SDGs in Zimbabwe.

4.6 Maintenance of Peace and Justice

Chiefs and councillors implement SDG 16 through endogenous measures in managing local development affairs, preserving peace and ensuring access to justice in communities. Chigwata (2018) revealed that the dispute resolution role takes up about 55% of the official time of chiefs in their districts. In their conflict management practices, traditional leaders mediate and seek to resolve family and community disputes, including gender-based violence, land conflicts and other disagreements with potential to stall community development.

In relation to domestic violence, traditional leaders provide counselling services, reconcile conflicting couples and discourage the use of violence to resolve disputes. Traditional leaders have local courts that also act as alternative dispute resolution platforms that amicably and economically bring justice closer to the poor. One cutting-edge advantage of traditional courts remains their emphasis on 'reconciliation rather than retribution to ensure harmony among neighbours, relatives and communities in rural areas' (Keulder 1998, p. 173). In many instances, these courts' verdicts are respected and have ensured peace and tranquillity, which this study found to be vital conditions for the attainment of sustainable community development. In their negative ways, local disputes and conflicts degenerate into full-fledged intractable violence that results in internally displaced persons and refugees, deaths and wider human rights violations with potential to stall the realisation of SDGs.

This important role of local leaders has not been without challenges in rural Zimbabwe. In the heat of political competition, traditional leaders are given motor vehicles, fuel subsidies, allowances and improvements of their homes, arguably to buy their allegiance by incumbent parties and leaders (Chigwata 2018). As a consequence of such generosity, many local leaders have been found on the wrong side of the law, instigating political violence for incumbent parties. Unsurprisingly, election reports accuse traditional leaders of participating in electoral politics by playing a central role in promoting hate speech, frog marching villagers to polling stations, vote buying, intimidating and fanning political violence against opposition supporters in contravention of Section 133A of the Electoral Act of Zimbabwe (ZHRC 2018). This disturbs peace in society, and largely defeats the spirit contained in the SDG framework.

4.7 Provision of Services

Local institutions implement SDGs through the provision of essential services including food, health, education, water and sanitation for community functioning. In providing these services, local institutions work towards the realisation of varied SDGs, including goals 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (good health and wellbeing), 4 (quality education), 5 (gender equality), 6 (clean water and sanitation), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land). In relation to ensuring food security and ending hunger, local institutions periodically source agricultural inputs and food aid from the central government and non-state actors for distribution to their communities.

The provision of food by local leaders often takes two forms: unconditional aid to vulnerable groups (chronically ill persons, orphans and vulnerable children, elderly and persons with disabilities), and 'food for assets' or 'food for work' to able-bodied, but poor families. For the latter, the support is advanced after partaking in community-rebuilding projects such as gulley reclamation, rehabilitation of roads and bridges, and brick moulding for schools, halls or health facilities.

Another initiative by traditional leaders includes the *Zunde RaMambo* (the chief's granary), which is largely a measure for ensuring food self-sustenance of indigent families in a given chiefdom. In this initiative, the chief avails

a piece of land and inputs for communities to grow crops on the leaders' behalf. In this project, communities come together and collectively render services in ploughing, weeding and harvesting these fields for the leader (Ringson 2017). Community participation in *Zunde RaMambo* is also an expression of oneness, belonging, reinforced collaboration, solidarity, relationships and loyalty to the leader (Mararike 1999). Thereafter, the chief keeps the proceeds and distributes to indigent and food-insecure families in times of need. A similar initiative was also evident in Malawi where chiefs mobilised subjects to cultivate crops to aid poorer and needy families (Walsh *et al*. 2018). In doing so, traditional leaders provide safety nets for the poor families, thereby building resilience against hunger and food insecurity as advocated for by SDG 2.

While challenges of inadequacy, politicisation and erratic supplies often hamper the utility of local institutions' initiatives to fight hunger, the 'real' poor beneficiaries have found the initiatives to be supportive. From a broader sense, the provision of food and other necessities to the poor remains crucial in reducing the impetus for conflicts in rural communities. Indeed, the failure by local institutions to provide essential services has degenerated into intractable and destructive conflicts that largely hamper the realisation of SDGs in many developing nations.

In some instances, local leaders utilise their indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) to ensure the sustainable utilisation of local resources by villagers to ensure food security and mitigate the vagaries of weather (Musarandega et al. 2018). Defined as the totality of information, skills and practices acquired by local people through past experiences, observations, informal experiments and intimate understanding of their environment, IKS is largely used by community leaders to mitigate communities' vulnerabilities to climate change and diseases (Marango 2017; Musarandega et al. 2018). With little access to modern weather forecast technologies and information, local leaders invoke IKS to predict seasons and climate and adequately inform their communities on the definitive course of action to take to alleviate adverse weather conditions. This confirms Nakashima et al.'s (2012) study that IKS have for long been used to interpret incidences of meteorological phenomena such as drought, storms and floods, thereby guiding local communities through offering early warning, risk reduction and management of disasters. Similarly, traditional leaders invoke their IKS to deal with allergies and diseases in communities. In offering these solutions, local leaders have contributed a great deal to the localisation of SDGs.

5 Challenges of Local Institutions in Localising SDGs

Notwithstanding the noted opportunities and practices, local institutions have not fared well in the localisation of SDGs in Zimbabwe. In practice, many local institutions are under-capacitated to infuse, fund, implement and report on SDGs and the set targets. In addition to the already discussed challenges, this section unearths the main limitations that hinder the effectiveness of RDCs and traditional leaders in localising SDGs in Zimbabwe.

5.1 Limited Capacity

The capacity of local institutions to coordinate and implement SDGs is affected by their limited knowledge and understanding of the SDG framework. This, therefore, affects its effective infusion into local by-laws, policies and plans, and its ultimate implementation in respective communities. Within a district, a few office bearers have know-how of SDGs, and these include the DA, local authority secretariat and few councillors, whereas the majority of leaders are not well versed in SDGs. For those with limited knowledge, the localisation of SDGs remains minimal and some happens coincidentally as they are responding to community challenges in their areas of jurisdiction.

Limited education remains another challenge that limits the capacity of local leaders to effectively implement SDGs at local levels. This ema-

nates from the fact that educational qualifications are not a requirement for one to be elected a councillor and be appointed as a traditional leader in Zimbabwe. As such, many councillors and traditional leaders have not acquired formal education (Chigwata 2018). This emanates from the fact that this then brings into question their ability to effectively comprehend and deliver their mandate, especially when it comes to technical issues, including budgeting and infusing SDGs into strategic plans. More often than not, local development plans gather dust in drawers and shelves of local authorities owing to the limited capacity of councillors to implement them (Chakaipa 2010). This negatively impacts the ability of local leaders to understand SDGs, infuse them into local plans, constantly implement, track and monitor progress towards realisation.

5.2 Limited Resources

Resource constraints cause an unfathomable strain on local government institutions' capacity to effectively respond to local people's service needs. Due to many factors, including their inability to engage in vigorous revenue generation, many local authorities are not able to raise enough resources for their planned activities. RDCs in Zimbabwe are owed huge sums of money by local ratepayers (Chigwata 2018; Chakaipa 2010). While some businesses fail to honour their levy obligations because of poor business returns, others boycott as they protest poor service delivery in their areas. RDCs have also been blamed for their ineffective debt recovery mechanisms (Chigwata 2018). Other cited explanations for non-payment of taxes relate to limited awareness and arbitrary, regressive and sometimes forceful tax collection methods. All these actions make rural communities reluctant to honour their tax obligations, resulting in limited revenue for local authorities.

Saddled with these challenges, many RDCs rely on central government and external partnerships to bankroll their community development. Yet, government disbursements have been erratic and far below their requests, especially considering the recurring socio-economic crisis and political polarisation that Zimbabwe has found itself in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Despite its utility in propelling community development, donor support has its own sustainability challenge. The financial challenges of RDCs further undermine their credit worthiness to moneylenders. Thus, resource constraints largely make the SDG framework a mantra for the DA, CEO and Council chair's opening meeting statements without much action on the ground.

5.3 Political Patronage and Corruption

Local institutions' efforts to localise SDGs are also hampered by corruption and increased political interference by central government into local affairs. As noted in previous sections, the local government laws in Zimbabwe increasingly cede power to the appointing authority and responsible minister to dictate affairs of RDCs and traditional leaders. For instance, the appointments of the CEOs and officers of the RDCs and those of traditional leaders are made with consent from politicians including the president and the minister responsible for local government (RDCA 1988; Constitution of Zimbabwe 2013). The interference is even worse for elected councillors who belong to political parties. The institution of traditional leadership also receives more directives from the DA (Dodo 2013). Consequently, local leaders have become conduits through which governments and politicians of the day gain political mileage than development in rural areas.

As finances, agricultural inputs and food aid for onward distribution to their respective communities often come from and through politicians and central government officials, local leaders are often coerced to politicise such assistance. Several complaints have been made against the partisan distribution of Cyclone Idai floods and COVID-19 food aid by ZANU PF councillors and traditional leaders in uttermost disregard of

the local laws and policies requiring such leaders to be non-partisan in their operations and response to disasters (Mavhinga 2019). An investigation by the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (ZHRC) (2018) implicated Chief Makuni in partisan distribution of presidential inputs in the Rushinga Constituency. The partisan resource distribution by leaders has been done without considering gender equality and vulnerability levels of beneficiaries. Partisan aid distribution defeats the spirit enunciated in the SDG framework to 'leave no one behind'.

This study also found rampant corruption and bad governance to be significant adversaries against the localisation of SDGs. A study by Chakaipa (2010) documented the arrest and appearance of Chief Negomo of Mashonaland Central Province before the court for defrauding Mvurwi Grain Marketing Board of farming inputs (fertilisers) meant to benefit peasant farmers under the Presidential Summer Crop Season Programme. Corrupt and bad governance tendencies are also rampant within local authorities. Many local authorities in Zimbabwe have been accused of spending around 75% of their incomes on unjustifiably hefty salaries and allowances for senior management instead of service provision (Chigwata 2018). Furthermore, local authority leaders also practise corruption in allocation of resources, residential stands, handling of public funds and tenders. This explains why a considerable number of local government officials have been prosecuted for abusing their powers and council property (Chakaipa 2010). These corrupt tendencies defraud local authorities of revenue meant to fund community development and the ultimate realisation of SDGs.

The challenges of local institutions are compounded by the adversarial relationship that develops when RDCs and local chiefs compete for power in rural communities. In some instances, the adversarial relationship exists within RDCs, between experts (secretariat) and politicians (the council). The net result of these adversarial power relations and corruption becomes loss of focus concerning local government institutions' core service provision mandate and ultimately the achievement of SDGs.

5.4 Lack of Data

Equally challenging for local institutions is limited access to national data on SDG priorities, targets and progress. This study established that many local authorities find it difficult to access national SDG data and plans. Even with government prioritisation of the SDG framework, there remains limited data that has been shared with local authorities. Thus, many RDCs find it difficult to report on SDGs as the reporting templates hardly include such information. The need to create a national database of SDG localisation targets, progress and challenges remains vital for a shared national vision. This will go a long way in sharing notes on the practices and challenges of RDCs in implementing SDGs across the country. Without this data to support learning, planning and monitoring, the capacities of RDCs to localise SDGs remain limited and disjointed.

6 Conclusions

The localisation of Agenda 2030's clarion call to 'leave no one behind' hinges on concerted efforts by local government institutions, including RDCs and institution of traditional leadership, to mobilise and harness resources for their effective realisation in the global South. In rural Zimbabwe, RDCs and the institution of traditional leadership are constitutionally mandated to oversee local governance and development. This broader mandate placed upon local institutions and their proximity to local communities strategically positions them to mobilise local people and resources around them for the cause. By ensuring increased local people participation, RDCs and traditional leadership institutions improve on the capacities of locals to tap into wider community resources for the realisation of SDGs. Furthermore, local institutions are well placed to forge partnerships with outsiders to manage conflicts; reduce inequality, vulnerability to hunger and poverty; and work towards environmental sustainability. It is because of local institutions' lack of participatory approaches that ultimate efficiency, accountability, ownership and sustainable community development become unachievable.

Despite these opportunities, the chapter noted limited localisation of SDGs in Zimbabwe. The capacity of traditional leadership institutions and RDCs to localise SDGs is largely undermined by limited resources, limited education of leaders and their corrupt tendencies, political interference and patronage. Burdened with these challenges, the localisation process has only been a preserve of the DA and local authority secretariat, which have knowledge of SDGs and the set targets. For many local leaders, the implementation of SDGs has been accidental and piecemeal for they are not conversant with SDGs let alone the targets.

Overcoming these underlying impediments creates well-functioning and empowered local institutions which remain key in localising SDGs. The chapter, thus, vouches for resourcing and capacitation of local government institutions and their leaders. Capacity building poised for effective localisation of SDGs should therefore emphasise on improving institutional governance, leaders' knowledge and their abilities to spearhead positive and visionary management in all facets of life. Equally important is the need to inculcate good governance practices among players in local institutions.

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