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A Review of Provincial Peace Committees: The NPRC's Step Towards Sustainable Peacebuilding in Zimbabwe

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About Focus on Peace building Publication

This publication, *Focus on Peace Building*, is published by Heal Zimbabwe Trust to share knowledge, practical experiences and creative ideas on peacebuilding, violence prevention and conflict transformation. The publication also provides comprehensive insights on empirical grassroots peacebuilding methodologies while reflecting on diverse best practices in transitional justice, healing and reconciliation processes.

Heal Zimbabwe Trust is a peace-building organization whose efforts centres on building a peaceful, inclusive and tolerant society. We envision a, 'socially cohesive nation that enjoys tolerance, peace, and prosperity at all tiers of the society'. Our mission is to 'promote tolerance, peace and inclusive prosperity hinged on the observance of socio-economic and political rights of Zimbabwean citizens. Since establishment in 2010, Heal Zimbabwe continues working on human rights protection, implemented peace-building interventions and supported victims and survivors of diverse forms of conflict and violence. The organization's work prides in bottom-up development strategies

Introduction

The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) recently established Provincial Peace Committees (PPCs) across Zimbabwe's 10 provinces¹ a process, which shows the Commission's steps forward in facilitating transitional justice, reconciliation and healing. The PPCs are the first ever decentralized peace structures established to complement the work of the NPRC. The NPRC is one of the Independent Commission Supporting Democracy (ICSD) established in Chapter 12 (Section 252) of the Zimbabwean Constitution. It has a mandate to deal with the past human rights violations while preventing future conflicts.

¹ The 10 Provincial Peace Committees that were established in 2019 include Manicaland, Masvingo, Midlands, Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, Bulawayo, Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West and Harare Provinces.

Each established PPC is composed of between 25-30 members drawn from a wide range of stakeholders including; government departments, civil society, traditional leaders and church organizations.

To raise awareness on the importance of the PPCs, this article provides a review of these Committees, focusing on their structure, operational expectations and broadly, opportunities for sustained peacebuilding. The article also analyses challenges and possible solutions towards an effective bottom-up informed national healing and reconciliation process.

Context

The NPRC established PPCs across the 10 Provinces in Zimbabwe after successfully launching and popularizing its 5-year strategic plan through public hearings. Others events that precedes the establishment of the PPCs include parallel national healing processes such as the Political Actors Dialogue (POLAD)² and Matabeleland Collective engagement spearheaded by President Emmerson Mnangangwa, and the Church-led national dialogue. The PPCs are also coming in amid the deteriorating human rights situation and the general economic environment, which is close to a meltdown following the harsh increases in basic commodities, fuel shortages, harsh currency reforms and a blackout following a series of massive power load shedding. The high cost of living presents uncertainty on ordinary citizens' livelihoods and possibilities of civil unrest if unaddressed. These events summarizes the state of the environment in which the PPCs are going to operate, challenges they will face and

opportunities which might be strategic entry points for sustained peace and reconciliation process in Zimbabwe.

The Operational Scope of PPCs

A total of 10 PPCs were established by the NPRC in the months of May and June 2019. These committees consist of a membership of 25 – 30 people drawn from a wide range of stakeholders from the relevant province.³ Each committee is led by a Chairperson who is also a Commissioner assigned to a specific province. The Deputy Chairperson is elected from among the PPC members. Other committee members include the Secretary drawn from the NPRC staff and ordinary members drawn from Provincial stakeholders. The NPRC is yet to publish a full list of each PPC with the exception of Chairpersons and their deputies whose names are already in



Figure 1: A highlight tweet from the NPRC after establishing 10 Provincial Peace Committees

³ The membership of the PPCs consists of the Minister of State for the Province or designate, the officer commanding Police in the Province or designate, the Provincial Administrator or designate, two representatives from the Local Authorities, Two representatives from the relevant government departments, two representatives from the Traditional Leaders, Two representatives from the church and faith based organisations, two representatives from civil society organizations, two representative from the business community, two representatives from the academia, two representatives from the political parties represented in Parliament, two representatives from the youth, two representatives from women's organisations, two representatives from people living with disabilities, two representatives from war veterans, a representative from each of the Districts in the Province and any other representative as may be appropriate

²POLAD launched... Forum to help turnaround country's economy, The Chronicle <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/polad-launched-forum-to-help-turnaround-countrys-economy/> 18 May 2019

the public domain.⁴ It will be essential, however, for all PPC members' names to be publicly published so that members of the public are able to reach out to them when in need.

PPC members will serve on a one-year term upon which renewal is subject to performance and clear demonstration of positive results. Limiting term of office and tying membership renewal to performance is essential. However, there is need for the NPRC to establish citizen driven performance monitoring mechanisms for the PPCs.

The PPC membership is drawn from a pool of varied stakeholders, which is highly commendable. However, the stakeholders' inclusion list fails to deliberately state 'victims' as a specific stakeholder regardless of the fact that these victims are sectorally defined and diverse. Omitting victims makes the PPCs lose the 'victim centered and victim sensitive' attribute which is essential in any sustainable peace building process.

In addition, the PPCs meet and conduct meetings on a quarterly basis. This frequency is understandable on budgetary grounds, but the structure's daily efficiencies in addressing conflict issues affecting communities will be certainly reduced.

Meetings by PPCs must be more frequent, suggestively on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Duties of PPCs

The duties and responsibilities of the PPCs are largely drawn from the 10 functions of the NPRC as stipulated in Section 252 of the Zimbabwean Constitution and the NPRC Act.⁵

In other words, their responsibilities feed into the broader NPRC functions.

However, the PPC's responsibilities are tied down to provinces and districts within their jurisdiction. For example, one of the responsibilities is ***“to promote peace within the province, create and or facilitate for dialogue between groups and communities and for exchange of ideas on issues that may threaten peace and stability within the community.”***

While the NPRC has been devolved to the Provincial level, there is need to cascade the peace infrastructures further down to the district and ward levels for easy access to the NPRC services and general citizen participation in national healing issues.

The work of Provincial Peace Committee shall be to;

- promote peace within the Province, create and / or facilitate spaces for dialogue between groups and communities and for the exchange of ideas on issues that may threaten peace and stability within the community
- engage in confidence and trust building activities between groups and communities in conflict within the Province
- Promote tolerance building and provide strategic advice and early warning on potential threats to the peace and stability of the communities.
- Engage in public education, sensation and awareness about conflict indicators within the Province and how to ameliorate them.
- facilitate the organization of sports, arts, cultural and economic activities that build friendships, promote trust and goodwill between communities in conflict
- Organize training and other capacity building programmes for the District Peace Committee.
- responding to the issues identified within the province or emanating from the work of District Peace Committees
- Other activities necessary for the prevention of violence and the promotion of peace.

The NPRC insightfully prioritize capacity development programmes as part of the PPCs work within the province. Capacity building is critical to equip communities and stakeholders with peacebuilding skills, especially. The PPCs are also required to use sports and the creative

⁴ See NPRC Twitter account posts on 4 July 2019. <https://twitter.com/NPRCZim/status/1146822288572080128>

⁵ Section 252, Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 and National Peace and Reconciliation Act Chapter 10:32

industries as avenues to promote peace and coexistence in conflicting communities. This approach is likely to improve the use of traditional peace building mechanisms. It is very important to reiterate that focusing on specific conflict issues emanating from the province will enhance prioritization of issues, hence, leading to easy tracking of the NPRC's progress in national healing and reconciliation processes.



Figure 2: A tweet from the NPRC following the establishment of the Manicaland Provincial Peace Committee

Possible Challenges

There are several possible challenges that might be faced by the PPCs when executing their mandate. This is largely operational and administrative. The challenges identified might include but not limited to:

a) **Stifling active citizen participation** -the inclusion of high-level people or government elites in the PPCs might hinder citizen participation especially considering that some of the involved stakeholders are viewed as perpetrators of past human rights violations.

For example, the inclusion of the Minister of State for the Province and the Officer Commanding Police in the Province⁶ may in turn limit trust in the committee by the general citizens, especially victims.

- b) **Guarantee of non-recurrence** -it is difficult to guarantee non-recurrence if some people considered perpetrators are part of the Peace Committees. Victims may possibly live in perpetual trauma unless if the designates are no longer viewed as unrepentant human rights violations perpetrators beyond their individual official positions.
- c) **Institutional independence** -the involvement of high profile persons might unintentionally or deliberately serve to undermine the independence of the PPCs. In situations where the Committee seeks to deal with sensitive issues where the members have a conflict of interest it will, therefore, become difficult to address unless if the NPRC plays a preventive oversight role.
- d) **Lack of explicit victims' representation in the PPCs** -the PPCs composition does not explicitly state the representation of victims. Exclusion of victims in the establishment of the PPCs may negatively affect the victims and ordinary citizens' participation due to lack of trust, sincerity and buy-in.
- e) **The harsh economic crisis**- the NPRC is currently underfunded and this casts doubt on whether it will have resources to support the PPCs work. In addition, the general economic situation may affect participation,

⁶ The categories include the Minister of State for the Province or designate, the officer commanding Police in the Province or designate, the Provincial Administrator or designate, two representatives from the Local Authorities, Two representatives from the relevant government departments, two representatives from the political parties represented in Parliament, two representatives from war veterans, a representative from each of the Districts in the Province

as citizens will be grappling to meet their livelihoods needs.

- f) **Conflict of interest**– the existence and or emergence of parallel processes such as the national dialogue by the Church, another by the President under POLAD and the Bulawayo Collective, ordinarily takes away the NPRC's import which is best placed to deal with such issues with legitimacy.

Opportunities for strengthened peace building and national healing processes

The establishment of the PPCs provides several opportunities that may complement the work of the commission in dealing with reconciliation and nation building issues. These opportunities include:

- a) **Room for context specific dialoguing** -the establishment of the PPCs provides a room for communities to dialogue on specific issues affecting them in their communal contexts. However, this must be supported by a broader national dialogue process to harness emerging issues coming from the 10 provinces.
- b) **Further decentralisation of Peace Committees** -following a successful process of establishing PPCs, there is room for further decentralisation to the District and ward level as noted in a baseline survey report published by Heal Zimbabwe. The baseline suggests that the NPRC should decentralise to the ward level to enhance issues to do with access to NPRC services and full participation of local communities.⁷
- c) **The Motlanthe Commission of Inquiry** -The establishment of the PPCs partly allows the implementation of the Motlanthe Commission

Peace is a collective effort that requires commitment and input from all stakeholders from government, civil society, political parties, the church, war veterans, citizens, victims, the business community, media, the academia etc. It is, therefore, important to ensure that no one is left behind.

of Inquiry recommendations. The Commission recommends nation building and reconciliation including an initiative for multiparty dialogue and cooperation, which is part of the PPCs responsibilities.⁸

- d) **Traditional peace building mechanisms** -the setting up of PPCs also provides an opportunity for the NPRC to adopt and make use of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in pursuit of sustainable peace, healing and reconciliation.

Recommendations

As a way forward, Heal Zimbabwe proposes the following to enhance the work of the PPCs and the NPRC in general:

- a) **PPCs Capacity building** -the established PPCs should be equipped with capacity building skills so that they are able to execute their mandate effectively. Members within the committees must have an appreciation of peace building and conflict resolution skills (Transitional Justice concepts) if they are to be effective in executing their duties.
- b) **Enhancing victims representation** - whilst there is diverse representation of stakeholders in the PPCs, there is need to enhance representation of victims in all the PPCs. Victims are critical stakeholders in the work of the NPRC. As such, their inclusion will enhance participation, ownership and trust.
- c) **Traditional leaders and indigenous knowledge systems** -traditional leader's representation is commendable. However, there is need for a

⁷ Heal Zimbabwe Baseline Study Report on Peace and Reconciliation Processes in Zimbabwe
<http://www.healzimbabwetrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Heal-Zimbabwe-BASELINE-REPORT-ON-PEACE-AND-RECONCILIATION-PROCESSES.pdf>

⁸Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the 1st of August 2018 post-election violence <http://kubatana.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-of-Inquiry-18-DEC-18.pdf>

clear framework that provides for the adoption of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in conflict resolution.

- d) **Speeding up further decentralisation of Peace Committees** - whilst there are plans to cascade the committees to district levels, there is need for the NPRC to speed up the decentralization process to districts and wards. This will enhance effective participation and access of victims and local communities to the services of the NPRC.
- e) **Performance monitoring** -monitoring and evaluation of the NPRC committees performance must done through grassroots consultations and popular mechanisms.

*“Peace begins with me.
Peace begins with you.
Peace begins with all of us.”-John Landa Nkomo*



Figure 3: A Baseline Study Report on the peace and reconciliation processes in Zimbabwe conducted by Heal Zimbabwe Trust

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