Chapter 16
How Informal Peace Committees Complement Macro-infrastructures for Peace in Zimbabwe

Norman Chivasa

Abstract The prospects for achieving peace in any conflicted society hinge on its capacity to design and implement an inclusive infrastructure for peace in response to opportunities and challenges provided by conflict. Zimbabwe is one of the countries that has been held in stasis in the area of post-conflict peace building ever since independence in 1980. To contribute towards a strategy or approach to peace in Zimbabwe, this article reflects the present yet unaccounted for contribution to peace by informal peace committees in Zimbabwe. The emergence of informal peace committees in Zimbabwe affirms that addressing peace challenges is not only a technical issue requiring macro-infrastructures for peace, but requires the participation of all sections of the population affected by conflict. In contrast to macro-infrastructures for peace, which are structured, male-dominated and elitist, the features of informal peace committees include, but are not limited to, flexibility, gender sensitivity and inclusivity, the inclusion of different social groups in the community, the embracing of a participatory approach in which decision making is a shared process, and shared common interests and purpose. The article recommends that informal peace committees can by themselves hardly make an impact without the support of state institutions. Therefore the micro-macro synergy infrastructures for peace should be embraced in Zimbabwe if sustainability is to be achieved.

Keywords Informal peace committees · Micro-macro-infrastructure for peace · Zimbabwe

16.1 Introduction

This article is a reflection on the need to establish a strategy, mechanism or approach that contributes to sustainable peace in post-independence Zimbabwe. The search for a solution comes against the background that Zimbabwe represents a country in the global south that is held in stasis in the area of post-conflict peace building, primarily because infrastructures for peace (14P) in Zimbabwe have not adequately addressed opportunities and challenges presented by episodic conflicts and violence

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since independence (Tshuma 2019). In its classical sense, peacebuilding is about rebuilding the social, political, economic and cultural life of a society before or after a violent episode. Societies contribute to those aims either through macro or through micro peace initiatives. This article focuses on micro peace initiatives primarily because their peacebuilding interventions remain undocumented and limited to specific geographical locations (Noma et al. 2012).

This article, therefore, is a reflection of the present, yet unaccounted for, contribution to peace by informal peace committees (IPCs) by local people in post-independence Zimbabwe. IPCs are created as a response to a specific conflict with the main goal of contributing to conflict management and post-conflict peacebuilding. They can be formed as a preventative measure, with the goal of preventing the outbreak or escalation of nascent micro-level conflicts into violent and more widespread conflicts (Chivasa 2019).

There are two types of peace committee, namely, formal peace committees (FPCs) and IPCs. FPCs are composed of official members from both sides of a conflict and are created by a legislative framework. IPCs, on the other hand, are made up of individuals from all walks of life at community level and have no specific mandate or legislation (van Tongeren 2012). Members of IPCs are familiar with the community's everyday life and the conflicts in question and have as well an in-depth (albeit instinctive) understanding of the community's collective mindset, both of which capacities are factors that play a minor yet critical role in promoting peace and development. Similar structures have been created in the Wajir district in South Kordofan, Sudan; in Colombia and in certain districts in the DRC, Burundi, Uganda and Afghanistan, inter alia (Adan/Pkalya 2006; van Tongeren 2012), and in post-independence South Africa (Shearing et al. 2006). Accordingly, this article reflects on the contributions of IPCs to peace which macro I4P in Zimbabwe do not.

Even though IPCs are rapidly increasing in Zimbabwe, they have not been fully embraced in mainstream peacebuilding initiatives, in part owing to the elitist and exclusivist nature of mainstream I4P (Chivasa 2017). The problem that this article seeks to address is that the elitist I4P in Zimbabwe frown upon and ignore a novel surge of IPCs at community level which embraces both peacebuilding from below and within. The article acknowledges the value of macro-I4P, and does not seek to replace them, but rather, to bring IPCs into the mainstream peacebuilding efforts using local community structures as a vehicle to create a greater impact in addressing peace challenges in Zimbabwe.

To address the research problem, the chapter will address the following research objectives: to historicise IPCs and macro-infrastructures of peace in Zimbabwe (third section); and to discuss the comparative advantages of IPC's over macro-14P in Africa, and in Zimbabwe in particular (fourth section). The chapter concludes by arguing that the setting up of peace committees in a post-conflict situation to fight the legacy of the violent past by local people sets a pace worth emulating, as these peace committees could be the beginning of homemade solutions to peacebuilding challenges in Zimbabwe.

16.2 Research Approach

This article is a reflection of the present, yet unaccounted for, contribution to peace by IPCs in Zimbabwe. To systematically address the objectives of this article, the qualitative research approach was followed through the descriptive, explorative and normative tasks (Osmer 2008). The descriptive task led the researcher to historicise IPCs in Zimbabwe. The explorative task led the researcher to discuss the comparative advantages of IPC's over macro-14P in Zimbabwe. Sources of data were drawn through document analysis in the form of a literature review on IPCs in Zimbabwe and beyond. The works of Adan and Pkalya (2006); van Tongeren (2012); Shearing/Jenneker (2006) were useful in providing insights on IPCs and their contributions to peace.

16.3 Brief History of Macro-infrastructures for Peace in Zimbabwe

Regarding Zimbabwe, Maruta (2014) observes that from the mid-1800s to the 2000s, Zimbabwean communities have not realised sustainable peace in terms of addressing animosities and the healing of wounds involving a range of challenges: caused by racial and intertribal conflicts between blacks and whites; and the Shona and Ndebele peoples; the horrors of the colonial conflict; the subsequent civil war and electoral conflict in the 2000s. Machakanja (2010) contends that since independence, sustainable peace in Zimbabwe has remained a mirage. She argues that the impacts of violent conflict in June 2000, March 2002, May 2005 and June 2008 have been destructive to the extent that prospects of sustainable peace through pro-peace policies were obstructed and ultimately dashed. She concludes that the top-down approaches to peace since independence in 1980 have tended to neglect local communities as agents that can play significant roles in violence prevention and reconciliation processes.

Similarly, Muzavazi (2014, p. 100) notes that "the history of Zimbabwe is a continuum of political violence and social injustice perpetrated by one group of individuals against another." These problematic relations stemmed from tribal conflicts in the precolonial era, the racial conflict during colonialism and inter-communal tensions and hostilities that have all left negative imprints posing a threat to peace in modern communities (Tshuma 2019).

In response to a history of episodic violence, Zimbabwe has instituted three major I4P initiatives since 1980, namely, the national reconciliation policy of the 1980s, the organ on national healing, reintegration and reconciliation (ONHRI) of 2009, and the national peace and reconciliation commission (NPRC) of 2013. All these 14P have undergone academic scrutiny about the impact of such interventions. Machakanja (2010), Zhou /Hardlife (2012), Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru (2013), Muzavazi (2014) and Chiweshe (2016) examined the reconciliation policy of 1980 and established that it lacked political will and inclusivity. It also lacked participation by people at the grassroots; and failed to address structures of injustice. While these studies

acknowledged that the reconciliation policy was noble and timely, they held that the policy left the Zimbabwean population divided.

Other studies that examined the ONHRI revealed that this peace process lacked political will, remained a paper tiger, and that like its predecessor, it left the fractured community unreconciled (Chinoputsa 2012; Muchemwa et al. 2013; Zembe 2013; Mhandara 2014; Muzavazi 2014; Chiweshe 2016).

Subsequently, the NPRC was instituted in 2013 to address the legacy of post-independence violence. As the current I4P initiative, the NPRC initially had a 10-year life span which was expected to expire in 2024, but developments in 2019 have shown that the life span of the NPRC has been extended. Theoretically, the NPRC is intended to carry on with the work of its forerunner, the ONHRI, which was also a precursor to Article 7 of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) signed between major political parties: the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and two formations of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in September 2008.

Like its predecessors, the NPRC is certainly not without challenges as the initiative is both elitist and informed by the liberal peacebuilding tradition, which is foreign to the culture of local communities in Zimbabwe. The liberal peacebuilding tradition is elitist, exclusivist and relies on actors external to the conflicted community (Mac Ginty 2008). Another gap within the NPRC is the non-recognition of the long-existing and firmly established customary courts of the Shona, Ndebele and other ethnic groups, and religious traditions, which has the potential to feed into the NPRC of Zimbabwe. There is extensive literature which confirms that mainstream I4P in Zimbabwe have predominantly been elitist without any regard to local resources for peace at the disposal of the community (Machakanja 2010; Muchemwa et al. 2013; Murambadoro/Wielenga 2015; Chiweshe 2016). This article acknowledges the contributions of IPCs to peace, which macro I4P in Zimbabwe do not.

16.4 Brief History of IPCs in Zimbabwe

Although many countries in Africa (such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, South Sudan, South Africa and others) have established both FPCs and IPCs in the 1990s, in Zimbabwe IPCs are still new tracing their origins in early 2004, and not much is written about these peace formations.

The first attempt to establish IPCs in Zimbabwe was done by the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET), a grassroots organization founded in 2000 following electoral and farm-invasion-related violence. ZIMCET has facilitated the creation of IPCs throughout the ten Provinces in Zimbabwe. By the end of 2004, an estimated nine peace committees had been created in the Harare-Chitungwiza region, 11 in the Mashonaland region, comprising Mashonaland West and Central, 13 in the eastern region, comprising Masvingo, Manicaland and Mashonaland East, and 16 in the southern region, comprising Bulawayo, Matabeleland South and North and Midlands (ZIMCET 2014).

Before creating IPCs, ZIMCET facilitates conflict resolution workshops involving members of political divides and ordinary members. These workshops focus on sensitising communities about conflict management, gender issues, and violence against women and children. Approximately 72 workshops, which drew close to 3 804 participants, were held in Mashonaland West, while Mashonaland Central had 54 ZIMCET-driven workshops attended by an estimated 3 982 participants (ZIMCET 2014).

Another civic organisation that helped to set up peace committees was the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum (ECLF), founded in 2008. ECLF was created in response to the upsurge of electoral violence in 2008 and was registered as a trust in 2010 (Cele 2013). Other civic organisations which have also advanced the IPCs framework in Zimbabwe are Heal Zimbabwe Trust, Envision Zimbabwe, which has facilitated the creation of peace clubs across the different provinces (Envision Zimbabwe 2014; Heal Zimbabwe Trust 2015). Not all civic organisations and communities involved in setting up IPCs in Zimbabwe are covered in this article, but insights from those mentioned provide a basis upon which the contributions of IPCs to peace in Zimbabwe can be understood and counted.

16.5 An Evaluative Discussion on the Comparative Advantages of IPCs over Macro-14P

This section discusses initiatives by ordinary people to avert violence amidst political turmoil. Examples include the street committees during apartheid and peace committees in post-independence South Africa, and IPCs in South Sudan.

16.5.1 The Case of Apartheid South Africa

South Africa is one of those countries that experienced violent conflict during the apartheid era. However, Lemanski (2008) praises informal community organisations in apartheid South Africa as game-changers when the country was experiencing political turmoil. One such grassroots initiative was the street committees. Street committees focused on bread-and-butter issues, "material needs", as Lemanski (2008, p. 396) puts it. Street committees emerged from townships to represent the aspirations of the poorest of the poor in South Africa. They became a notable challenge that subverted the political system of the day to give peace a chance.

Apart from street committees, another grassroots initiative called community development forums emerged, and it involved those people who were living in suburbs comprising ratepayers. The community development forum traced its roots from people at the grassroots, who reacted against what they perceived as peace challenges in their suburbs. They mobilised each other, and registered discontent

through organised protests, marches and boycotts to lobby and force government to address issues that were affecting their wellbeing. These civic movements negotiated for the people's interests and needs, thus affirming the important role of grassroots in championing their shared interests and needs during a transition period. As Lemanski (2008) notes, these informal groups provided the poor and marginalised a window of opportunity to secure a voice for themselves when South Africa was undergoing a political transition. In the end, these grassroots efforts captured the attention of the perpetrators of the unjust system of apartheid and helped to mitigate the impact of violence in townships and suburbs.

16.5.2 The Case of Post-apartheid South Africa

In South Africa, foreign nationals, who include refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, among others, have been targets of xenophobic attacks by local South African citizens since the eruption of xenophobia in 2008. Peace committees have been instrumental in conducting peace education in xenophobic hot spots. The major tasks of IPCs in these communities have involved counteracting xenophobia. This was the case in places such as Alexander Township and Makause in Gauteng province, and Kwamashu and Isipingo in KwaZulu-Natal province. These formations help to reduce fear and promote community policing and improved community reporting of acts of violence (ASC 2015, 2016). As a result, these IPCs have helped to mitigate the spread of xenophobic violence against foreign nationals between 2019 and 2020 by alerting the police force and mobilising communities to quell potential attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa (Nganje 2021).

As the foregoing account depicts, IPCs "provide early warning before violence erupts, and because they are known and trusted by locals, communities turn to them as valuable mediators that prevent people from taking matters into their own hands when violence is imminent" (http://www.asc.org.za/2016/09/27/combating-drivers-of-xenophobia/). Typically, IPCs in South Africa are working hand in glove with formal justice systems in Alexandria, Johannesburg. This followed the involvement of IPCs in mediating conflict involving the death of one Mozambican national in the 2015 xenophobic attacks (Nganje 2021). Odendaal (2010) notes that IPCs act as a link between the state and local justice systems, administering both customary law and cosmopolitan norms. Adan /Pkalya (2006) note that IPCs are hybrid formations that combine both traditional and cosmopolitan values. In the Alexandrian case in Johannesburg, IPCs intervened in xenophobic conflict using the restorative justice (victim-offender centred) approach to complement the formal justice.

16.5.3 The Case of South Sudan

Sudan is one of those countries that have a long history of violent conflict. However, communities there were not negligent in that they came up with various alternatives, one of which involved the formation of IPCs to mitigate the impact of violence. A study on the transformative role of IPCs by van Tongeren (2012) revealed how the nonviolent resolution of conflicts has paid off in Sudan's local communities. He found that in South Kordofan (Sudan, where the Nuba Mountains are) and Unity State (South Sudan), a network of IPCs were aimed at responding quickly to conflicts, preventing smaller conflicts from escalating and helping communities resist any pressure to become involved in local conflicts, with the result that

54% of IPC interventions have resulted in communities "that previously fought alongside one of the parties now have chosen not to"

- [In] 80% of interventions where violence had occurred, no repeated violence has been reported.
- [In] 94% of interventions, the conflict appears to have been resolved or partially resolved" (van Tongeren 2012, p. 108).
- The foregoing review indicates that peace committees are tackling interpersonal violence, using conflict resolution and peacebuilding techniques such as non-violent resolution of conflict, dialogue, mediation and negotiation techniques to foster peace in Sudan.

16.6 Advantages of IPCs Over Macro-14P in Zimbabwe

16.6.1 Flexibility in the Creation of Peace Initiatives

In Zimbabwe, IPCs have been created using self-selection, where local people volunteer to join the committee, but with the community subsequently approving those individuals with qualities such as faithfulness, honesty, and trustworthiness, or who have abilities in resolving conflict (Sangqu 2014). Adan/Pkalya (2006) note that the self-selection process increases the chances of expanding the constituencies of peace committees because it is inclusive of all social groups, including the vulnerable and marginalised. The self-selection process is flexible in that it is based on the norms and values of the host community, which are largely dynamic in nature.

In contrast, macro-14P in Zimbabwe and elsewhere are created by structured and bureaucratic pieces of legislation. For instance, in South Africa, it was the National Peace Accord which brought about the establishment of 14P, which cascaded down to districts and villages (Nganje 2021). In Serbia, peace committees were established through the Committee on Inter-Community Relations in 2002, and in Sierra Leone, they were established through the District Code of Conduct Monitoring Committees (Odendaal 2010). In Zimbabwe, the ONHRI and NPRC were established by the GNU, all of which were elitist. By and large, these macro-I4P are noble, but not

flexible and are not building on the local culture of the people affected by conflict. As a result, IPCs come out best because they are designed and implemented within the context where the conflict occurred, using the self-selection process because of iits flexibility and inclusivity. This kind of flexibility occurred during the formation of IPCs in the Wajir district in South Kordofan, Sudan; in Colombia and in certain districts in the DRC, Burundi, Uganda, and Afghanistan, among others (Adan/Pkalya 2006; van Tongeren 2012), and in post-apartheid South Africa (Shearing et al. 2006).

16.6.2 The Gender Sensitivities in the Informal Peace Committee Framework

One major important aspect that IPCs offer relates to their gender sensitiveness. This is so because any woman or man can chair a peace committee. For that reason, women can occupy strategic positions, such as that of chairperson, deputy or secretary, which are usually a preserve for men in traditional structures. This trend has to do with the gender sensitivities that underlie peace committees (Sangqu 2014). Of particular note is that there are no restrictions on women in the decision-making processes in peace committees, as is not the case in traditional structures such as customary courts.

In contrast, most macro-14P are male dominated, as was the case with the GNU in Zimbabwe. The GNU in Zimbabwe was male dominated from inception right up to its expiry in 2013. The NPRC is also accused of being maledominated by turning a blind eye to discouraging the participation of women and youth. As if that was not enough, in 2018, following the disputed presidential election results in which the MDC Alliance lost to ZANU PF, a quasi-peace process called political actors dialogue (POLAD) instituted by the ZANU PF government to resolve political stalemate in the country is also gender-sensitive (Tshuma 2019). The fact that IPCs are gender sensitive gives them a strong niche in peacebuilding because they take into account the experiences and aspirations of the most vulnerable groups in peace and conflict issues.

16.6.3 Inclusivity in the Peace Committee Framework

Peace committees comprise individual people representing different constituencies on the community level. For example, as Moyo (2014, p. 93) notes, peace committees comprise "civil servants, church leaders, traditional leaders, state security sector actors, political party leaders, women, youth and other stakeholders such as organisations operating at the community level." Sangqu (2014) adds that peace committees comprise different components of society, including youth, women, children and religious groups. She notes that these social groups represent different cultural, ethnic, political, religious, economic status and power dynamics existing in communities.

The merits of inclusivity and gender sensitivity of peace committees give them a very strong niche in peacebuilding initiatives. The inclusive nature of peace committees are building blocks for social harmony, cohesion and coexistence between group members at community level.

In contrast, macro-14P in Zimbabwe, in particular, the GPA, are comprised only of two major political parties. Other critical sectors such as civil society organisations, which include, among others, the Church, traditional leadership, women and youth, were not represented. For those women such as Priscilla Misiharambwi-Mushonga, it appears she was in the GPA representing a political party, not women in Zimbabwe, a specific social group. The youth were not represented in the GPA, thus again technically relegating critical stakeholders (women and youth) in peace issues. The inclusive nature of IPCs tells a story about their potential peacebuilding successes compared to macro-I4P.

16.6.4 The Non-elitist Diversity and Non-formality of Peace Committees

IPCs are rooted in the quest for non-elitist peacebuilding motivated by the realisation that ordinary people have the capacity to engage in peacebuilding (Young 2010). For that reason, it is not practical to overlook peace committees on the basis that they are not formal institutions, as to accept this is to allude to the fallacy that formality is superior to informality. What is critical about these formations is that they are diverse, non-formal models of peace promotion at the local community level.

The non-formal participatory approach is one of the major characteristic features of IPCs. A case in point involved the implementation by ordinary people of participatory approaches to tackle violence and rising crime rates, and the al-Shabaab terrorist attacks in Kenya. These locally initiated interventions produced relatively satisfactory positive results by lowering cases of violence and banditry (Anderson/McKnight 2014; Kioko 2017).

16.6.5 The Transformative Role of Peace Committees

There are reasons to believe in the transformative role of peace committees in some places where they operated, which resulted in reduced election violence as a result of bringing together stakeholders from conflicting parties to jointly explore ways of reducing electoral violence. In Zimbabwe, the establishment of inclusive peace committees comprising ZANU-PF and MDC members in Chivi, Nkai and Mudzi districts and other parts of the country helped to break down the polarisation that existed between members of different political parties (ZIMCET 2014). ZIMCET (2014) asserts that in some of Harare's high-density suburbs where peace committees

were created, co-existence and tolerance was noticeable during the 2013 election by contrast with the two preceding elections. A similar outcome was attributed to the work of peace committees in the Mutasa district of Manicaland Province (ECLF 2014).

Another report by ECLF (2015) on the Chivi district of Masvingo Province showed that peace committees have contributed significantly by empowering local community members with skills on how to constructively handle conflicts. Many local people in the Chivi district seem to have changed the way they address conflict in their local traditional courts in which conciliation, as opposed to expulsion of offenders, is becoming almost the primary method of dealing with conflict (ECLF 2015). The capacity of IPCs to contribute to some reduction of violence and the embracing of participatory problem-solving are suggestive of the transformative power of these informal peace formations when compared to macro-14P.

16.6.6 Major Challenges of IPCs

The voluntary nature of IPCs is one of the challenges. This is so because peace committees depend upon individuals volunteering and serving, but if volunteers are not forthcoming, or do little after joining the committee, a peace committee can fail both in the short and long term (van Tongeren 2012).

Gender dynamics is another challenge in that within communities' discrimination against women can impede the participation and involvement of women in IPCs (Moyo 2014). If a community is male dominated, the composition of the IPCs will be predominantly male. In Nepal, for example, male domination of peace committees resulted in women losing confidence in the committees and subsequently avoiding participation, thus deterring their participation in local peace initiatives (Frogh et al. 2010). As Adan/Pklaya (2006) have pointed out, although IPCs draw most of their norms and values from both customary and cosmopolitan frameworks, they are faced with the reality of the exclusion of women and the youth, because traditional communities usually insist on maintaining the gender status quo.

16.7 Conclusion

The central argument of this article was to capture what IPCs are contributing to peacebuilding which mainstream I4P in Zimbabwe do not. The most important contribution is that of inclusivity. With respect to inclusivity, it is the calibre of people that make up the peace committee that matters; this relates to issues of personality, status in the community, level of education and degree of maturity, among others. The internal dynamics of the IPC hinge on the extent to which committee members are prepared to work together, and to which the committee is at peace with itself. This

realisation often emanates from a clash of personalities, or a divergence in understanding the vision and mission of the peace committee and the needs and peace aspirations of the community at large. As a result, at the formation stage of the peace committee, a lot of attention and effort must be expended in selecting the right calibre of would-be members of the peace committee, and educating them on the vision and mission of the committee and the nature of its work before taking them in. For example, the members recruited must have the ability to perform the vertical link role, to work with all manner of people in the community, to function as a cohesive unit, and perhaps above all, to stay the course as the work ahead is not an overnight event.

Another important contribution of IPCs is that the community level social conflicts that the informal committees often deal with contribute to the political stability or otherwise of the community, as they are the fodder on which the political polarisation feeds. As a result, the more effective IPCs are at the community level of social interaction and relationships, the more relevant their work becomes at the political level in the community.

Overall, as evidence seems to suggest, creating more IPCs may mean helping local communities to have spaces to address conflict as a collective, as peace committees are indicative of local agency by ordinary people to take responsibility for their own peace and development, rather than looking to government to bring peace to their local communities.

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