

Fragility of Existing Civic Engagement Platforms in National Governance of Zambia Towards Community Development

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ABSTRACT

In a democratic nation like Zambia, Civic engagement is expected to improve the well-being of the people in the community. Given the expected outcome of Civic engagement, this study explores the fragility of existing platforms of civic engagement in national governance of Zambia towards community development. The study rides on a case study design to generate evidence on the weaknesses of existing platforms of civic engagement in national governance of Zambia towards community development. Data was generated from a total sample of 23 participants. Key among the findings show that civic engagement platforms are politically inclined and manipulated. Equally, there are inadequate feedback mechanisms. Further, actors are perceived to depend on donor funding for their functionality. The study also established information deficiency about existing platforms of civic engagement among citizens as well as lack of fully fraged budget allocation to support civic engagement and associated with dynamics of government policies. Therefore, this study concludes that the existing platforms of civic engagement are unattractive and as such, they have caused the creation of a dominance version of democracy by the elected civic leaders. Thus, among others, it is recommended that there is need for the Ministry of Justice to reform the laws that impede active civic engagement in national governance of Zambia as active civic engagement may cultivate positive change in the community.

Keywords: civic engagement, community, governance, Zambia.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of independence, Zambia was founded on the principle of citizens coming together to fight the oppressive government in order to attain a new nation based on equality, rule of law, social compact and respect for the human dignity among others (Phiri, 2006). This was a democratic experience that was to be measured by the quality of functions performed by citizens. The changes experienced by citizens to gain independence over the past decade remain unprecedented. Civic engagement proved to be a useful tool in this democratic dispensation. However, in recent years, there has been an increasing interest on how to make democracy more authentic in response to community development (Norris, 2015).

Commenting on political governance in Zambia, Kaumba (2015) argues that critical recognition should be made of the fact that people have asserted congruence between governance and democracy. This then prescribes that the Zambian people have opted for the choice that governance in Zambia will be founded on democratic tenets. This chosen polity or political governance system necessitates that the people (shall) have controlling influence on the decisions and affairs of government and that the people are supreme to government. In recognition of this, the government is expected to institute responsive mechanisms that ensure that the people are treated with equal respect and as of equal worth in the exercise of their controlling influence.

Premised on the foregoing argument, the underlying assumption of this study is that innovative framework of civic engagement in national governance is critical as this is expected to provide an environment that can improve the wellbeing of the citizens. In view of critical insights on expected reasons for civic novelty, it is essential to note that the concept of Civic engagement (CE) has a very long history. It dates back as far as the 17th century but it has become more prominent in the 21st century (Dede, 2010). The idea behind was premised on a belief in the possibility of what we may call collective agency. For instance, Plato envisioned a form of political activity that would enable us to self-consciously direct our affairs in accordance with the aspirations and commitments we have deliberately accepted (Blitze, 2010).

An overview of civic engagement is also provided in the academic discourse by Levinson (2012) who elaborated on the importance of Civic Education to the citizens. This goes to show that in the Zambian

scenario, civic engagement is not a new phenomenon, as it has a long tradition, with its roots traced back to the early days of colonialism as demonstrated by Matenga (2010) who argued that during the colonial era, a large number of informal groups and formal institutions such as welfare associations, churches and mining trade unions played an important social and political role at both local and national levels. Other notable actors in the arena of Civic Engagement in Zambia have been political parties, cooperatives, environment organizations, service organizations, and human rights activists, among many others.

In generic sense, United Nations (2018) defines civic engagement as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Therefore, one would argue that Civic engagement takes many forms ranging from individual volunteerism, organizational involvement and electoral participation. It can also include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. This would suggest that Civic Engagement is absolutely instrumental for democracy to be reborn and sustained hence, providing an environment for socio-economic development.

In the political discourse, United Nations (2017) defines democracy as the process through which free human beings can govern themselves in a manner that serves their aspirations. Therefore, I argue that the ability of connecting innovative framework of civic engagement to national governance has a potential on the success of a health democracy were respect for rule of law, economic development, personal freedoms and human rights exist. However, Muleya (2015) observed that, in Zambia, some stakeholders are not well grounded on ethics that can bring about social change to the community. This Paradigm shift does not favor the dreams of having a better Zambia. Achieving good governance requires citizens to continuously navigate towards a particular vision and making sure that day-to-day management of affairs is always lined up with nation's goals and aspirations of the people (Maingaila, 2021). The assumption for this engagement is to improve the quality of living in the community (Kaumba, 2015).

Furthermore, Habasonda (2010) contends that Zambia's civil society has been shaped by a history of authoritarian traditions and that for decades CSOs have been largely restricted to activities within the agendas and control of the state. Mumba (2010) further argues that during the leadership of the second republican president Fredrick Chiluba, he (Chiluba) employed Kaunda's strategy of taming civil society using different means. One of the strategies he employed was the use of the Public Order Act in trying to curtail the freedom of assembly and association, which act as one of the major vehicles used by CSOs and citizenry in their civic duties. Similarly, Ndulo (2020) adds that Civic engagement in national governance of Zambia has been treated as an event as opposed to a continuous process. These arguments on civic engagement provided a basis to undertake this present study to generate empirical evidence on what has been causing this erratic engagement as this may cause failure for the local authority to deliver services to the community (Magagula *et al.*, 2019). Further, the erratic engagement does not settle well with elements of citizenship like civil, social, and political rights which must be fulfilled by all citizens as advanced by Marshal (1950).

Similarly, Matole (2021) in his study on civic engagement in democratic dispensation among teachers of civic education in Mumbwa district of Zambia found that threat to job security, weak national governance system in Zambia, Political interference and fear of being labeled as ant-government prevented teachers from participating in national governance. The study concluded that teachers of Civic Education should be given equal space to exercise their full civic responsibilities at all levels as enshrined in human rights charter as this is likely to reciprocate full benefits of civic participation.

Another broader perspective concerning civic engagement has been provided by Maingaila (2021) in her study on the role of political parties in enhance democratic governance. Findings show that political parties are knowledgeable of the need to participate in democratic activities. However, challenges such as incompetent police service, perceived bias by the media in coverage of opposition events, financial constraints to carryout party activities effectively, and perceived compromised electoral and judicial systems in the country compromised the engagement. The study concluded that in order to make democracy a reality, all political parties should be given an equal space in the governance of the nation. Based on the observed challenges to democracy which are hitting both western and African liberal counties, time has come to take a fresh look at how we can find sources of democratic stability. Since our knowledge depends on evidence drawn from research, the findings of this study may be able to provide a fresh look at civic engagement in national governance for community development.

A. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the fragility of existing platforms of civic engagement in national governance of Zambia towards community development.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the framework of civic culture propounded by Almond and Verba (1963). Almond and Verba (1963) define civic culture as a set of political attitudes, habits, sentiments and behavior related to the functioning of the democratic regime. It implies that although citizens are not necessarily

involved in politics all the time, they are aware to a certain extent of their political rights and also of the implications of the decision-making process that affects their life and society. The concept of civic culture is part of a long tradition of thought that investigates the nature of democracy ideal to the full realization of human dignity (Silva, 2015).

Papa-Georgiou (1990) in his study on Aristotle and democracy noted that Aristotle spoke of the political goodwill necessary for a political regime to be able to fulfil its mission, but also of public virtues such as civic partnership and political restraint. To further substantiate the importance of civic engagement in national governance, Almond and Verba (1963) maintains that positive move toward the institutions of representative government is essential for a well-functioning democracy. This suggests that the legitimacy of democracy rests upon the public's positive opinions of representative government and its institutions. I therefore argue that when people are divorced from participating in national governance in either physical or psychological terms, the nation becomes vulnerable as democracy is left to flourish by chance hence exposing it to accidental ends. Exposing democracy to accidental ends I see it to be a problem. To prevent such accidental ends, it calls for continuous civic engagement in national governance hence the present study.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This was qualitative research with a case study design. It was targeted at three institutions selected purposively with keen interest in civic engagement, national governance and community development. This study design falls within the constraints of constructivist and relativist ontology world view whose argument suggests that knowledge and truth of a particular phenomenon can be obtained through subjective interaction with study participants. This entails that the researcher had an opportunity to interact with participants in their natural setting to observe and make conclusions out of the responses given on the weaknesses of existing platforms of civic engagement in national governance of Zambia towards community development in real life context (Kasonde-Ngandu, 2013).

B. Study Site

This study was conducted from Lusaka district of Zambia. There were quite a number of potential participants in the district. However, the study was conducted by political institutions, nongovernment organizations and religious institutions. The choice for these institutions were that Political parties in Zambia remain the best instrument to fulfill vital functions in democratic politics, (Maingaila, 2021), non-governmental organizations provide insights into policy formulations that have a far-reaching implications on the lives of the citizens (Moonga and Phiri, 2010).

C. Study Sample

The study used 23 members from political parties, non-governmental organizations and the religious world. The sample comprised of technocrats on Civic engagement in national governance and community development and it was arrived at through data saturation.

D. Sampling Procedure

The aim of this study was to gain an initial understanding of the different experiences and beliefs of participants concerning the link between civic engagement and community development. To achieve this within the constraints of the study, the participants were carefully selected with a view to the unique information and insights that they can contribute. The best way to ensure this was using a judgmental sampling approach, by which the researcher decided who to include in the sample, a decision which was made based on participants with similar interest and knowledge on the subject matter. Since purposive sampling is wide, the researcher used homogenous and expert purposive sampling on all the participants due to their technical know-how and similar characteristics in carrying out civic engagement activities.

E. Instruments for Data Generation

The study used primary data. Primary data was collected by means of an interview guide with semi-structured questions on all participants. The use of Semi-structured interviews were based on the reason advanced by Creswell (2014) who posit that semi-structured interviews are flexible hence helps to gather in-depth information which gives the researcher a complete and detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, using semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to get first-hand information on the topic that was under exploration.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

A. Fragility of Existing Platforms of Civic Engagement

Through face to face interaction with participants from targeted organizations, various submissions were made and the analysis of data on this objective established six major themes: Platforms as being politically inclined and manipulated, lack of proper feedback mechanisms, donor dependency, information deficiency about existing platforms of civic engagement, lack of fully fringed budget allocation to support civic engagement and civic engagement being associated with dynamics of government policies.

1) Politically inclined and manipulated

Participants were asked to give their views on the weaknesses of the existing platforms of civic engagement in National governance of Zambia Towards community development. The study revealed that platforms of civic engagement were monopolized by the government in power. Participants mentioned that the monopolization of civic engagement platforms made the civic space shrink. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P7M from organization D mentioned that:

The weaknesses would be that these structures can easily fall prey to political manipulation where political representatives could exploit people and say well this is us who have brought this, which is not the case.

P15M from organization H made the following remarks:

In the previous government we had civic shrinking space and that was very bad. The civic space was quite ill, we could not breathe and speak. I believe with the new dawn government there is that air that people can speak. We do not know, maybe in future even them they will start censoring. At least now people can speak, you can breathe, anyone can criticize government, and anyone can critically criticize Hakainde Hichilema. You have seen even PF, which is the previous government criticizes UPND to an extent you ask but six months ago you were the ones in government and leading.

P10M from organization F mentioned that:

Contrary to the ideal situation where government is supposed to be responsive to the citizens. I think our leadership over time has created an atmosphere of being our bosses such that even calling them out sometimes you risk being told that you are defaming the President of course there are such laws that limit how far someone can even talk, we have to hold them into account responsively.

P1M from organization A mentioned that:

The biggest challenges that as an institution we have been facing trying to supplement government's efforts coming from the previous regime of course, civic space was shrinking because when you want to educate citizens for example on the issues of debt you are seen as an anti-government. So, you can only be good to the government if you speak their language. Corrupt practices that are taking place of course we are seen as anti-government.

P2M from organization B narrated that:

The other challenge with our civic engagement is the political environment but we have made a goodwill of the new government. However, we never know because tomorrow they might change.

2) Lack of proper feedback mechanism

The study revealed that platforms of civic engagement lacked proper flow of information between the governors and those that are governed. Participants mentioned that there is a tendency for elected officials to divorce themselves from the electorate immediately after elections. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P12M from organization B stated that:

Most of these platforms it is like you are representing yourself. Once you are done with the meeting, it ends there.

P23M from organization K state that:

If I was to rate out of 10, I would say we are at 4/10 in terms of government involving citizens in governance matters. There is still a lot that needs to be done. This is so because most local leaders such as ward councilors and constituency members of parliament do not represent the views and issues faced by their members in their delimitation which separates the communities from the much-needed development.

P13F from organization G stated that:

Yes, we do face some challenges sometimes with our civic engagement. The challenges include the flow, lack or inadequate information especially on the ground. We may be privileged to have a bit of information, but lack of information is a challenge. Political will is also a challenge, if you have leaders in these governance structures who are not willing to promote the dignity of a human being as it were then it becomes a challenge to penetrate or realize what we are advocating for as a Church.

3) Donor dependency

The study also revealed that for the platforms of civic engagement to be functional, government and non-state actors needed to solicit for funds from donors. However, participants mentioned that the challenges with donor funding sometimes are not reliable as donors have specific catchment areas. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P20F from organization J stated that:

As an organization and other civil society depend on donor funding to execute their civic duties and of late donor funds are not easy to come by because there is fatigue from the donors, they also have to contend with problems in their own countries such as COVID and other challenges.

P7M from organization D narrated that:

First and foremost, we are a non-profit making organization and we rely on well-wishers and fully dependant on what the donors provide. So, when we started, we had a soft spot for the country that it has just become a democratic state and so on, in that context nearly every cooperating partner was willing to provide resources. Over time as we were perceived to have grown and being able to have attained certain levels of democratic credentials and abilities, cooperating partners' support has been dwindling in the current period.

P3M from organization F mentioned that:

Well obvious in a country like ours where resources are very minimal is the challenge. We are donor funded organization hundred percent and we depend on donors. In other countries you know that NGOs like ours are actually supported by the government. So, we need to be supported as we depend on foreign aid and some of our funders are in Norway some in the USA and that is supporting us to support our own democracy.

4) Information deficiency about existing platforms of civic engagement

The study revealed that platforms of civic engagement were not highly popularized and some citizens lacked the knowledge and the skills on a holistic approach to civic engagement. Participants mentioned that this crisis slows down development as development is supposed to be driven by the people themselves. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P11F from organization A stated that:

The challenge which we have been facing in our advocacy include the inability of people to participate in development processes due to uncertainties on procedures, inadequate use of available platforms through which Government can use to engage citizens and communities not well aware of available models thus limiting the use and appreciation of these platforms.

P13F from organization G narrated that:

The weakness could be with issues to do with the information, lack of information or limited information in certain instances where civic engagement is concerned.

P2M from organization B observed that:

Many people think that when you go and cast your vote as a voter then civic responsibility ends there but it shouldn't be like that.

5) *Lack of fully flagged budget allocation to support civic engagement*

The study further revealed that there was lack of fully flagged bags to support civic engagement. Participants mentioned that the government, as the main driver of civic engagement, did not have the capacity to allocate funds that can be used to actualize civic engagement. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P12M from organization B stressed that:

Our democracy is dependent on the outsiders to survive. Electoral Commission Zambia (ECZ) is supported by the foreigners. Now if the foreigners are the ones that support elections, how can you claim that you are glowing democracy? It is not possible.

P2M from organization B stated that:

The challenges we do face mainly it is financial resources. Where you have challenges with financial resources you can only do civic engagement to a certain extent. We may want to roll out a national program to cater for everyone but due to inadequate resources we streamline the program according to what we can manage.

6) *Associated with dynamics of government policies*

Findings also show that platforms of civic engagement were associated with dynamics of government policies. Participants mentioned that there was a tendency of each and every government which comes into power to come up with new policies which sometimes makes it difficult for the advocacy organization to maintain the vision of engaging citizens. The following responses confirm the above stated theme.

P9 M from organization E stated that:

The biggest weakness of civic engagement platforms is that they are not always consistent, and this tends to create a lapse or disconnect in a manner that information is disseminated.

P13F from organization G stressed that:

The other challenge that we face apart from political will, is also the changes in policies. Sometimes because of the change of government some policies are changed to fit into the manifesto of a certain government that is in power. Sometimes because of those changes it means you have to read and direct your advocating strategies also to be in line with that or advocate for changes in the policies that have been made.

P14M from organization H observed that:

The truth is that in Zambia we have a lot of good policies and documents, but implementation and continuity is a challenge. Whenever the leaders differ from an individual in ideologies it becomes a stumbling block, and that engagement is shaped. If the very good documents we have in Zambia were respected regardless of who formulated them and continue implementing them, Zambia could have been on a different level all together.

Despite the weaknesses attributed to the existing platforms of civic engagement towards community development, findings revealed that some platforms such as the social media, the Ward Development Committees (WDC), District Development Committee (DDC), Provincial Development Committee (PDC), Constituency Development Fund (CDF) voter education and elections were found to have some strengths but not to the expected standards of real democracy. The following responses confirm the aforementioned statement.

P9M from organization E stated that:

The best form is that of civic and voter education which tends to be conducted through various platforms such as community meetings, radio and television (TV) programs, social media and media advocacy among others and the biggest strength is that they have worked,

and they continue to assist the people engage in the national affairs of their country but the biggest weakness is that they are not always consistent, and this tends to create a lapse or a disconnect in a manner that information is disseminated.

P7M from organization D narrated that:

Yes, we have achieved something but there is still more to be done as you know civic engagement and development is a continuous process. The moment you achieve what you desired you seek to achieve another thing. If you look at it in terms of representation because that's our main focus as an organization in terms of interest we have had progress in term of the number of structures that people can engage at sub-national level like at the constituency with the members of parliament and at district and ward levels and recently they has been this whole talk about decentralization which has created even much more increased engagements where people can engage in civic issues for development but what is the talk of the day now is the constituency development fund (CDF) and the ward development committees (WDC) which are now being actualized in a more visible level than we have seen before.

P6F from organization C stated that:

Voting is a good way for civic engagement, also the media for airing out views for instance CDF announcement has been held on media so that people are aware and know it and how to apply. Using tools such as radio, television (TV), social media because most young people are on social media helps to ensure that they are aware of all the issues affecting the country.

P4M from organization D shared the following view:

The UPND government from the word go have shown a high degree of political will and have actually exhibited by allocating that portion of 25.7million to CDF that is a very good step to the right direction. The constitution itself recognizes decentralization and the local government Act also recognizes the importance of decentralization where you give the authority and resources to the local structures in ensuring the undertaken development is in consultation with the people and if you go in the communities, you will see the elements of such engagement.

IV. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

A. Fragility of Existing Civic Engagement Platforms:

1) Politically inclined and manipulated

From the results given, existing platforms of civic engagement were perceived to be politically inclined and manipulated by the party in power. This means that the party in power has an upper hand in controlling how civic engagement should be done, when it should be done and who should be involved. Participants bemoaned the historical trends of cadres wanting to be the sole owner of government activities. This bears a huge implication on the growth of democracy in the sense that those who are not members of the ruling party may feel not to be important in the running of national affairs. In a democracy, there should be no winner nor loser. The study indicated that all the citizens regardless of their political party affiliation can potentially benefit from divergent views on achieving a common goal of developing the nation. This suggests that civic engagement can be used as an input to foster change in the community. To the contrary, findings tend to suggest that there is intolerance of divergent views in our Zambian democracy. Those who hold views that do not agree with others are perceived to be enemies.

Moonga and Phiri (2010) hold views that there is an inequality in the enjoyment of civil, political and social rights by the citizens in Zambia. This observation is further backed by Matole (2021) who reported that teachers of civic education were not given equal space to participate in democratic activities despite them possessing civic knowledge and skills.

2) Lack of proper feedback mechanism

The study has also revealed that the existing platform of civic engagement lacks proper feedback mechanisms. This means that the government has not operationalized strategies on how to constantly keep in touch with community members. There was an observation that despite the government making pronouncements on developmental projects, sometimes they hardly go back to the community to explain

the trajectory they intend to take. Results indicated that once some leaders are voted into office, they have no time to engage with community members. The fear with this approach to governance may be the mismanagement of finances, attending to wrong community needs, delayed completion of community projects, mistrust of leaders and creation of political tension.

These findings depart from what was established by Zambia Human Development Report (2016) which revealed inequalities in education, culture and income as challenges surrounding opportunities of civic engagement. According to this view, people living in poverty generally have great respect for authorities and as a consequence the demand for accountability is low. This argument is well aligned with the views of Nwokeke (2019) who believe that political elites play major roles in democracy consolidation and that differing attitudes among the political elites can account for democratic outcomes. There are several reasons for this such as lack of information, illiteracy, poor knowledge of English and lack of empowerment. Maingaila (2021) also holds a different view on her study of role of political parties in enhancing democratic governance. According to her study, challenges surrounding civic engagement were based on incompetent police service, perceived bias by the media in coverage of opposition events, financial constraints to carryout party activities effectively, and perceived compromised electoral and judicial systems.

3) Donor dependency

The study revealed that for the platforms of civic engagement to be fully functional, they depended on the outsiders to fund them. This suggests that government has no model of funding its own democratic activities. This trend has a huge bearing on civic engagement based on the fact that donor funding comes with conditions and they have specific catchment areas. Thus, if the activity to be carried out by the government is not in the best interest of the donors, they may become reluctant to fund such an activity. This in the long run may create an elapse on the flow of civic information which is necessary in helping citizens on how to potentially develop their communities. Findings also suggest that donor funding may promote issues of imperialism as the funders may dictate how the given funds should be utilized. Once this begins to manifest, it means the sovereignty of state is lobbed.

Failure by the state to fund its own civic engagement activities may be the reason why Magagula et al, (2019) observed that this approach to governance still remains to be one of the causes for the decline of public confidence in the public sector as this causes delay in public service delivery. Donor dependency may also pose some challenges to the defining characteristic of active civic engagement which includes among others the commitment to participate and contribute to the improvement of one's community, neighborhood and nation (PACE, 2020). Almond and Verba (1963) confirms that Civic culture is considered to be relevant not only for the stability of any democratic regime but also for its quality. This goes to show that the quality of democracy is measured by the capacity of the individual states to facilitate radical change and transformation in all spheres of life. Findings of this study confirmed that donor findings may not achieve this goal. This is a clear indication that a responsive government must not rely on donor funding in meeting peoples aspirations instead, they should focus on a permanent and sustainable ways of generating resources.

4) Information deficiency about existing platforms of civic engagement

From the responses given by the participants, the study found that there was information deficiency about existing platforms of civic engagement among citizens. This means that the majority of citizens, especially those with low education background do not know which platforms they can use to engage their leaders effectively. The only platform which seems to be popular even to those with low education is an election. However, this study has already shown that sometimes elections in Zambia do not reflect the will of the people due to the discussed impediments associated with the process. This brings to the fore the argument by Zambia Human Development Report (2016) by indicating that radio is the most commonly used media, but very few people get actively involved in any way in the production.

Contrary to information deficiency, Kaumba (2015) in his study on an examination of student's perceptions of public participation in national governance argued that students had a positive attitude towards participation in national governance instead, what was lacking was the promotion and protection of political rights due to misapplication of the public order act. This is consistence with the identified challenge of digital immigrants among staff and students as observed by Muleya *et al.* (2019), Mupeta *et al.* (2020); Mwanangombe *et al.* (2020); and Simwatachela *et al.* (2020).

5) Lack of fully fraggged budget allocation to support civic engagement

The study also revealed that existing platforms of civic engagement were unattractive due to lack of reasonable budget allocation to fully operationalise them. For instance, focusing on an election as a platform of civic engagement, there was an observation that the electoral commission Zambia (ECZ) had not yet reached the stage of funding an election as expected. During time of elections, there is always heavy reliance on donors who may be suffocated with their own challenges to attend too. This trend has trickled down to civic organizations and political parties to heavily rely on well-wishers in carrying out their political activities. This has an implication on the growth of our democracy as lack of fully framed budget allocation

to support civic engagement may limit citizens to fully exploit opportunities that comes with civic engagement.

The above findings depart from Matole (2021) who found that threat to job security, weak national governance system in Zambia, Political interference and fear of being labeled as ant-government prevented teachers from participating in national governance. However, based on the responses of this study, it could appear that financial constraints limits people, organizations and the state to explore their potential in civic life.

Maingaila (2021) in her study on the role of political parties in enhancing democratic governance also found a different dimension by arguing that challenges such as incompetent police service, perceived bias by the media in coverage of opposition events and perceived compromised electoral and judicial systems in the country compromised the engagement. However, to the lesser extent, she also found some signs of financial constraints among some opposition political parties which hindered them from carrying out party activities effectively.

6) *Associated with dynamics of government policies*

Findings further revealed that platforms of civic engagement were associated with dynamics of government policies. This means that there was a tendency of each and every government which comes into power to come up with new policies which sometimes makes it difficult for the advocacy organization to maintain the vision of engaging citizens. The implication this has on civic engagement is that, once there is change of policy, the advocacy organization needs to go back to the drawing board and crafts new civic engagement plans to suit the current policy direction. This tends to create an elapse in civic information. Sometimes there is also a possibility of discontinuing of civic engagement plans due to disagreement in principles between the government of the day and the advocacy organizations since it has been shown in this study that most of the civic engagement activities depends on donors to be operationalized.

Despite the weaknesses attributed to the existing platforms of civic engagement towards community development, findings revealed there are some strengths associated with some platforms of civic engagement but not to the expected standards of real democracy. Among others includes social media, Ward Development Committees (WDC), District Development Committee (DDC), Provincial Development Committee (PDC), Constituency Development Fund (CDF) voter education and elections.

This invoke the argument that dynamic of government policies may be a confirmation of a perceived failed civic engagement promise in the case of Mwanakatwe constitution review commission where the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) had to divert from its original pro-poor approach to governance (Cunning, 2012). The MMD campaigned in the 1991 elections on the platform that if elected to power, it would replace the 1991 Constitution, with one that would be above partisan considerations and would strengthen democracy and the protection of human rights. To the country, it is reported that Government through Government White Paper No. 1 of 1996, rejected most, if not all the fundamental recommendations that were meant to uplift the lives of the people in the community (Ndulo, 2014).

V. CONCLUSION

The study found that the existing platforms of civic engagement are not unattractive as they are perceived to be politically inclined and manipulated by the party in power. The existing platforms of civic engagement also lack proper flow of information. It was also indicated that in order for these platforms to function, they depend on donor funding which may cause a delay in implementation and popularization of civic activities. This invoke the reflection that there is information deficiency among citizens about the about existing platforms of civic engagement. This brings to the fore the conclusion that platforms of civic engagement are associated with dynamics of government policies. Due to these limitations, the involvement of stake holders in national governance of Zambia is perceived to be erratic. This calls for civic innovation and an increased dominance version of democracy by the citizens if human dignity is to be promoted.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made among others:

- 1) There is need for the Ministry of justice to reform the laws that impede active civic engagement in national governance of Zambia as active civic engagement may cultivate positive change in the community.
- 2) Government through law enforcement agencies should not stifle the voice of critical watchdog institutions like civic organizations as this helps to create a conducive environment where governance can be practiced.
- 3) There is a need for citizens to remain proactive in civic matters even after the electoral process as this may help to remind civic leaders to materialize their campaign promises. This may also help to

reduce the tendency of waiting for 5 years to react through the ballot as the damage that may be caused to the economy within 5 years may take time to be repaired.

- 4) There is need for the party in power to make it clear to their party members that once they have formed government, matters of civic engagement are not only the preserve of the party members but the entire citizenry.

VII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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