Contested Terrain: Local Governance and Development in Post-Land Reform Zimbabwe

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Abstract: Although the world over, there is an emphasis on the need for clarity on local governance procedures and actual practice, in post land reform Zimbabwe there is a contest with regards to the local governance. There is a contest at the institutional level and the practice level. This study sought to explore how local governance systems operate in post-land reform contexts, how such existing local governance architecture impacts on citizen participation in local development. The study revealed that, while the land reform areas fall under the jurisdiction of Rural District Council Act, the continued politicking by the ruling party, resulted in the area falling under the jurisdiction of Traditional Leaders Act. As traditional leaders gear to exercise their authority, local and national elites and authorities also compete to exercise superintendence over these areas. In the end, the citizens are subject to multiple forms of authority, all claiming to be the de jure local government system functionaries. This conflicting milieu divides citizens participation across gender lines, political party schisms, and generations and provides broken lines that are exploited by the contesting 'authorities'. The citizenry reacts through various means such as bypassing the local authorities directives, non-compliance, and compliance. The study points to the need to streamline local government procedure to match ground- level realities, educate and empower communities in terms of policymaking, advocacy for non partisan local government bureaucrats and ensure more training for the elected local government functionaries, at the same time foster greater citizen participation rather than citizen mobilization. The study draws from a qualitative research conducted in Marondera district located 74 km from the capital city Harare from January 2018 to September 2018.

Keywords: Local Governance; citizen participation; democracy; rural development; rural authority; Marondera; Zimbabwe

I.   INTRODUCTION

The need for local democracy remains critical, yet it is 'stalled or resisted' (Chatiza and Makanza, 2017). Local democracy is achieved through decentralization. Decentralization provides opportunities for the interaction of state and non-state actors (Chatiza and Makanza, 2017). Decentralization is encompassed with the establishment of local authorities. Local government is devised as a strategy that enables the filling of 'governance gaps' that exist between the center and the periphery (Grindle, 2004). Filling such gaps is envisaged to improve service delivery and increase citizen participation.

Local governance is aimed at addressing rural development challenges (Connelly, Ricardson, and Miles, 2006). However, governance is not simple as it is associated with controversy as practical norms sometimes conflict, contradict and bypass conventional norms (Kamete, 2009; Herdt and Olivier de Sardan, 2016). Local democracy is based on citizen participation in governance matters with the justification that participation will lead to an engaged, educated, and equal society (Shortall, 2008; Gaventa, 2004). However, participation does not always translate to equality because of issues such as gender inequalities, generational inequalities, and power dynamics that characterize public participation processes. Nonetheless, decentralization brings more and more pressure for local authorities as roles change from humble ones such as school repairs and road maintenance to finance planning, and policy implementation (Grindle, 2007). Underpinning the need for decentralization and more localized governance are calls for power sharing among various levels of government. These calls emanate from various societal groups such as political activists and NGOs (Grindle, 2007; Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina, 2008). It is further argued; functional local governance leads to economic growth and increases the chances of transferring power from the central government to local elites (Zhang et al, 2002; Ribot, 2004:41). To achieve progressive local governance, there is a need to conduct a local selection of leaders. Such

selection makes decentralization more inclusiveness and public (Ribot, Chhatre and Lankina, 2008). The debates over decentralization have also been over concerns that centralized government is not adaptive to local concerns (Wunsch, 1998). At the same time, a paradox exists characterized by deliberate resource sabotage by national governments (Lo Saito, 2008; Wunsch, 1998).

The local elections create the opportunity for power transfers (Wunsch, 2001). For example, Botswana has frequent power changes at the local government level. Though, it is essential to note that the process has not been a smooth one, particularly in the early days as noticeable by frequent corruption and low-performance concerns (Wunsch, 2001). Similarly, in China, the rural governance system has been transformed from an appointed to the electoral system (Zhang et al, 2002). However, some studies point that in some contexts, citizens focus more on national and parliamentary elections than local elections (Kamete, 2009). Thus, under such context, there is a tendency to undermine and underrate the efficacy of local elections, yet they are pertinent to the achievement of democratic societies.

Functional local governance is a concern for both right and left wing governments (Guarneros–Meza and Geddes 2010). In Africa, the local government system has undergone several transitions and transformations. These transitions can be phased into the pre-colonial, colonial, transition, and post-independence (Conyers, 2007). As for decentralization is has been adopted by African states since the 1960s though not so successful. There has been the rise of hybrid systems, which are alleged to be a result of the fact that African states embarked on the decentralization drive without proper assessment of their realities (Cornwall and Coelho (n.d); Hyden, 2016). Furthermore, there is the capture of decentralization by competing ideologues (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Within the African context, local governance has been widely resisted by the older nationalist leaders holding on to power (Dorman, 2019).

In the early 2000s, Zimbabwe carried out a radical land reform program that was officially dubbed the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP). The FTLRP saw land expropriated from 4500 Large Scale Commercial Farmers and redistributed to 145 000 peasant households (A1[1]) and 16 500 middle to large farm beneficiaries (A2[2]) (Moyo, 2011; Moyo and Nyoni, 2013; Scoones et al., 2011). In fast track land reform areas, there is the prevalence of various competing authorities in terms of local governance. These local actors are new authority structures with competing claims of autochthony and by and large demonstrate how the land reform impacts on local politics (Mkodzongi, 2016; Murisa 2013). In essence, these competing authorities demonstrate the contested nature of local governance in post-land reform areas. The contested nature of local governance is characterized by interactions of various actors, embedded networks, histories, social interactions, and informalities of decentralization (Hoppe, Rickson, and Burch, 2007; Hyden, 2016). The complexity of local governance in rural Zimbabwe is mostly a result of the various discourses shaping the land, differentiated classes, and accumulation (Scoones, 2015: Murisa, 2018). The land reform resulted in rural accumulation transformation, but democratic freedoms remain stunted (Murisa, 2018).

Unlike in the communal areas in the resettlement areas, beneficiaries were drawn from various backgrounds (Matondi, 2012). The heterogeneity of the beneficiaries also resulted in the absence of lineage forms of organization that are manifest in the communal areas (Murisa, 2011). As such, this has also resulted in the friction between traditional authority and the resettled communities. In land reform areas, there is a contested relationship between government and traditional authorities (Hammar 2005: 15). Amidst this contest, is the deterioration in local government service delivery due to the economic situation (Dewa, Dziva and Mukwashi, 2014). The economy is severely affected by huge government debt, deindustrialization, and hyperinflation and economic sanctions (Helliker, Chiweshe, and Bhatasara, 2018; Moyo and Yeros, 2007).

This article focuses on local governance in a post land reform context; that is, it dwells on local governance practice in fast track land reform resettlement communities. The article is guided by the questions, how is local governance practiced in land reform areas, how do citizens participate in the governance processes and to what extent is the governance system decentralized and how such decentralization impacts on local development processes. By and large, the article attempts to understand the variations between the institutional setup and the ground-level realities. This is done to broaden our understanding of the democratic processes underway or lack thereof.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 outlines the research methodology; section 3-10 provides some findings and discussions and finally, section 11 provides some concluding remarks and raises some questions on how best we can achieve effective local governance in a contest that is mainly characterized authoritarianism.

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[1] A1 peasant landholdings up to 6 ha.
[2] A2 middle to large-scale landholdings from 6 ha up to 1500 ha depending on agro-ecological zone.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on three farms in Ward 23 of Marondera East. Marondera is a farming district located 74 km northeast of the capital Harare. It is the Provincial Capital of Mashonaland East Province. Ward 23 is located 20 kilometers from Marondera Central Business District. The three farms (Riverside, Springvalley, and Waterhead) were allocated to smallholder farmers under the A1 model of the fast track land reform from 2001 to 2008. The three farms were purposively selected based on the researchers' prior knowledge of the area. Also, the farms were more accessible to the researchers. A total of 90 households and 15 key informants (local leadership and government officials) were selected through purposive and snowball sampling as participants in the study. Maxwell (1996) highlights that purposive sampling is not about sampling a person only; the focus is also given to settings, events, and process. Purposive sampling is ideal for exploratory research, or in situations where the population under study is specialized or difficult to reach (Maxwell, 1996). As for snowball sampling, the researcher relied on the use of interconnected networks among the research population (Neuman, 2014).

The primary data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and in-depth interviews. A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool for the semi-structured interviews, and an interview guide was used as the tool for the in-depth interviews with the key informants the primary data collection was conducted from January 2018 to September 2018[3]. The January 2018 to September 2018 visit to the study area coincided with the election period in Zimbabwe, this enabled the gathering of richer findings on the political activities in the area. While discussing governance and participation is a sensitive issue, challenges were experienced at the study's inception, as some participants were reluctant to participate in the study, the researchers clearly explained to the community that the information was solely for research and they were not government officials. The respondents slowly started to participate in the study; besides, network sampling also enabled with the confidence building among the study participants.

III. ZIMBABWE'S RURAL GOVERNANCE

As previously indicated Zimbabwe's local governance system has undergone several transformations since independence. The emphasis has been over decentralization, with the justification that decentralization will open space for more involvement of the public in the development processes (Moyo 2010; Kurebwa, 2015). The formation of the governance architecture is outlined in the Constitution of Zim Section 111 (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013).

The Zimbabwean governance system is divided into three levels, the national, provincial and local government (Chatiza and Makanza, 2017) Furthermore, it is divided into 92 councils, 60 rural and 32 urban councils, 272 chiefs, (women only 7), 484 headmen and 30 000 village heads, 1596 wards (Chatiza and Makanza, 2017; ZEC, 2008). The presence of only seven women chiefs out of a total of 272 chiefs shows the gender inequalities in terms of leadership positions. This can be primarily attributed to the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwe's society (Gaidzanwa, 2012). Chief who have jurisprudence over land reform areas derive authority from the Traditional Leaders Act (Ch 20:17). Whereas one would expect chiefs to be custodians of traditional culture, the chiefs rely on State-backed custom (Alexander 2006 cited in Mkodzongi, 2016). The Rural District Council (RDC) Act 29:13 regulates the conduct of rural councils. The RDCs have powers to make bylaws and are run under the RDC Act of 1988 that lays the ground for the need for decentralization (Kurebwa, 2015).

The RDCs suffer from various challenges such as skills shortages, but there have also been efforts to improve their capacity, for instance, capacity building programs by NGOs since the 1990s as well as by the International Centre for Local Democracy to urban local authorities (Manyena, 2006). These decentralization efforts are decimated by the central government's control of provincial and district government (Mcgregor, 2002). It is such control that hinders active citizen participation at the grassroots levels. By and large, the control by the central government indicates re-centralization efforts (Jonga, 2014). Since 2003, land reform areas to fall under traditional leaders (Murisa 2013). Several elites and authorities compete to superintend over these areas. Within resettlement areas, there other platforms for citizen participation such as the as VIDCO (Village Development Committee) and Ward Development Committee (WADCO). However, studies note that these were established with non-clear mandates and weak communication channels (Mandondo, 2000). The other legal instruments regulating governance in the resettlement areas are; Statutory Instrument 43 of 2014; The Zimbabwe Land Commission Act of 20:29 of 2018. These legal instruments also overlap in terms of how governance is practiced in resettlement areas. At the same, it is also crucial to note that the Communal Lands Act also governs the Traditional Chiefs. This act is the one the Chiefs use when governing in communal areas and at law, it is not supposed to be applied in Resettlement Areas. However, there is no mechanism to ensure that the chiefs apply this law to the communal land only. Figure 1 below illustrates the contest in the governance architecture. The contest is at the legal framework and the praxis level.

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3 Zimbabwe held council, parliamentary and presidential elections on 30 July 2018.

IV. ELECTIONS

The holding of elections is critical in democratic decentralization (Ribot, 2004). Local elections are held after every five years. In terms of posts that are subject to election in the study area, a councilor is subject to elections as prescribed in the RDC Act. The study area falls under one councilor. The contest for the councilor posts has mainly been a ruling party political matter since the year 2000 as there are no political actors from the opposition that contest in this area.

In land reform areas opposing the ruling party is regarded as a sign of reversing the gains of the land reform and therefore is usually accompanied by threats of eviction from the land (Mudimu and Kurima, 2018). This decimates the prospects for alternative political politics, and at times result in the election of non-competent leaders. Since the year 2003, the councilor position has been alternating within the ruling party, and the seat is reserved for women. Therefore, one can safely argue that in terms of voting for the councilor citizen participation has been limited mainly to political party democracy in that whosoever is elected during a primary election (party level selection of election candidates) at the party level automatically gets to win the council elections uncontested. Competitive election sets the grounds for participative local processes (Wunsch, 2001). Within the political party structures, political decisions are made on what politicians can offer not policies and more on clientelism (Hyden, 2016; Herdt and Olivier de Sardan, 2016; Smith, 1996). This is mostly seen in the discourse and narrative accompanying the elections in this community that center more on a contestant's wealth[4] than the contestant's development proposals.

The other authority structures that are the village head; headman and chiefs are not subject to elections. The chief appoints the Village head and the headman. Furthermore, the three village heads are all men, demonstrating the gendered nature of leadership positions.

V. ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEGITIMACY

Accountability is about the ability of the citizens to use the votes to reward or punish the local government officials (Grindle, 2011). Whereas the hallmark of local governance is that for effective local government to be realized, leaders must be answerable to the led, the current state of affairs points to the contra. The unelected leaders (village heads, chief and headman) are accountable to the citizenry to a limited extent; however, there is no mechanism to ensure that if they are not accountable, the community can enforce checks and balance. While the Traditional Leaders Act Chapter 29:17 provides that the Minister of local government has the mandate to remove an underperforming traditional leader, this constitutional provision is barely announced to the community by the traditional leaders or by the government organs. Furthermore, the agriculture extensionists, District Administrator, traditional appear to be more accountable to the higher authority than the community as they rarely held meetings or consultation with the local community. In the study area, most decisions are cascaded from the central government to the local authorities with limited input from the citizens. The central government justifies its control in that some decisions are urgent and also rural people at times are ill informed (Nsingo and Kuye, 2005). Furthermore, in the study site, there are limited Non-Governmental Organisation activities. The absence of NGO support provides the State with the chance to be the only benefactor and entrenches its stronghold on these areas (Murisa, 2018: Matondi, 2012). Therefore, the absence of civilian participation platforms undermines accountability mechanisms, as there is limited room to question the State's actions. For accountability to be is achieved, there must be negative and positive sanctions (Ribot, Chhatre, and Lankina, 2008).

The legitimacy of traditional authorities is also limited by the fact that they are not elected. Legitimacy is mostly achieved through the ballot box (Connelly, Ricardson, and Miles, 2016; Murisa, 2018; 2013). However, it is critical to note that legitimacy allows for the exercise of power without coercion and having the actions of the rulers accepted voluntarily (Schmitter, 2001). Thus, in the study area, as highlighted in this article, the leaders achieve legitimacy to a limited extent, especially when they make popular decisions such as arranging community projects like irrigation partnership schemes with outsiders.

VI. PARTICIPATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Political participation is essential in a democracy (Nsingo and Kuye, 2005; Grindle, 2007). Citizen participation in the study area is achieved via three main means; political party, village meetings, and ward meetings. The village meetings are held irregularly and are usually summoned by the village heads when they decide whenever they want one. On average, the three villages held seven meetings annually, and the meetings were primarily to communicate decisions from the higher authorities. Thus, one can safely argue that in the

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[4] Interviews at campaign rallies, and citizens pointed to individual wealth as some of the motivating factors in their voting behaviors.

study area there is more community mobilization than participation[5]. Furthermore, the village heads also functioned as party functionaries as they also communicated ruling party demands to the local citizenry.

Evidence from our participant observations indicates that there was no officially recognized explanation proffered over the role of the village head. The meetings held with the villagers barely inquired on the citizens' input on development plans. Whenever they did, there was no feedback on the progress of such plans. For instance, there was no consultation of the citizenry on the amount of land rent the citizens had to pay, the central government announced the new rent amounts without any due consideration of the local communities input. The central state's limited consultation with the local governance structures undermines democratic efforts at the local level (Jonga, 2014) as it ignores the local realities such as economic stagnation, which curtails the citizenry ability to pay land rentals demanded by the central State.

On the other hand, the three village heads also assisted their communities by contesting at the ward level for their villages to access the limited agriculture inputs that are at times offered by the government. This finding is in sync with other studies in land reform areas in Zimbabwe that point that traditional authorities are not wholesomely repressive (Mkodzongi, 2016), they are also involved in struggles to empower their people, this stems from the need to bolster their legitimacy. Thus, this study points out that Mamdani's (1996) citizen and subject typology, cannot be wholesomely applied to the study area. However, a graduated scale of the citizen and subject would be in place. Thus, instead of a binary citizen and subject categorization, a spectrum could suffice to capture the ground-level realities in rural Zimbabwe. Hence, concerning Mkodzongi (2016) who completely dismisses Mamdani's citizen and subject categorization, this study would first concur with Mkodzongi (2016) on the presence of traditional progressive leaders and further argue, that these traditional progressive leaders can be placed on a spectrum. A spectrum, which would, we argue, needs to move from one pole of citizen and subject to the full citizenry pole ('progressive leadership'). Thus, this article argues that traditional leadership is in constant flux. Therefore a moving target which escapes bifurcation.

Interestingly, the government through the District Administrator, agriculture extension officers also claim to play the same role as the village heads. Within the local governance system in Zimbabwe, competition is more rampant at the local level than cooperation (Manyena, 2006). For example, the agriculture extension officers also summoned the citizens for development meetings, and the DA also visited the communities on a similar agenda. While one can argue that poverty requires a multi-pronged approach, the often divergence in the approach and goals of the various authorities points out more to a contest for power than a concerted effort to address the development question in this community. Overall, the capacity of these competing authorities to deliver development is hindered by the economic situation that impacts negatively on the capacity of local governance (Chatiza and Makanza, 2017).

VII.   AGRICULTURE INPUTS AND FOOD AID DISTRIBUTION

The agriculture extension officer also compiles a list of farmers as potential beneficiaries of farm inputs, at the same time; the local councilor also compiles a list of the village that they list as more deserving. Similarly, the ruling party officials in the study area listed party members who had to be prioritized under inputs distribution. This scenario presents competition over scarce resources and generates more confusion during inputs distribution program. In the end, officials distributing inputs are forced to ignore the officially recognized channels that are the village head and the councilor and pay more attention to party members (on politics and farm inputs and food aid see Chinsinga, 2010; Chipato and Wang, 2019). Furthermore, the government consistently deploys the military to take part in agricultural input programs. For example, operation Maguta and Command Agriculture. The deployment of the military is justified on the basis that the government endeavors to achieve military-grade efficiency in inputs distribution and also to demonstrate how serious the inputs program and agricultural productivity is to the national question (Mazwi et al, 2019). However, the deployment of the military from the national government undermines the legitimacy of local actors and further complicates an already contested situation over resources access and availability.

VIII.   LAND ADMINISTRATION

Land administration in resettlement areas is another arena of the contest. The village head together with a committee of seven[6] also solved land disputes. At the same time, the ruling party structures in the study area also claimed jurisdiction over the same matter. In the study area, information from focus group discussion reveals that there is a common belief that since the ruling party-led government implemented the land reform as such the party has a moral responsibility for land matters. For instance, the party allocated some youth land in some uncultivated areas, yet this is supposed to be the responsibility of the ministry of lands.

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[5] Political mobilization, the process of including the socially available into new behaviors (See Cameron, 1974).
[6] Committee of Seven- 7 member committee at village level chaired by the village head.

As for land dispute resolution overall say over land dispute resides with the Zimbabwe Land Commission (ZLC ACT, 2017). However, this is not the case for the land resettlement areas fall under the jurisdiction of chiefs, such maneuvers of putting the land resettlement areas under the jurisdiction of the chiefs were mainly for political reasons as chiefs are widely considered loyal and having capabilities to spearhead the ruling party's hegemonic project. Conjecturally, traditional leaders also claim moral responsibility to be the legitimate authorities because they actively participated in the land reform (c. f Mkodzongi, 2016). Thus, in terms of land administration, there are contest among the ZLC, central government, Traditional Authorities, Ruling Party ZANU-PF, War Veterans and the land reform beneficiaries who opine that since they were allocated the land, they should have an overall say over what and how they use and live on the land.

IX. LAND RENT COLLECTION

At the onset of the land reform, the land reform beneficiaries did not pay any rent. However, the economic crisis that ensued after the withdrawal of international capital (see Moyo and Yeros, 2007) resulted in the government imposing a rent on the peasants as it tried to cushion its financial resources. At first, the rent was paid to the District administrator's office, a year later, the rental payment was changed and had to the paid to the RDC offices, as from 2018, the rents are now being paid to the village head. While making payments to the village heads is noble given the proximity of the village heads to their communities, the question that remains unanswered is where the money is channeled since no local development projects have been established.. Lately, there is a contest between the DA, the RDC and the Ministry of Land each partner offering to collect the rents on the basis that they all represent the resettlement areas and are determined to see progress in the resettled area. This contest for rent collection with no resultant development confirms arguments that some local government policies are inclusionary in cost and exclusionary in terms of benefits sharing (Mandondo, 2000).

X. GENDER AND CIVIL SOCIETY

In Zimbabwe, like in most African countries, there has been the gendering of the nationalist legacy (Dorman, 2019). This gendered nature of nationalist politics permeates from the central to the local government level. The three village heads are all men and have all been in power since 2000. As previously indicated, the village head position is not contested. Similarly, out of the twenty-one committees members of the 'committee of seven' in the three villages, only four are women. As for the youth (18-35 years), they are not represented in the local leadership positions. A similar study in Goromonzi District in the same Mashonaland East Province noted that women had limited chances for political office (Mudge and Kwangwari, 2013). Moreover, if they are women who ascended to top leadership positions faced resistance from men (ibid).

The elders regard the youth as dependents and as the future (Chipato et al forthcoming). In the study area, the youth are excluded from decision making as they are forced to wait for the future. This form of social exclusion has a bearing on local governance that is supposed to be public and inclusive (Ribot, 2004). However, it is also important to note that non-participation is also a legitimate choice and also a source of power (Shortall, 2008). Nonetheless, in the case study area non-participation was not a choice as the youth interviewees remarked that: "*we are secluded and barely invited for meetings unless if there work to be done such as repairing fences or for election campaigns.*"

There are limited civil society activities in these communities, the only form of community organizations are farmer groups such as the Zimbabwe Farmers Union, sorely concentrated on its mandate of providing agronomic advice to the farmers. Murisa (2011) makes similar observations, that farmer groups in resettlement areas mainly concentrate on enhancing farm productivity. The civil society landscape in this community resembles arguments by Hyden (2016:5) that in Africa, there is barely the voluntarism that is expected of civil society. The farmer groups are conduits for assessing inputs and related service as such failure to join would be at one's detriment. Other civil society organizations such as churches are present in this community but rarely discuss governance issues or citizen participation. The only civil society association that is very active in the area is the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association. The majority of land reform beneficiaries in this locality are war veterans. Interesting the war veterans association is aligned to the ruling party, and it barely considers itself a civil society for the term civil society is associated with Western-backed NGOs that are alleged to be involved in regime change agenda (Makumbe, 2007). This alignment of the war veterans association to the ruling party can be attributed to the fact that there is pressure from the ruling party for 'legitimate' organizations prove their patriotic nature by aligning to the ruling party (Moyo, 1993). Furthermore, the majority of current state leaders and party members are also liberation war veterans. These forms organizations including the VIDCOs it is argued, they are parochial associations that further the ideology of the center (Moyo, 1993).

XI. REACTIONS FROM BELOW

The community's response to the governance contest has been variegated. First, there is compliance with all the competing 'hybrid' authorities. This manifests when community members pay allegiance to directives from the party, traditional leaders and the government. Others resorted to react indifferently; for instance, some community members decided not to pay their land rental purporting that they were not sure who and where to pay. Also, some paid more attention to the party issued directives than the government issued orders. This is mostly a result of the conflation of party and state politics. For instance, around the year 2012, the then Provincial Administrator Mr. XY visited the villagers and advised some who were resisting to venture into production partnerships with former white farmers so that the resulted peasants could improve their livelihoods. At the same time, the party leadership objected to this position, for the party regarded this as counter-agrarian reform and a derail to 2013 elections that were nearing. The community adhered the ruling party directives.

XII.   CONCLUSION

This article has illustrated how a supposedly decentralized local governance system in post-land reform Zimbabwe unfolds. The study explored how in resettlement areas, there is competition and contest among various actors and legislative framework for legitimacy over the governance architecture. The article argued that the contest is triggered at two levels, that is, the legislative and the praxis level. At the legislative level, the article demonstrated that conflicting and overlapping policies create conflicts among the implementing partners. At the practice level, the various actors, each with differing motivation contests to be the sole governance authorities in the land reform areas. Under such a scenario, the absence of a vibrant civil society space resulted in limited citizens' participation in development issues as the central government, directly and indirectly, seeks to control the democratic practices in land reform areas. This has led to the closure of democratic space for citizen participation and in the end, the perpetuation of local platforms such as VIDCO as extensions of the central government control efforts. The study also noted the ambivalent nature of the traditional leaders as they carry out the central government instructions and at times contest as they sought to enable their communities to benefit from limited state resources. The study recommends the establishment of training from the civil society to the citizens on their democratic rights, and more importantly, the study points to the need for broader democratic synergies that span political, gender and generational line both at the national level and the local level. Such struggles should slowly transform the resettlement dwellers from 'mere voters (subjects) to citizens' (Mamdani, 1996; Hyden, 2016; Ribot, 2004). It is such struggles that can counterbalance the adverse effects of the State (Smith, 1996; Mazwi and Mudimu, 2019) and other authoritarian modes of control that are experienced in rural Zimbabwe. This study raises questions for further research; how can the citizenry ensure effective local governance and democratic decentralization in a context that is characterized by an ever-solidifying authoritarian regime or rather in a context where the democratic space is shrinking?

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Conflict of Interest
The authors report no conflict of interest.

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