Reflections on Peacebuilding Constructs in Seke District, Zimbabwe

Norman Chivasa

Abstract
Since 2004, the formation of informal peace committees in Zimbabwe has signaled a change in the dynamics of local peace initiatives away from external elite top-down donor-driven interventions and toward a greater understanding of the potential of localized indigenous village and community informed solution-focused perspectives and initiatives. Despite the fact that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aided in the facilitation, promotion, and enhancement of what was already in place, local peacebuilding efforts in Zimbabwe are not new, nor did they begin in 2004. Many Zimbabwean villages have had local peacebuilding initiatives such as customary courts for several decades prior to colonialism, but their notion of peacebuilding remain overlooked and under-appreciated. This study focuses on the peacebuilding constructs that have prompted ordinary people in the Seke district of Mashonaland East province, Zimbabwe, to create ward-level and village peace committees. The results of an action research method involving a 15-member ward peace committee (WPC) and 27 male and female respondents are discussed in this study. One of the main constructs was that peacebuilding is a collaborative mechanism (with no end-point) with the primary goal of preventing violence through conflict transformation rather than eradicating conflict. Peacebuilding was further interpreted as everyone’s occupation, regardless of social or political standing, since conflict knows no bounds. This study contends that elites can collaborate through a hybridized mechanism with local actors and informal institutions to promote community empowerment capacity for local peace and development initiatives in Zimbabwe.

Keywords
action research, local peace committees, hybrid peacebuilding, Zimbabwe

Introduction
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 peacebuilding ever since independence in 1980 (Mungure & Mandikwaza, 2020; Tshuma, 2020). Literature on peacebuilding in Zimbabwe indicates that since independence mainstream approaches to peace have not adequately addressed peace and development challenges that bedeviled the southern African country simply because these peacebuilding interventions have been elitist, overlooking, and under-appreciating local peace initiatives (Machakanja, 2010; Murambadoro & Wielenga, 2015; Mazambani & Tapfumaneyi, 2020).

The current study is part of a wider initiative that aimed to understand more about how Zimbabwe’s ordinary people contribute to community peacebuilding. It is situated in a historical context in which, peacebuilding has been marked by a binary relationship between top-down and bottom-up efforts and institutions in post-independence Zimbabwe (Chitana, 2013; Tshuma, 2019, 2020). These binaries, according to this research, are counterproductive in that mainstream peacebuilding approaches continue to overlook and under-appreciate informal actors and initiatives, whereas top-down programs face credibility issues at community level.

As a result, there is still unresolved friction in Zimbabwe between top-down and bottom-up approaches to peace. This is due to that elitist peacebuilding efforts in Zimbabwe have shunned and neglected an established system of customary courts which have a long history of addressing conflict situations in pre- and post-colonial Zimbabwe at community level (Chiweshe, 2016; Muchemwa et al., 2013). Most recently in 2004, IPCs which demonstrates local agency, self-reliance, and resilience by ordinary people in Zimbabwe remain unacknowledged in peacebuilding discourses in Zimbabwe.
However, despite the fact that customary courts and IPCs do not have an official mandate, their mutual interest in social issues such as resolving interpersonal conflict, addressing rape cases involving the girl child, fist fighting at beer parties, domestic abuse, stock robbery, burglary, theft, and land boundary disputes demonstrates local capacity and resilience to manage peace and development within their villages (Chivasa, 2017).

To contribute toward the establishment of a strategy or approach to peace in Zimbabwe, in 2014, an action research (AR) project was launched in ward 8 of Seke district, Zimbabwe, with the aim of supporting community level initiatives while also responding to the dominance of top-down approaches to peace in Zimbabwe. Local citizens in ward 8 of Seke district, in partnership with the researcher, planned and created a 15-member ward peace committee (WPC) made up of eight female and seven male adults. The peace committee’s goal was for local residents to take responsibility for their own peace by using local conflict resolution mechanisms to resolve peace issues that were affecting their well-being (Chivasa, 2015). The aim of this study was to address the identified gap, by reflecting on the peacebuilding constructs that have prompted ordinary people in the Seke district to create ward-level and village peace committees through the AR framework with a goal to contribute to the broad debates on localized peacebuilding.

The study is organized as follows: The research approach and data collection appended by reflexivity on the researcher’s position are explained in Section 2. Section 3 provides an overview snapshot of the peacebuilding context in Zimbabwe. Section 4 examines the conceptual discourses on peacebuilding appended by the hybrid peacebuilding theory, informal peace committees, and their hybridity nature. The subsequent section discusses continuities and discontinuities in local peace initiatives in Zimbabwe. The research findings are discussed in Section 6 followed by concluding remarks.

**Research Approach and Data Collection**

The study examines data from Seke district’s ward 8 to consider how ordinary people conceptualize peacebuilding as they demonstrate (practice) local agency to reject top-down approaches to peace and development. Ward 8 is a communal area where subsistence crops and livestock farming are the main sources of income. Its proximity to the agricultural markets of Harare and Chitungwiza has facilitated market gardening as a source of income for locals. A peace committee was envisioned as a peacebuilding tool to assist people in taking responsibility for their own peace and development goals.

The researcher’s entry into the social space was to set up a WPC in Ward 8, which occurred within the context of prior contacts with some of the peace committee members that he collaborated with. The merits of gaining access to individuals the researcher had prior contacts and interactions with outweighed the interactions with individuals with whom the researcher had no prior contacts. As the section: *reflexivity on the researcher’s position* in this study will illustrate in detail, this study was written from an insider’s point of view.

Accordingly, the researcher worked with ordinary people to design and form a WPC, using the AR approach. AR entails the researcher forming a partnership/collaboration with participants and jointly defining the issue, designing an intervention, and putting it into practice (Bradbury, 2015; Greenwood et al., 1993; Stiefel, 2001). The AR cycle in this study began with the establishment of the WPC and continued for nine months, during which time a self-evaluation was performed. The aim of the assessment was to evaluate the WPC’s immediate effect on members and the community.

Over a 9-month timeframe, villagers’ buy-in resulted in the creation of three village peace committees. Ethical concerns concerning the project were discussed and debated prior to the creation of the WPC and village peace committees. As a result, the 15 members of the WPC who became the researcher’s reference team made well-informed decisions about whether or not to participate in the analysis. They felt inspired to participate in the peace initiative because it was designed first and foremost to serve the community’s perceived interests and only secondarily to fulfill my research requirements.

This researcher considered members of the WPC and village peace committees as a convenient sample. As a result, a total of 42 adults (21 male and 21 female adults) participated in this study. Data was gathered through a 15-member WPC community discussion, as well as participant observation and informal interactions with individual committee members. Another data set came from three village peace committee focus groups of five participants each, as well as 12 interviews with people who weren’t on the peace committee but lived in ward 8. The majority (19) were between the ages of 47 and 70, while 13 were between the ages of 40 and 44. Ten of the participants were between the ages of 30 and 39. Three had diploma certificates, two had degrees, 20 had some secondary education, and 17 had stopped at the primary school level. The formation of the IPCs along with the selection of interview and focus group participants did not have youth representation or participation (i.e., 18–35 years older). The main reasons behind this, as any peace structure in any community surely must involve its youth populace was not deliberate, but a coincidence in that only elderly men and women were the ones who availed themselves for the information of peace committees. To ensure youth representation, respondents advocated for the co-option of one or two youths (male or female) in future committees to represent the interests of youths in peacebuilding (Chivasa, 2015).

The interviews were based on three primary questions: the first was about how peace is viewed, the second was about how peacebuilding is perceived, and the third was about the outcomes of peace committees. During focus group
discussion, similar questions were asked, along with one additional question: Has the process of “ownership” and taking responsibility for community peace formation and dispute resolution resulted in local villagers working together? The interviews were conducted after administering three-village peace committee focus group meetings, which were appended by a 15-member WPC discussion. Random informal discussions and observations took place during the data collection process. In collecting data, the researcher was assisted by an adult male university undergraduate whom the researcher trained to moderate focus group discussions. After securing consent, a voice recorder was employed to record the unfolding dynamics while the research assistant moderated the discussions.

Reflexivity on the Researcher’s Position

The researcher first entered the social space by forming a WPC in Ward 8, which he did in the light of previous collaborations with some of the would-be peace committee members. Two factors affected the adoption of the AR strategy. Firstly, the researcher’s role in the planning process contributed to the adoption of AR in the creation of the peace committee. The establishment of a peace committee coincided with the researcher’s post-graduate research in Seke district’s ward 8, which aimed to see how effective IPCs can be peacebuilding mechanisms. Ordinary residents in Ward 8 had no intention of adopting the AR method from the start because the creation of the peace committee lacked an academic dimension.

Prior to the creation of the ward-level peace committee, the researcher spent time discussing the would-be chairperson of the peace committee and stressing the benefits of using the AR approach, especially its proclivity for creating spaces for collective preparation, reflection, decision-making, and problem-solving. Furthermore, the researcher stated that AR was to assist those involved in the design and implementation of the WPC formulation procedures in assessing the effective of such interventions both in the short and long term.

The researcher emphasized that the goal of the AR approach was to provide insights into how societies should take responsibility for their own peace, as well as to assist in future peace committee preparation. Since the interim chairperson could read and write English, the researcher had no trouble describing and demonstrating to him using pictures of the AR to get him on board? The researcher was inspired by van Niekerk and van Niekerk (2009), who used an AR approach in their analysis in South Africa and exchanged pictures with participants.

The use of a standardized interview guide in the self-evaluation phase that the 15-member WPC conducted after 9 months of the formation of the intervention resulted from the adoption of AR. As a result, co-researchers were actively involved in coming up with thematic areas and developing the assessment guide because of the participatory nature of the process. The co-researchers did not regard the researcher as an outsider because the process took place in the framework of our usual day-to-day activities, and the researcher was free to express his views while also exercising caution not to dominate the show and end up reporting events that he might have produced, as this would contaminate the research results.

Consequently, AR team involvement affected the study process and its writing. This was due to the fact that the researcher planned to initially assess the effectiveness of the WPC 3 months after its creation, but he had to make changes to fit into the timetable of the entire committee, which did not have a set date for evaluation until 9 months after the formation date. For that reason, the WPC’s participation in the design, development, and assessment of the peace intervention informed the writing of this study in the sense that the evaluation date was determined by their resolution as a committee, and their conception of peacebuilding served as the foundation for this study. The results are based on the deliberations of the peace committee representatives with whom the researcher worked with.

The Peacebuilding Context for Zimbabwe

From the mid-1800s to the 2000s, Zimbabwean communities have not realized 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 (Maruta, 2014; Mungure & Mandikwaza, 2020; Tshuma, 2020). 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 (Machakanja, 2010).

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 (Mungure & Mandikwaza, 2020; Tshuma, 2020).
In response to a history of episodic violence, Zimbabwe has instituted three major 14P initiatives since 1980, namely, the national reconciliation policy of the 1980s, the organ on national healing, reintegration, and reconciliation (ONHRI) of 2009, and the NPRC of 2013. All these 14P have undergone academic scrutiny about the impact of such interventions. While the reconciliation policy of 1980 was noble and timely, it left the Zimbabwean population divided because the policy lacked political will and inclusivity. It also lacked participation by people at the grassroots; and failed to address structures of injustice (Chiweshe, 2016; Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2013; Machakanja, 2010; Muzavazi, 2014).

As if that was not enough, the ONHRI peace process lacked political will, remained a paper tiger, and that like its predecessor, it left the fractured community unreconciled (Chinoputsa, 2012; Chiweshe, 2016; Muchemwa et al., 2013; Mhandara, 2014; Muzavazi, 2014).

Subsequently, the NPRC was instituted in 2013 to address the legacy of post-independence violence. 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 (Marimbe, 2019). 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 (Mungure & Mandikwaza, 2020).

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 (Tshuma, 2019, 2020). Against this background, this study reflects on peacebuilding constructs that have prompted ordinary people in the Seke district’s ward 8 without the intervention of an external agent. It argues that hybrid peacebuilding, which includes local actors, informal institutions, and state-centric peacebuilding (top-down) institutions, is essential to promote the empowerment potential of local people.

**Hybrid Peacebuilding Theory**

This research blends into the hybridity debates. Hybridity is one of the post-colonial lenses that aims to reverse hegemonic relations between top-down actors and institutions with informal actors and institutions in the field of peacebuilding (Richmond, 2012; Visoka, 2013). It is a concept used in the peacebuilding literature to describe the synthesis of liberal and illiberal norms, structures, and actors. It can also mean integration between international and local peacebuilding actors and institutions (Kent et al., 2018). Schmeidl (2009) describes hybridity as the interaction of modern and traditional norms and values without infringing on another’s space. Mac Ginty (2010) views hybridity as the relationship of national or international-sponsored peace initiatives with peace initiatives based on local customs, norms, and values. As a result, hybrid peacebuilding arose from hybrid discourses.

Hybrid peacebuilding is a mechanism in which “previously separate practices or systems are merged to create new structures or practices” (Visoka 2013, p. 25). It has also included incumbent state institutions partnering with local actors and institutions in other situations. In this study, it is suggested that the best way to achieve peace is to use a hybrid approach, which is exemplified by IPCs, a type of hybrid peace formation that combines both indigenous and cosmopolitan norms and values.

Hybrid peace is an alternative to liberal peacebuilding that emphasizes state-mediated peace initiatives as well as free market economic initiatives. The international community and regional bodies have attempted to achieve liberal
Critical peacebuilding invoked hybridity to embrace engagement between different actors and institutions in light of the problems associated with liberal peacebuilding interventions (Visoka, 2013). Three pillars underpin hybrid peace. To begin with, traditional peacebuilding institutions primarily represent the elites by signing peace agreements and power-sharing agreements. It argues that, despite the fact that peacebuilding is increasingly being regarded as a long-term process, elites have a propensity to plan and execute strategies in terms of time-bound measures such as signing peace agreements with short time limits (Adam et al., 2014). Elites have preferred to concentrate on immediate results through peace negotiations, which has hindered peacebuilding's long-term existence (Louw-Vaudran, 2016).

Second, without the participation of grassroots citizens, mainstream peacebuilding organizations have little ability to achieve peace. The failure of conventional peace efforts to bring about peace in the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is an example (Louw-Vaudran, 2016). Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Mozambique are examples of countries in southern Africa caught in a state of post-conflict peacebuilding stagnation, owing to a tendency for peace efforts in the region to take a top-down approach when dealing with peace problems.

Third, traditional institutions that existed prior to colonialism are now trying to preserve peace. These traditional institutions are not static; they respond to evolving conditions and can be versatile, cost-effective, and adaptable to integrate with cosmopolitan institutions. They are rooted in a desire for non-elitist peacebuilding, inspired by the realization that ordinary citizens can contribute to peacebuilding, even if their efforts are largely undocumented and restricted to particular geographic areas (Noma et al., 2012; Young, 2010). Despite the fact that hybrid peacebuilding is seen as a novel alternative solution capable of accommodating both liberal peacebuilding and informal institutions and actors (Anam, 2018; Brown, 2018), critics claim that hybridity may be used to legitimize liberal peacebuilding initiatives that might not be relevant to local realities on the one hand.

On the other, hybridity has the potential to romanticize the capabilities of local actors and informal institutions which are often small, socially focused, and sometimes covert overlooking peace initiatives at macro level, which are standardized and more formal. As a result, combining the two raises issues such as which framework (formal or informal) should be prioritized? (Richmond, 2012).

Although the combination of top-down and bottom-up actors and institutions is appealing, it is unlikely to be a panacea for the immense challenges of conflict and violence in the world. Conversely, hybridity tends to be more preferable than over-dependence entirely on top-down or bottom-up actors and institutions. Northern Kenyans were able to mediate peace and development issues by combining local social traditions and values with state-centric mainstream peacebuilding (Menkhaus, 2008). Northern Somaliland pursued a hybrid approach to peacebuilding after the demise of Said Barre, and conflict was reduced to a large extent (Paffenholz, 2013). In today’s societies, hybrid peacebuilding takes the form of IPCs, which blend cosmopolitan and traditional norms and values (Adan & Pklya, 2006).

Typically, interventions by IPCs have been recorded as success stories in community-based attempts to take responsibility for their own peace and development in several other countries such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda (Odendaal, 2008, 2010; van Tongeren, 2012, 2013). In South Africa, these IPCs have helped to mitigate the spread of xenophobic violence against foreign nationals between 2019 and 2020 by alerting the police force and mobilizing communities to quell potential attacks on foreign nationals in South Africa. They have also helped to reduce fear, and promote community policing and improved community reporting of acts of violence in places such as Alexander Township and Mafikeng in Gauteng Province and KwaZulu-Natal Province (Nganje, 2021). The emergence of IPCs 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. Building on these theoretical underpinnings, this study aimed to focus on ordinary people’s peacebuilding constructs and how they are building peace in Seke district, Zimbabwe.

**Informal Peace Committees and Their Hybridity Nature**

Peace committees first appeared in the 1980s (Giessmann, 2016), following decades of unsuccessful or restricted peacebuilding efforts under the then-current peacekeeping model. However, as Odendaal (2008, 2010) and van Tongeren (2012) point out, the effectiveness of peace committees has been hindered by the fact that contemporary peacebuilding mechanisms prefer top-down rather than bottom-up approaches. Peace committees are created as a response to a specific conflict, with the main goal of contributing to conflict management and post-conflict peacebuilding, or 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 committees. Formal peace committees (FPCs) are composed of official members from
both sides of a conflict and are created by a legislative framework. The NPRC was formed in Zimbabwe by Section 251 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment No. 20 of 2013) to deal with the legacy of post-independence violence and to foster healing, reconciliation, and cohesion. Between May and June 2019, the Zimbabwean government formed provincial peace committees through the NPRC in each of the country’s 10 provinces, with plans to cascade these structures down to village levels throughout the country. FPCs are structured, male-dominated, and elitist when compared to IPCs which are relatively flexible, gender sensitive, and inclusive in terms of the inclusion of different social groups in the community and embracing of a participatory approach in which decision making becomes a shared process, and shared common interests and purpose (Adan & Pklya, 2006; Chivasa, 2015, 2019).

Additionally, IPCs are made up of individuals from all walks of life at community level and have no specific mandate or legislation. Members of IPCs are familiar with the community’s everyday life and the conflict in question, as well as an in-depth (albeit instinctive) understanding of the community’s collective mindset, both of which are factors that play a minor yet critical role in promoting peace and development. Despite these merits, IPCs often lack the capacity to deal directly with political level disputes. This weakness is particularly apparent during elections, when group polarization takes center stage, which stems from the fact that political disputes are normally instigated from outside the community by people at a higher level within the political formations involved, with local political functionaries simply following instructions from above (Chivasa, 2017). However, IPCs can by themselves hardly make an impact without the support of state institutions (Adan & Pklya, 2006). Therefore, the micro-macro synergy infrastructures for peace should be embraced in Zimbabwe if sustainability is to be achieved.

This study focuses on IPCs as they are hybrid mechanisms. 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). Adan and Pklya (2006) note that IPCs are hybrid formations that combine both traditional and cosmopolitan values. IPCs act as a link between the state and local justice systems, administering both customary law and cosmopolitan norms (Odendaal, 2010). They are timely and a valuable hybrid approach to contemporary conflicts (Adan & Pklya, 2006). Richmond (2012) notes that local peace formations are aimed at resolving conflict in daily life and to resist external prescriptions for peace. These characteristics point to the strengths and empowerment potential that hybrid peacebuilding can address in order to improve the influence of IPCs and its cognate institutions such as customary courts at the community level.

### Continuities and Discontinuities in Local Peace Initiatives in Zimbabwe

In 2004, the formation of self-initiated peace committees by ordinary people in Zimbabwe demonstrated local agency, self-reliance, and resilience in the area of peacebuilding. Despite the fact that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) assisted in the facilitation, promotion, and enhancement of local peace initiatives, local peacebuilding efforts in Zimbabwe are not new and did not begin in 2004. Local peacebuilding efforts have existed in several Zimbabwean villages for many decades prior to colonialism. Ordinary Zimbabweans have historically deployed customary courts and other cognate structures to settle tribal and interpersonal disputes in their communities, such as banditry, family feuds, infidelity, robbery, and arson to cite but a few examples (Gombe, 2006; Holleman, 1952). Ironically, women and youth continue to be oppressed in these conventional structures, which include customary courts, in terms of holding key roles, decision-making, and dispute resolution involvement (Gombe, 2006).

As a result, IPCs differ from the traditional court system in that they represent a change in gender roles and decision-making processes between men and women, in that a woman can hold a strategic role such as chairperson or secretary and participate equally in decision-making, which is still a challenge in Zimbabwe’s traditional court system. Another important distinction is that IPCs are locally hybridized solution-focused initiatives that can be replicated (Chivasa, 2017; Moyo, 2014), while customary courts are culture specific and not universally replicable.

IPCs and customary courts, on the other hand, are also egalitarian in that they include male and female adults from village to district levels. Despite the fact that both IPCs and customary courts lack an official authority, they both show resilience, local agency, and self-determination, which stand out as locally accessible assets in the face of failing top-down initiatives in Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2014). This type of local agency provides a good example for other societies to follow.

Furthermore, the perpetual existence of the customary court system in Zimbabwe has remained unchanged, although what has changed so far is the advent of IPCs as hybrid formations that combine both traditional and cosmopolitan values (Adan & Pklya, 2006). IPCs are a modern initiative that not only questions male domination, but also allows for a rethinking of values and perceptions about the role of all social classes (including youth and women) in peacebuilding. Local people, especially in rural areas, continue to use customary courts to establish peace, and these courts are presided over by village heads or chiefs who are hereditary according to bloodlines (Chivasa, 2019; Gombe, 2006).
In contrast, IPCs are not hereditary as any female adult can occupy any strategic position such as chairperson. These initiatives are underpinned by traditional and cosmopolitan norms and values, which makes them less formal but valid in their host communities. Despite the discrepancies between IPCs and customary courts in Zimbabwe, these community-led institutions are participatory and structured to address the needs of the host community (Moyo, 2014).

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 derailing their participation in local peace initiatives (Frogh et al., 2010).

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses a number of key understandings held by the IPC members in Seke District.

Peace Involves Co-Existence

Peace as coexistence was one of the themes that stood out, and it expressed itself through teamwork, cooperative work, supporting each other in tough times, treating people fairly, reconciling after a dispute, and showing love to everyone. People cannot encounter peace at all if they do not cooperate, treat each other with dignity, and so on. Respondents saw supporting the poor as another important element of coexistence, as one woman put it during an interview: “that peace is helping each other in times of need.” People do not collaborate blindly, according to respondents; if they believe they are being treated with dignity, they collaborate on a regular basis by displaying “respect to one another,” “cohesion,” “being together,” and “tolerating one another,” as one minister of religion pointed out. One traditional leader said the following while discussing how people can coexist “Self-control, for example, is required when conflict occurs; people must consider such occurrences as part of daily life in order to prevent conflict” (Subsistent farmer, female, late 30s).

Relationships are always strained at some stage, according to respondents, and misunderstandings are inevitable. They stated that if a conflict arises, parties should make attempts to repair broken relationships in order to prevent a relapse into conflict. Reconciliation, according to respondents, includes “confessing, apologizing, and forgiving one another to work out previously troubled relationships. Where two people who haven’t seen eye to eye can be seen talking to each other, only then can we say peace has visited them,” one respondent explained. The core concept was that “if two people who previously couldn’t speak to each other are seen asking each other for salt, we can confidently assume that they have reconciled.” According to Chimuka (2009), coexistence (kugarisana) entails “accepting the numerous differences among members of the same group.” Even in terms of misconduct, kugarisana entailed the recognition that it is human to make mistakes and that one may be in the wrong at some point in the future, necessitating tolerance.

One of the imperatives that sustain peace is “working together (co-existence).” The imperative is supported by a number of cardinal virtues, including kuvimbisika (keeping one’s word and telling the truth); kuzvidukupisa (willingness to follow traditional custom); rudo and chido (personal intimate love expressed more by actions than words); tsitsi (sympathy); and kuregerera (to forgive). Other virtues include kurega zwakaipa (repentance), kusazvida (selflessness), and kuvadzana (civic friendship) (Gelfand, 1999). These findings emphasize the importance of interpersonal relationship between individuals and groups as a foundation for peace.

Peace is Experiencing Satisfaction and Happiness

Almost every interview and focus group conversation revolved around the topic of happiness. Happiness, according to respondents, entails “experiencing pleasure,” “a sense of self-sufficiency,” and “a sense of comfort.” One respondent, for example, claimed that happiness is “having enough food to eat every day in the house.” ‘Having time to share lighter moments,’ said another. Peace, in their opinion, is inextricably linked to satisfying both physical and psychological needs. One respondent seemed to agree that total happiness does not exist, as summarized below:

Personally, I believe it is very possible to be at peace in oneself; however, given the realities of life, one cannot be absolutely happy. Being at ease or happy means coming to terms with life, which entails being content with what you have. It also entails embracing the truth of life, which is that life is what it is. As a consequence, I will not prohibit myself from living, but I will recognize the facts of life as they are while striving to change the circumstances that prevent life from improving. That, to me, is a sign that 100 percent happiness doesn’t exist (Social worker, female, late 30s).

This perspective is consistent with two main local people’s vernacular for harmony, which are rugare (satisfied and happy) and runyararo (tranquility, silence), (Gelfand, 1999). Rugare connotes contentment, happiness, restfulness, or a state of contentment with the current situation. Rugare is the absence of war (violence), suffering, and it involves success and development in social, political, economic, and spiritual aspects of life for an individual with rugare. Rugare is not only individualistic; it can also be observed at the group level, where a community experiences development and prosperity, the absence of all types of crime, poverty, and
Peacebuilding is a Process and Not an Event

Peacebuilding is a method with no end in sight, according to all respondents. The underlying belief was that peacebuilding would never be completed. According to some respondents:

- Since conflict never ends, peacebuilding will continue (Minister of religion, female, late 40s)
- Conflict dynamics are continually shifting because society can never achieve equilibrium; for example, once one dispute is resolved, another emerges (Local government, male, mid 40s)

These findings are in line with previous research, which shows that conflict is never-ending and, as a result, is still in need of transformation (Sandole, 2010; Shirch, 2008). Peacebuilding is construed as having a transformative role within the context because conflict is seen as unavoidable but still a part of every progressive society (Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006).

Peacebuilding as a process should be locally owned to signal a change in dynamics away from external elite top-down donor-driven (template) goals or initiatives and toward a greater understanding of the potential of localized indigenous village and community oriented solution-focused perspectives and initiatives.

Peacebuilding is a Joint/Hybrid Process

Peacebuilding is a collective endeavor, according to all respondents. They emphasized that peace challenges in every society should include a range of stakeholders with a variety of skills and experiences. It was also discovered that when it comes to peacebuilding, stakeholders from various sectors must come together so that they can bring their diverse perspectives and skills to the table each time a conflict arises. One respondent backed this up with the following comments:

Since disputes take several forms, we need to integrate appropriate stakeholders who are capable of resolving conflict issues in their field of expertise. We involve the village head or chief, for example, if there is a land dispute within the village, since they are the relevant stakeholder. We call the cops if it’s a robbery, because that’s their area of expertise. . . because we can’t all be doing the same thing at the same time (Subsistence farmer, female, mid 40s).

As a collaborative process, peacebuilding brings the hybridity agenda to the fore. Hybridity, as described in the literature, includes both traditional and unconventional approaches to peacebuilding. Another important aspect of hybridity is the cooperation of different actors, as one respondent put it: “There is a need for stakeholders representing various sectors to work together so that each one can concentrate on their area of competence” (Minister of religion, male, mid 40s). Hybridity is able to embrace and combine standards, principles, and traditions from both liberal and conservative practices, as well as various actors, such as government officials and local citizens. It recognizes that peacebuilding actors are diverse, but that they do not exist in isolation from one another, allowing them to collaborate (Richmond, 2012; Wallis, 2018).

Peacebuilding is viewed as a hybrid process in that it should involve local people and elites to organize, engage, and develop local capacities, as well as to help motivate ordinary people to take responsibility for their own peace aspirations. The findings indicate that hybrid peacebuilding has the potential to promote bottom-up connections between individuals, in which people experiencing challenges become creative by forming alliances to share their perspectives, expertise, and work together to learn from their achievements. One of the main aspects of hybrid peacebuilding is the creation of alliances and the participation of people experiencing challenges in taking responsibility for their own well-being (Wallis, 2018).

Peacebuilding as Processes that Prevent Violence not the Eradication of Conflict

This trend was prompted by a question about respondents’ perceptions of the primary position of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is equivalent to erecting a shelter before the rains come in order to prevent death when the rains finally arrive. Some of the responses were as follows:

Dissensions, disputes, misunderstandings, and discrepancies are the rain that can fall on us. Building a shelter does not prevent rain from falling; rather, it is a response to the fact that rain will fall at some point, and that we should be prepared so that the rains do not ruin our way of life (Subsistence farmer, female, early 60s).
In several ways, the preceding portrays conflict as inherently disruptive, necessitating processes to avoid this. In the literature, peacebuilding has been described as addressing the root causes of conflict (Barnett et al., 2007) as a means of preventing violence from erupting. Another point of view expressed was that peacebuilding does not aim to end conflict:

Peacebuilding does not aim to eliminate conflicts between neighbours, villagers, or husband and wife, but rather that when they occur, we should be able to sit down together and identify and analyze the causes of the conflict, and do our utmost to ensure that if another dispute arises in the future, we do not participate in violence but instead continue to live together in happiness as human beings rather than animals (Home-based care worker, female, late 40s).

The preceding poses concerns about whether peacebuilding is a result, a solution, or a problem-solving mechanism. The solution/outcome-oriented hypothesis is based on the notion that peacebuilding aims to repair the relationships between conflict parties, which appears to be a common perspective among respondents. As a result, peacebuilding as a problem-solving mechanism is based on achieving a result in which people living in conflict are expected to live in a world with less incidents of violence. The outcome-oriented strategy suggests that when both parties to a conflict participate in shaping the outcome, a mutually satisfactory outcome can be achieved. Conflict resolution, in this sense, aims to foster harmony between disputing parties so that the end result is satisfactory to all parties involved (Sandole, 2010; Shirch, 2008).

The results indicate that, rather than waiting for elites with their bureaucratic frameworks to prevent violence, successful peacebuilding needs identifying and fostering local institutions (such as IPCs) in order to develop their capacities and indeed help empower them to resolve conflict and prevent violence at the local village level where it erupts. Peacebuilding, as a mechanism, creates a forum for ordinary people, especially women, youth, and the elderly, to creatively deal with conflict that arises within their local contexts, according to the findings. It helps local citizens to self-regulate when coping with peace issues that impact their well-being on a local level.

**Peacebuilding is Everyone’s Occupation**

Respondents to this question pointed out that peacebuilding is everyone’s business because conflict knows no bounds. They emphasized that conflict has no limits, so no one can claim to be protected from it. This notion was captured by one respondent who posited that:

*Conflict is part of our daily lives so building peace should not be seen as a no person’s business. It is no respecter of age, race or socio-economic status. We are in it together. We experience conflict everywhere and if I may emphasize this we don’t read about conflict in newspapers, we know it and we have it at individual and group level. We all have tension in our homes, so we must all be prepared to create peace every now and then (Security sector, male, late 50s).*

The preceding tends to mean that peacebuilding includes a number of actors—young, middle-aged, and elderly people, traditional and political leaders—each of whom is involved in conflicts of various types and magnitudes. This viewpoint is in line with Lederach’s (1997) assertion that the affected population should be involved in the peacebuilding process. People at the grassroots, civil society organizations, and political leadership, as well as their different constituents, are all included in Lederach’s definition of the affected population. This suggests that peacebuilding should begin at the individual level, at home, in school, in the community, and at the national level. All of these individuals and organizations should be involved in some way in the development of successful relationships and trust.

Overall, these findings support the notion that peace is more than just the absence of aggression and the avoidance of conflict; it is a positive state of being that must be established and reinforced by various actors at all levels of engagement. Zimbabwean proverbs *rume rimwe harikombi churu* (one man cannot encircle an anti-hill); *gumwe rimwe haritswanyi inda* (one hand will not kill a louse) match well with the idea that peace can only be achieved when people interact with one another. It’s worth noting that these proverbs are based on the ideals of collaboration, meaning that what a community wants can be done if people work together. The same can be said for peacebuilding: the ideals of cooperation, coexistence, and solidarity necessitate the partnership of multiple actors for a common objective implying that everyone has a role to play in peacebuilding initiatives.

**Peacebuilding as Tied to Improvement of Livelihoods**

Peacebuilding, according to all respondents, begins with better livelihoods, which can be accomplished by income-generating initiatives. The following are some of the points raised by one of the respondents:

*The majority of people have entered savings clubs, in which individuals form associations to establish a shared cash fund and loan it out to members who repay it at a set interest rate. The scheme’s goals are to increase income so that they can meet their basic needs, such as food and school fees for their children who are in school* (District Political commissar, female, late 40s).

A savings club is a type of informal organization that is maintained by a network of interpersonal relationships.
When applied to peacebuilding, the concept of informal alliances implies that working for peace as a group is highly beneficial. As a result, income-generating projects were viewed by respondents as tools for bringing about community growth in their villages. They are able to avoid poverty and fulfill their food, educational, housing, and other basic needs by participating in income-generating projects as individuals or groups. Another respondent was quoted as saying: *rugare harukwanisi kuvapo kana dumbo riine nzara* (peace is not built on empty stomachs). When asked about the connection between income-generating projects and peace, one respondent stated that “Peace is not peace without food, shelter, school fees, and health.” The conviction that peace cannot be founded on an empty stomach supports the maxim that “no peace without food” (Karlysheva, 2014, p. 37).

Economic development programs, some of which involve income-generating ventures, are at the core of peacebuilding, according to O’Brien (2007). Personal and collective engagement in bringing about social change is how O’Brien describes community development. As this study shows, income-generating initiatives have a direct impact on peacebuilding because individuals and organizations are willing to work together to effect meaningful change that meets people’s peace and development goals.

As a result of the findings, it appears that peacebuilding is a means of empowerment since it offers forums for local people to organize and participate in low-cost entrepreneurial activities as tools to counter poverty, hunger, and food insecurity in their communities. Accordingly, achieving peace is inextricably linked to escaping poverty and combatting hunger, as well as meeting people’s financial, social, and psychological needs, which include but are not limited to food, education, housing, and other basic necessities, which is improvement of livelihoods by another name.

### Outcomes of Establishing Peace Committees

The aim of the question about the peace committee’s outcomes was to see how many individuals and groups have benefited after taking responsibility for their own peace and development by creating self-initiated interventions. One respondent said,

“One of the outcomes of the intervention was the awareness that community members are able to take care of their own needs through the peace committee by resolving issues such as hunger, school fees, and house building” (Ward coordinator, female, mid 40s).

It was discovered, that peace cannot be achieved on an empty stomach. As a result, people should strive to create peace by establishing modalities to ensure that everyone in the home and society has enough to eat. Last but not least, it was noted that peace committees are intended to foster not only social and economic conditions, but also stability, trust, and relationships, as well as nonviolent dispute resolution, thus fostering peace and prosperity in homes and villages.

### Challenges Faced and Recommendations for Future Peace Committees

The crucial issue that needed to be addressed with members of the WPC and village peace committees was whether the process of “ownership” and taking responsibility for community peace creation and dispute resolution culminated in local villagers in the Seke district working together. The majority of respondents said the mechanism was owned by everyone. People were also united, participated, and expressed their opinions equally. The establishment of a peace committee, according to respondents, marks a turning point in ordinary people’s lives, signaling a step away from external elite top-down donor-driven agendas or initiatives and toward a greater understanding of the potential of localized indigenous village and community-based solution-focused perspectives and initiatives. Despite the above, the composition and management of the peace committee posed some serious challenges. The main one being those members of the peace committee’s sporadic presence at monthly meetings. In response to some members’ attendance fluctuations, one respondent was quoted as saying:

*We agreed that those who were committed to attending monthly meetings should not be discouraged by absentee participants, as this was a common tendency among humans to take a wait-and-see approach while an initiative was in its early stages* (Minister of religion, male, late 40s).

Another issue posed was the lack of youth representation in the community scheme. One respondent recounted the following as a solution to this problem:

*We agreed that, in order to ensure youth representation, we would promote the establishment of additional peace committees, each of which would lobby for one or two youths (male or female) to represent the interests of youths in peace committees* (Ward coordinator, female, mid 40s).

Participants agreed, however, that the lack of youth inclusion in the community scheme was not intentional, but rather a result of the fact that only elderly men and women attended the information meeting. The general consensus was that the peace committee intervention would not be accepted by all age groups at the same time because some people want to wait and see. It was also emphasized that many people take a long time to consider new programs. As a result, members of the peace committee encouraged one another to remain optimistic, noting that some citizens might reject the program.
Conclusion

The failure of liberal peacebuilding in Zimbabwe highlights the need for a robust, creative, and diverse solution that incorporates a variety of actors and institutions, both formal and informal, to resolve Zimbabwe’s peace challenges. In general, ordinary people’s hybridization in Seke district gives hope to Zimbabwe’s new national peace strategy, the NPRC, that hybrid peacebuilding can be used to address local peace challenges.

The establishment of self-initiated peace committees by local communities demonstrates local agency, self-reliance, and resilience because it resulted in the joint efforts of local villagers not only in Seke district, but across the country, in which case people were able to collectively organize, engage, and take responsibility for their own peace and development challenges. This change in dynamics from external elite top-down donor-driven (template) goals or programs to greater understanding of the potential of localized indigenous village and community informed solution-focused viewpoints and initiatives is exemplified by this local agency and self-determination.

As a result, local people should design and apply the IPCs model in various contexts in order and try to replicate their success elsewhere as a means of fostering community empowerment for local peace initiatives in Zimbabwe. While local peace initiatives provide resources for women and youth to engage in peacebuilding processes at the grassroots level, IPCs lack the capacity to address entrenched power and gender norms. The contribution of this study to localized peacebuilding is that it is possible for local people to deal with local peace challenges provided the affected community is willing to take responsibility for its own peace and development. For that reason, elites should collaborate through a hybridized process with local actors and informal institutions to help empower those who have little influence over their lives and resolve disparities and injustices in the peacebuilding terrain across communities.

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ORCID iD

Norman Chivasa ID https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5953-7855

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