LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN TRANSITION

Zimbabwe's Local Authorities
During the Inclusive Government

A Study Co-sponsored by RTI International and
the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for Zimbabwe

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List of Acronyms

CEO	chief executive officer
DA	district administrator
DemCoF	Democratic Councils Forum
EISA	Electoral Institute of Southern Africa
GDP	gross domestic product
GPA	Global Political Agreement
GTZ	*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (German Organization for Technical Cooperation)
IDAZIM	Institute for a Democratic Alternative for Zimbabwe
LGB	Local Government Board
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-M	Movement for Democratic Change — Mutambara
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change — Tsvangirai
MLG	Ministry of Local Government
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	nongovernmental organization
RDC	rural district council
RDCA	Rural District Councils Act
RDCAn	Rural District Council Association
RTI	Research Triangle Institute International
SADC	Southern African Development Community
UC	urban council
UCA	Urban Councils Act
UCAZ	Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front
ZESN	Zimbabwe Election Support Network
ZILGA	Zimbabwe Local Government Association
ZINWA	Zimbabwe National Water Authority

Executive Summary

This report is an extensive study of the state of local government and the intergovernmental system in Zimbabwe at a critical juncture in the country's history. From May to June 2009—slightly more than one year after the "harmonized" elections of 2008 and just a few months after the establishment of the Inclusive Government—RTI International and the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for Zimbabwe (IDAZIM) conducted a wide-ranging survey of leading local officials in 15 local authorities across the country. With the belief that local governance matters in transitional settings, we sought to examine the operation of Zimbabwe's local system at a time when national and international attention was focused on the progress of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), the power-sharing accord that gave rise to the new government and that intends to lead the country out of political and economic crisis. Through surveys of more than 250 local officials, among other actors, we investigated local politics and intergovernmental linkages, participatory governance, the local financial system, and public service delivery. The following chapters provide the results of our research effort. In the conclusion, we offer a series of suggestions for reform.

Local Politics and Intergovernmental Relations

Zimbabwe's local authorities have a strong tradition of local service delivery that grew out of the English colonial, racially segregated system. The local authorities—comprising 30 urban and 60 rural district councils—are essentially deconcentrated entities of the central government. Local government is not constitutionally protected; local officials derive their administrative authority from the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works, and Urban Development (MLG). Though local officials—councilors, mayors, chairpersons—are directly elected, their autonomy is extraordinarily restricted in several ways.

Over the past decade, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which is the primary political opposition to the Mugabe government and its ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), has dominated the urban councils (UCs) in consecutive elections and made gains in rural areas as well. (In 2008, MDC won nearly half of the rural councils). The MDC's local electoral strength, especially in the major cities, thus gave rise to the operative intergovernmental political dynamic in Zimbabwe: The ruling party controls the MLG and levers of local power at the national level, while the opposition controls most of the local authorities. The result has been political

conflict, including the removal of MDC mayors by the MLG, which claims to act in the interest of effective administration (under the new government, the MLG is held by ZANU-PF). As our surveys illustrated, local–local and local–national relationships are strongly driven by political affiliation.

With respect to the major local government challenges, all local officials primarily cited the lack of financial resources; indeed, many authorities had almost no income. As they were emerging from a period of hyperinflationary economic collapse, this was no surprise. In addressing local problems, the education level and professional experience of elected officials and administrative staff proved to be serious concerns. In our survey, nearly four of five councilors and nearly 60% of the mayors were in their first term of office. Administrative staff and especially town clerks had far more experience, thereby putting elected officials at a considerable disadvantage in their efforts to manage local affairs. Training needs were therefore severe. Women, meanwhile, were poorly represented in local government.

Participatory Governance

Local governance in Zimbabwe is characterized by high levels of patronage and clientelism. In classic clientelistic fashion, local officials reported that they address all types of individual requests; they are expected to help resolve them. Answering these personal petitions is the currency of local politics; in an environment of scarcity, it fills needs and brings votes.

More than 70% of officials in our sample reported that public participation in the local government is strong. Moreover, with the support of international aid, participatory budgeting had been introduced in a number of municipalities with some progress. The reality, however, is that participation is weak. Mayors, chairpersons, and councilors tend to take a limited view of participation. Any interaction is viewed as participatory, and they often cited their consultations with citizens around the budget process as evidence of citizen involvement. In most instances, however, we found that participation was limited to political party allies, and such politicization discourages broader citizen involvement. In addition, while budget consultations tend to help ratify decisions, there is little actual deliberation or public role in making the decisions. Community associations further complained of a lack of transparency.

Local officials were asked to identify the major stakeholders in their communities. Their responses indicate a strong presence of international humanitarian assistance and demonstrate the severity of local conditions and the near-collapse of public services. The rare mention of a national municipal association indicates local officials' limitations in locating support from colleagues. Resident, ratepayer, and other local interest group associations were regularly mentioned and clearly can be major local actors where they are active, especially in the budgetary process.

Local Finances

The financial situation that local authorities in Zimbabwe endured over the past decade, culminating as it did with hyperinflation, was severe, and it remains extraordinarily difficult today. With respect to revenue generation, local officials have long been on their own; fiscal transfers from the central government essentially dried up years ago. The political and economic crisis severely eroded local capacity to repair equipment, improve infrastructure, and provide basic services. Communities' incentive to pay taxes and fees for public services they were not receiving crumbled along with their infrastructure, and their ability to pay now is restricted by declining incomes and rising poverty. Many local residents, officials reported, simply do not pay.

Just about all of the local officials interviewed reported that they either did not receive fiscal transfers or that such transfers were insufficient. When asked about the most important sources of revenue they do generate, they cited property taxes, license fees for businesses and vehicles, and public service fees. In their efforts to find revenue sources, they also reported turning to a variety of additional means, including liquor sales and other businesses operated by the local authority. As for spending, the officials reported that wages consume a disproportionate share of budgets, and general operating expenses are significant. Infrastructure repair is reportedly the third budgetary priority. Capital investment is almost nonexistent given the lack of resources.

Public Service Delivery

Service provision among local authorities in Zimbabwe is a matter of trying to make something of a crisis situation. Local officials are, of course, well aware of the situation they face across a variety of service areas. When asked to describe the general state of service delivery in their locality, there was strong agreement: typically poor, fair at best. The most important services provided by local authorities, according to those surveyed, are water and sanitation, refuse collection, road maintenance, and primary health care.

The main constraints local officials reported encountering are the (1) lack of financial resources to make improvement; (2) short supply of functioning equipment and machinery; and (3) lack of availability of material stocks—pipes, tanks, lights, and other necessary supplies. Virtually all of the local officials recognized that their community residents could not afford to pay much, if anything, for the services that were provided, and many reported that residents were not paying what they should be.

Some Reform Ideas

The best outcome for local authorities and all Zimbabweans would be the achievement of a national consensus based on respect for democracy and on securing sustainable, long-term economic growth. The local officials we

surveyed recognized this point, and it bears repeating that they were generally hopeful about the future. Some of the suggestions for reform and recovery that we propose include:

- Support the massive reconstruction of services and related infrastructure, as will be required to restore normalcy, by the international community.
- Remove at least some of the restrictive oversight and control mechanisms exercised by the central government, as part of a broader consideration for the prospects of decentralization.
- Examine the prospects for development of a rational system for intergovernmental fiscal transfers when allowed by macro-economic conditions.
- Focus on the development of local participatory governance, including mandates for the introduction of participatory budgeting.
- Implement a sustained training program for elected local officials and target training, as needed, for administrative staff.

1. Introduction:
A Perspective from the Local Level

The crisis of democracy and development in Zimbabwe has been a subject of world concern for more than a decade. By the end of the 2000s, the country, once considered in many ways an example for the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, was suffering through unbridled socioeconomic and political deterioration. Zimbabwe was fraught with political conflict, international isolation, poverty, disease, and economic collapse. However, following violent elections in 2008, a window of opportunity for change tentatively opened. By September 2008, the Mugabe government and the political opposition signed the GPA, a controversial accord in which the parties to the election agreed to share the power to govern. The GPA took effect in February 2009. Robert Mugabe retained the presidency; Morgan Tsvangirai, a leader of the MDC, became prime minister; and the ministerial posts were divided evenly among the ruling ZANU-PF and the two opposition MDC parties.[1] Zimbabwe's Inclusive Government was born.

Is a democratic transition underway? That remains to be seen. The GPA provided for constitutional reform as well as other measures considered essential for increasing the space for democratic politics and governance. Reform of the constitution was expected to set the stage for elections within two years. As of mid-2010, there has been an extended period of negotiations over commitments made in the GPA. The Inclusive Government has labored to make progress as differences among the political parties represented in government have emerged.

Naturally, much of the focus on Zimbabwe has been directed toward national politics, national leaders, and the macrostabilization of the economy. Zimbabwe has an extraordinary tradition of local governance, however, and much of what affects the daily lives of the average citizen occurs in the rural districts and urban areas into which the country is divided. If the puzzle is to help Zimbabwe attain democratic stability and economic development, a piece was missing. Important change had to be happening at the local level, and there was clearly a strong need to resuscitate local government institutions. Yet they seemed to be getting no attention.

The reason: At least two important events had occurred. First, the 2008 elections were "harmonized" elections. That is, voters cast their ballots for all presidential, parliamentary, and local electoral posts in a single day, for

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[1]The MDC split in 2005, and both parties contested the 2008 elections. The party led by Tsvangirai (MDC-T) is by far the largest formation. The smaller formation (MDC-M) is led by Arthur Mutambara.

the first time ever. As national leaders were contesting a second round of the presidential vote, a wave of violence was unleashed on the opposition, leading to Tsvangirai's withdrawal in June. At the same time, newly elected councilors—most of whom had never held local office—were contemplating their new positions as local representatives of their respective wards. They faced the high expectations of a population seeking relief from political and economic turmoil.

The second important event was the GPA. Incorporated into the accord was "Annexure B"—a draft constitutional reform. The draft included a short, three-part chapter dedicated to the institutions of local government: local government, provincial government, and local authorities for urban and rural areas. It referred to the coordination of decentralization, provision of adequate local finance and resources, and legally defined authorities of elected councils. Considering there had never been any constitutional protection of local government, this was a major development. So there seems to be some political support for the inclusion of local government in the pending constitutional reform effort.

It is essential to note that the seeds of political and economic change sprouted and were nurtured in the local arena. The rise of the MDC began in the cities. The MDC began winning UC elections soon after it was founded in 1999, and it used its urban base successfully as a platform for advocating democratic reform and an economic turnaround.

As we will explain, the problems facing the local government system mirrored those reflected in the national decline. Within a political environment characterized by deep polarization, local governments faced the daunting task of restoring a public service delivery system that had largely collapsed. Supplies for water, road repair, and health care—to name a few of the services affected—have long been scarce, and most local officials have long been on their own to generate financial resources for public services. For the local officials elected in 2008, the challenge of making some progress was coupled with the public's high expectations that something would finally change for the better.

Study objectives

We discovered that we could potentially make a much-needed contribution to the understanding of Zimbabwe's local government system at a critical juncture in the country's history. Making such a contribution was the first objective of this study. Virtually all news or commentary reported in the media or published about Zimbabwe today addresses—again, for obvious reasons—the national situation. Even scholarly studies of decentralization or the local councils are uncommon.[2] International aid donors such as Swedish and German bilateral

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[2]Two recent and fairly comprehensive studies include Kamete 2006 and Sachikonye, et al. 2007. Synnerholm and Boman conducted an assessment (2009).

agencies appear to be slowly re-engaging on service delivery, primarily producing valuable reports, albeit of limited scope. In short, it is difficult to find any current, thorough analysis of local governance in Zimbabwe. With this study, we hope to close some of the informational and analytical gaps, help national and local officials overcome the difficulties the country faces, and ultimately support a successful democratic transition.

The second objective of our study was to examine the role local government plays as countries like Zimbabwe emerge from conflict and crisis environments. Capturing the local experience early on in any transition (the research team began work in Harare two months after the Inclusive Government took office) is essential to examining developments and designing assistance activities over the long term.

We have found that focusing on improved governance and development at the local level is one way to demonstrate in post-conflict settings that government is working again (Brinkerhoff, Johnson, and Hill 2009). Local governments provide proximity to citizens, allowing for participatory approaches and a reconnection of government and civil society around local concerns. Working locally allows for a diversity of representation (politically, ethnically, etc.) and responses tailored to local circumstances. Perhaps most important, local governments can more effectively provide public goods and services that have been sorely lacking. A quick return of services can be central to the restoration of state legitimacy as citizen expectations for change tend to be high.

Research team and methodology

With these two goals in mind, we embarked on this study in 2009. This report is based on a series of surveys with three groups of local officials (mayors/chairs, councilors, and administrative staff) representing 15 of Zimbabwe's local governments. A total of 256 local officials were surveyed by our research team. The sample of local authorities was selected in an effort to balance diversity demographically—rural and urban councils of all five formal categories were represented; geographically—all 10 provinces are represented; and politically—three of the 15 local authorities were majority ZANU-PF, and all of these three authorities were rural. Only one urban council in Zimbabwe is majority ZANU-PF. The councils included in this survey were the following:

- Mutoko Rural District Council (RDC)
- City of Gweru
- Kadoma Municipality
- City of Mutare
- City of Bulawayo
- Chipinge RDC
- City of Harare
- City of Masvingo

- Epworth Local Board
- Bindura Municipality
- Kariba Municipality
- Gwanda RDC
- Chikomba RDC
- Mberengwa RDC
- Chivi RDC

The results we present also draw on surveys with community representatives and associations in nine localities; surveys with four traditional leaders; interviews with a small group of national officials and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and published materials (laws, media reports, election reports, and other publications). Copies of the surveys are available in the appendices.

This study therefore largely reflects the perspectives of locally elected and administrative officials on the issues and concerns they encounter in their work. To a lesser extent, we also discuss the views of local residents and national officials. We do not consider this study to have been a comprehensive examination of all institutions and actors of relevance to local government. Instead, the study's value is the insight it provides into the operation of local institutions and the motivations and pressures that local officials face.

Our research and survey team began work in late April 2009, developing and refining the main 31-item, questionnaire-based instrument for interviews. It included closed and open-ended questions, and we encouraged participants to elaborate on their responses. The surveys were administered in English and began the first week of May and continued until mid-June 2009. In each local authority, we separately conducted the surveys with mayors, councilors, and administration officials. Three interview sessions were held with: the mayors or chairs (or their deputies); the town clerks and accompanying department heads and officials (the participants varied); and the group of councilors.[3] The team also developed a shorter, 23-question version of the questionnaire to survey representatives of the community associations in a focus group setting. Eight of these sessions were held during the same period.

RTI and IDAZIM would like to extend our deep appreciation to the hundreds of local elected and administrative officials, community representatives, and traditional leaders who participated in this study. National elected and ministerial officials as well as several NGOs also took part in interviews with our research team. Completion of the surveys and the discussion of local issues required considerable time, interest, and commitment. We thank all of you for your support for this study.

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[3]The number of councilors who completed the survey varied, depending on the size of the council and the number of councilors who could attend. Not including the mayors, a total of 327 councilors participated.

2. Local Governance in Transition

Zimbabwe has paid an enormous price for the economic collapse and political turmoil that began about 13 years ago and that has stabilized only as of 2009. The crisis that engulfed Zimbabwe has affected all institutions, public and private. The country's local authorities, as we will explain, were particularly hard hit by the turmoil.

Zimbabwe's current local authorities—the country's 30 urban and 60 rural district councils—were elected on March 29, 2008, as part of the momentous consolidated presidential, parliamentary, and local government elections held on that day. In the local vote, the opposition MDC won at least a majority in all but one of the UCs, and in almost half of the rural districts, which had long been the ZANU-PF's stronghold.

The 2008 elections were highly contested and controversial. Disputes over the outcome of the first round of the presidential vote produced a decision by the two leading candidates—President Mugabe and the MDC's Tsvangirai—to face off in a second round in June.[4] The two MDC parties officially won a majority in the House of Assembly, and they split almost evenly the seats with ZANU-PF in the Senate. However, Tsvangirai, concerned about the wave of election-related violence that soon followed, withdrew from the second-round vote. The only candidate left in the race, Mugabe, claimed victory. The political upheaval, violence, and international concern surrounding these events led to extended negotiations between Mugabe and Tsvangirai that resulted in the GPA.

When our research team began its evaluation in April 2009, the GPA, albeit fragile, was in place and along with the economic measures was helping provide a measure of relative stability, allowing local officials some space to work despite the severe constraints they faced. The difficulties confronting local authorities were all-encompassing—involving political stability, finance, human resources, and service delivery, to name a few. As we discuss in the next section, the problems have long been in the making and have often been outside the control of the local councils.

The Emergence of the Crisis: A Brief Review

It is beyond the scope of this report to discuss the complex and deep-seated roots of the Zimbabwean crisis in the detail it deserves. Our more immediate

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[4]The nonpartisan Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) forecast, based on random sampling of voters, reported that Tsvangirai received 49.4 percent (ZESN 2008).

purpose is to provide the political and socioeconomic context for an examination of the state of local governance in 2009. One can begin in 1997, when the economy began a steady decline and local authorities began to feel the stress on their ability to govern. Over the next 12 years, the economy continued its tailspin and eventually collapsed into hyperinflation. Not surprisingly, the governing regime saw its political fortunes erode as well. Local authorities struggled under increasing central government control, and at best worked to prevent the complete erosion of public service delivery in their communities.

Excessive spending (eventually financed by printing money), uncontrollable deficits and debt, and failed government efforts to revive the private sector produced zero gross domestic product (GDP) growth in 1998. From 1998 to 2007, the cumulative decline in growth of the GDP reached a remarkable 44%—or an average annual GDP decline of 5.9%. During this period, the rest of Southern Africa moved in the opposite direction. The growth rate of the nine other economies of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was an average of 4.8% (UNDP 2008, 10–11).

A host of other economic indicators confirm the depth of the economic slide:

- Employment growth from 2001–2006 (%) — -7.5
- Formal employment, 2001–2006 (% of population) — 7.0
- Inflation rate, 2008 (%) — At least 231 million[5]
- Investment as percentage of GDP, 2000–2006 (average %) — 4.0

As of 2008, according to a UNDP report, "productive investments are on the decline, speculative activities are on the ascendant. An increasing volume of economic activities are taking place outside the formal economy" (UNDP 2008,17). The "fast-track" land resettlement campaign that began in 2000 and the subsequent seizures of thousands of white-owned farms had a devastating impact on food production and made the country increasingly dependent on foreign food and relief (Meredith 2005, 640–45).

The social breakdown is strongly evidenced by the prevalence of HIV/AIDS: Zimbabwe has one of the highest prevalence rates in Africa. The adult HIV prevalence rate reached one-quarter of the population in 2003, and life expectancy has fallen from 57 years in 1982 to an estimated 39 years in 2003 (UNDP 2008, 11). The significant loss of jobs; lack of public investment in education, health, and other public services; and collapsing incomes have contributed to increased poverty, malnutrition, and inequality, especially in rural areas and among women. One report found a 30% increase in poverty from 1995–2003 (UNDP 2008, 17–18).

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[5]This is the Zimbabwe government's last recorded estimate in mid-2008; the World Bank recorded 500 billion percent at the end of 2008. These figures were cited by Tendai Biti, the current Minister of Finance, in a presentation at the National Press Club, Washington, DC, January 26, 2009.

The socioeconomic erosion weakened Mugabe and ZANU-PF's political support and opened the door for the rise of the MDC. Emerging from a coalition of labor and civic groups under the leadership of Tsvangirai, the MDC was founded in 1999. The party relied on its base in urban areas to generate national appeal. The ruling government's first defeat came in the 2000 referendum to amend the Constitution of Zimbabwe in ways that would, much of the opposition believed, strengthen Mugabe's control. Parliamentary elections followed later in 2000, and the MDC won almost half of the seats. With a few exceptions, the ruling party lost all major urban centers.

The fairness of elections would subsequently be deeply disputed domestically and internationally, and each election cycle was accompanied by violence and intimidation. Elections were also accompanied by laws on security, information protection, and elections, among other policies, which further served to shift the events in the ruling government's favor.

Later in 2000, ZANU-PF lost the mayoral by-elections in three major cities, including Bulawayo, and did all that it could to prevent mayoral and council elections in Harare, where it had just lost all its parliamentary seats (Kamete 2006). The presidential elections of 2002 were heavily tilted in favor of the regime in power, and Mugabe won. ZANU-PF handily won the RDC elections in the same year. Parliamentary elections were held again in 2005. This time, again with the playing field favoring the ruling party, ZANU-PF won two-thirds of the seats.

The polarized local political scene

Although it received little international attention, the ability of the once-effective local government system to carry out its functions also suffered. The decline in capacity began by the late 1990s as the system grew increasingly centralized and deeply politicized.

Two constants have characterized local governance in Zimbabwe from the start of the decade, essentially since the opposition MDC was founded in 1999. First, the MDC has consistently won in urban areas. From 2000 onward, elections were convened in separate votes for UCs, including direct votes for mayors (a provision rescinded in 2007, as discussed below), and for RDCs. The MDC has easily won the mayor's offices and UCs in most cities, and in Harare and Bulawayo in particular, to the consternation of the Mugabe-led regime. Second, ZANU-PF was traditionally strong in rural areas, winning the RDC seats by large margins, though even that support dropped significantly in 2008. Figure 1 shows the trend in local election outcomes for UCs, not including the mayoral races, and Figure 2 shows the RDC votes.

The second constant of Zimbabwean local governance during this decade has been the polarization of the relationship between urban authorities controlled by the MDC and the central government and ruling party. As the MDC began to win the urban centers in 2000, the ruling regime reacted strongly to

Figure 1: Urban Council Election Results Since 2000, Seats Won by Party
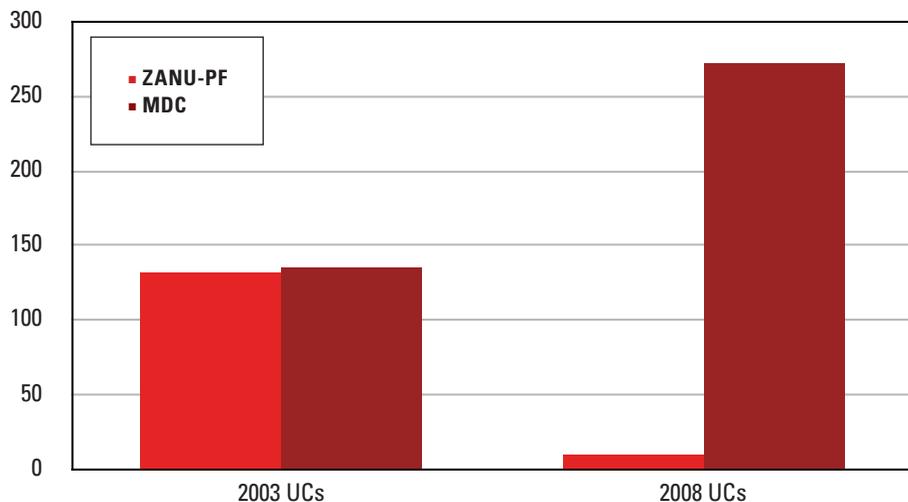
Sources: 2003 results: See results in MDC document published at: http://www.kubatana.net/html/archive/ elec/030902mdc.asp?sector=ELEC&year=2003&range_start=1. Accessed June 2, 2010.
2008 results: the ZESN Web site, www.zesn.org.zw/ publications.cfm?pid=10. Accessed June 2, 2010.

Note: In 2003, elections were held in only 21 UCs because by-elections had been previously held in several UCs, and according to the MDC, its candidates were barred from registering in three local authorities comprising 30 seats. The 2008 results were unavailable for Matabeleland South Province.

its loss of political authority. Meanwhile, the newly oppositional urban authorities began seeking relative autonomy and making demands on the central government for restitution of funds owed and for redress of other grievances. The MDC was compelled to demonstrate its ability to govern effectively, as the ruling government well knew. In a centralized system in which the Ministry of Local Government—the "mother" ministry of all local authorities—has a wealth of legal tools at its disposal to become involved, if not interfere, in local decision making, animosity proved inevitable.

Thus municipalities and towns fought the perceived illegal intervention of the MLG in the affairs of their localities. The MLG, meanwhile, attempted to demonstrate that it remained in control by restricting local room to maneuver if necessary and threatening to suspend the defiant councils for incompetence or corruption (Kamete 2006).

Despite the polarization and the social and economic challenges facing all local authorities, in reporting on the results of this study, we can begin on a

Figure 2: Rural District Council Vote Results Since 2000, Seats Won by Party
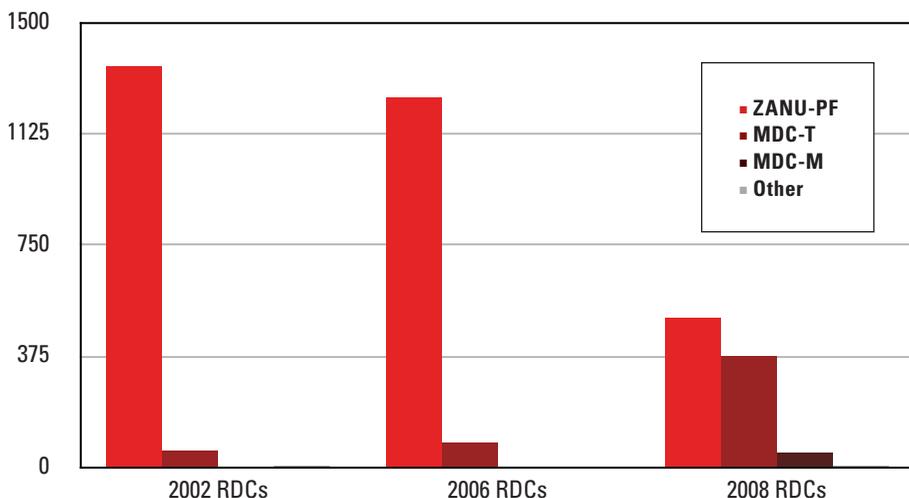
Sources: 2002 results: "Rural District Council election preliminary results-12 October, 2002," ZESN, posted at: www.kubatana.net/html/archive/elec/021012zesn.asp?sector=ELEC. Accessed June 2, 2010. 2006 results: News report by Eldred Masunungure, "Local Government Elections and the Zimbabwe Voter," November 10, 2006, posted at: www. kubatana.net/html/archive/opin/061110em.asp? sector=ELEC&year=2006&range_ start=1. Accessed June 2, 2010. 2008 results: ZESN Web site, www.zesn.org.zw/publications.cfm?pid=10. Accessed June 2, 2010.

Note: In 2006, ZANU-PF won 482 seats unopposed. The 2008 results were not available for most of Matabeleland South Province.

fairly positive note. Local authorities reported some improvements, relative to the severe crisis they had just experienced. When local authorities were asked whether or not the localities' situation had improved since the establishment of the Inclusive Government, the majority tended to be hopeful or optimistic. More than 58% of the officials interviewed reported that the situation had improved. Thirty-three percent said it had made no difference, and less than 3% reported that the situation had worsened. There was now some measure of political and economic stability in Zimbabwe—a dramatic shift from just months earlier, and local authorities were already recognizing it—and that the GPA remained fragile.

3. The Local System, Politics, and Intergovernmental Relations, Past and Present

The local government system in Zimbabwe, a British colony for almost a century, naturally reflects its colonial legacy. Upon achieving independence in 1980, the country inherited a racially based model of governance that served the interests of white Europeans and segregated white from black Africans. On one side, generally wealthy urban and rural councils were elected by white settlers and enjoyed considerable autonomy. On the other side, African councils (later district councils), which oversaw communal lands, were highly fragmented and subject to strong and authoritarian control by centrally appointed commissioners and centrally imposed rules. During the first decade of independence, successive efforts to end this dual system led to the amalgamation reform of 1988. The Rural District Councils Act (RDCA) unified the old rural and district councils into the single system of rural administration, though implementation was such that its impact was not really seen until the early 1990s. The law created the 60 RDCs that are in operation today (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1992, 111; Stewart, Klugman, and Helmsing 1994, 3–4).

Zimbabwe's current system of local government was effectively established in 1993, when the first local assembly elections were held for the RDCs under the newly unified system of rural territorial administration (Schou 2000, 125). The RDCA, which has been revised a number of times since 1988, governs the RDCs. The 30 UCs are subject to the provisions of the Urban Councils Act (UCA), which was promulgated at the end of 1995. The UCA governs a hierarchy of local government in densely populated areas, ranging from cities and municipalities to towns and newly emerging urban areas, or local boards. Local governments in all of their forms and sizes are referred to as "local authorities." They may also be referred to separately as UCs and RDCs.

These two enabling laws for rural district and urban councils codified a local administrative system that has roots in the nineteenth century. Over the decades, the colonial system, and in particular the white-dominated councils, evolved into a strong administrative structure staffed by educated and capable personnel. Local authorities engaged in delivering a range of public services, and the public soon expected them to carry out these functions. Local officials also became involved in local commerce, utilities, and, famously, beer manufacturing and retailing. An important degree of institutional capacity therefore remained upon independence to benefit the new councils. Thus their scope for service provision is extensive. Even after a decade of crisis, the local system exhibits a good degree of institutionalization—though, as

in most countries, there is considerable diversity, and the strength of these institutions is much greater in urban areas, where human capital and the financial base are typically stronger.

Decentralization in the post-independence period

Local authorities in Zimbabwe have a considerable degree of political, administrative, and financial authority, which is usually the recipe for a decentralized local system. That autonomy is restricted in a multitude of ways, however, by law and central government action. Even though local councils are popularly elected, it is more accurate to view local authorities as deconcentrated entities of the MLG instead of autonomous local governments.

During the 1980s and 1990s, decentralization was a major stated policy objective of the government. The focus during the 1980s was coordinating the agencies involved in local planning and development through establishment of an intergovernmental hierarchy of provincial, district, and local development committees (Conyers 2003, 116). A bottom-up process was devised for planning to begin at the village level and work its way up through the wards, districts, provinces, and regions until the final plan reached the National Planning Commission. Although district development committees included local elected officials, representation was biased toward the central ministries, and the planning process overall was dominated by technical staff in central government agencies and council staff (Schou 2000, 126, 137). Ultimately, the process proved locally unresponsive because of the lack of organizational commitment, central government intervention in local decision making, and weak local finances (Schou 2000, 137).

The decentralization focus of the 1990s was democracy and the elected local authorities. RDC elections of councilors by ward were first held in 1993, and urban elections followed later in the decade. The direct election of mayors was introduced for UCs in 1995, under the UCA. As development committees proved to be weak and ineffective, the councils became the most important local institutions for service delivery and local advancement (Conyers 2003, 116, 119).

The impact of this political decentralization was dramatically evidenced by the 2000s, as the polarization between the MDC-led local authorities and the central government emerged and intensified. The long tradition of central involvement in local decision making helped produce a highly politicized and debilitating environment for those interested in effective local governance. As is often the case with decentralization in general, the rhetoric did not match the reality when it came to transferring functions and finance to the local level. In Zimbabwe, progress was either minimal or reversed. Some primary education, rural water supplies, social welfare/poverty alleviation, and wildlife management were transferred to the local level—that is, the local authorities had new meaningful control over these functions. Health decentralization was often discussed but had not occurred (Conyers 2003, 117). Financially, the local authorities received new responsibilities without the corresponding resources to carry them out, and they were ultimately left to

their own devices. RDCs tended to be highly dependent on the central government, though the degree of dependency varied considerably.

By the late 1990s, the central government developed four sources of funding for local authorities, a series of grants and funds financed largely by international donors such as the World Bank. By the early 2000s, however, these sources were either suspended or terminated because of the deepening political and economic crisis (Conyers 2003, 116). Many local authorities responded to the lack of central financial support with efforts to mobilize revenue locally.

The current local government framework

Central government oversight and collaboration with local government is generally considered a necessary feature of any intergovernmental system. However, the potential for disruptive central interference is always a concern. On the one hand, if policymakers are concerned about ensuring compliance with procedures on budget expenditures, for example, or about helping local institutions develop the technical capacity to manage public services, central efforts to make sure that the local officials get the procedures right should be considered valuable in any system. On the other hand, central intervention in local affairs to the extent that available local solutions and accountability suffer, especially where local democracy is at issue, is likely to foster public apathy. Such intervention can eventually undermine any system. The same can be said for a central government's neglect of local concerns. It is this interventionist scenario—given the overall political setting and the politicization and manipulation of the intergovernmental system—that reflects conditions in Zimbabwe.

The central government in Zimbabwe holds broad reserve powers of control over the local system. That is, under the doctrine of *ultra vires*, local governments can undertake only the functions that are expressly delegated to them (Wekwete 1992, 99; Sachikonye 2007, 81). The following are some important characteristics of the intergovernmental system that limit local authority and public accountability (Urban Councils Act 2002; Rural District Councils Act 1996; and Local Government Laws Amendments Bill 2007).

- The Constitution of Zimbabwe does not provide for a system of local government; the local level is not constitutionally protected. Rural and urban councils derive their authority from their location within the MLG. As noted above, the GPA provides the prospect for reform in this area.
- Local actions subject to MLG approval include: the annual budget, by-laws and resolutions approved by the council, and senior staff hiring and firing (via the Local Government Board, which is appointed by the MLG).
- The authority of the MLG to make or adopt council by-laws and to set ceilings on local property tax rates and other taxes or fees.

- For years, amid great controversy, the MLG could suspend or dismiss elected councils for general mismanagement and appoint replacement commissioners to act as councilors. In a package of reforms promulgated in 2007, the MLG's power to appoint commissioners was repealed. The MLG can now appoint only three caretakers to run the council, if it proves inoperative, for up to 90 days until new council elections are held, though it should be noted that such time limits have been ignored in the past (Sachikonye 2007, 77).
- MLG approval is required for NGO capacity building training for local councilors.
- Beginning in 1994, the MLG appointed a number of "public-interest" councilors—including local chiefs, women, farm workers, mine workers, and defeated council candidates—to local councils (Schou 2000, 125). As of 2007, moreover, the MLG can appoint nonvoting special interest councilors to any urban council, and as many as one-quarter of the council size can be appointed.

Within this institutional environment, councils and the local authorities' staffs must often wait for MLG for approval of their actions in critical areas of governance. Delay and in many instances the perceived intransigence of the MLG have long been a divisive issue. As a matter of course, to avoid tension or conflict, local officials need to be aware of and responsive to MLG priorities. They must be attuned to central government decision makers in Harare, at least as much as to the local constituencies they were elected to represent.

The principal actors
Reflecting the British pattern, the standard Zimbabwean local authority is characterized by a council organized by committee and a weak mayor (or council chair) selected by council member vote. Each committee makes policy in its respective sector.[6] As we discuss below, beginning in the mid-1990s, mayors in urban areas were directly elected. They were the chief executives of cities, managing day-to-day functions, with the town clerk serving as the senior administrative official. The 2008 abolition of directly elected mayors and their executive functions remains controversial among local officials.

As of 2008, the senior staff member charged with executing council decisions is the town clerk (or chief executive officer [CEO]), whose hiring must be approved by the Local Government Board (LGB), and who is often the best educated and most experienced member of the local administration. The town clerk supervises administrative department heads. The LGB comprises seven

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[6]The RDCA and UCA mandate the establishment of finance, natural resources, and other committees comprising councilors, administrative department heads, and some appointed representatives. The local authorities may establish additional committees as needed.

members who are appointed by the MLG to: provide guidance and control to the functioning of council employees; ensure council staff well-being and administration; conduct inquiries into council affairs and procedures; and approve the appointment and dismissal of senior council staff (UCA 2002, 43–46). The LGB is a central agency for oversight of council staff and, when necessary in areas of its jurisdiction, the council.

The number and type of committees established by each local authority vary. Among the most important are finance and, especially for rural areas, roads. The department heads manage local authorities' departments. In urban areas, according to one analysis, the department heads tend to operate as independent business units and therefore lose perspective of the larger interests of the community, especially with respect to service delivery (Chikumbu, Mika, and Manikai 2006, 83–84).

The district administrator (DA) is the MLG's representative in the local authority, physically located closest to local officials. The DA is in charge of most interactions between local officials and the MLG, so relations with the DA are a core aspect of local governance. One MDC city mayor complained, for example, that the DA presented for approval a number of special interest councilors, some of whom had lost in the election, at their first council meeting. Likewise, the 10 provincial governors (appointed by the president) and councils can be influential in coordinating with and overseeing local authorities. They also answer to the central government, though they appear less directly involved with local authorities than the DAs.

Traditional leaders—chiefs or headmen—are constitutionally recognized and have historically been influential in rural areas. They, too, owe their positions to and are overseen by the central government. Their status gives them considerable weight in community affairs and development; indeed, they come into conflict with councilors and have been accused of supporting the ruling party's agenda, especially around elections. In local affairs, they work closely with RDCs, collecting revenue for the local administration, participating in council committees as *ex officio* members, distributing farm supplies, and influencing decision making in councils or in the wards.

Given the severity of the crisis, as we will see, humanitarian NGOs can be critical actors at the local level. Local officials and community associations are often well aware of their presence and the support they can provide. The following were among those mentioned in the survey: Africare, CARE International, Red Cross, Oxfam, and World Vision.

Finally, local authorities interact regularly with local civil society organizations. Locally, associations of residents and ratepayers (taxpayers) are the most commonly mentioned for their involvement in a variety of civic affairs, but especially the budgetary process. They can be highly politicized. The presence of other organizations generally reflects the socioeconomic composition of the community and wards that comprise the local authority.

Informal traders' associations operate in many localities, for example, where that sector is prominent.

Providing public services. In a speech on the troubles facing service delivery provision, Zimbabwe's Deputy Minister of Local Government (and former Gweru mayor) explained that local authorities are involved in providing the following (Zvidzai 2009, 1):

- Potable water supply
- Disposal of waste water
- Solid waste disposal and management
- Housing and shelter for large and small businesses
- Public and clinical health
- Public safety and security
- Emergency services
- Protection of the environment
- Pollution control
- Poverty reduction through local economic development
- Enacting by-laws for regulation of various activities

In fact, the responsibilities accorded local authorities in Zimbabwe are much broader than those offered counterparts in most countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Wekwete 1992, 98). The RDCA and UCA each list more than 50 separate services subject to council provision, including a number of revenue-generating business activities. Indeed, the RDCA includes the following language: With MLG approval, "a council may engage in any commercial, industrial, agricultural or other activity for the purpose of raising revenue for the council" (RDCA 1996, 468). As we will see below, our survey uncovers additional detail on what local authorities actually do in service delivery.

Local political dynamics

The operative intergovernmental political dynamic in Zimbabwe, which emerged as soon as the MDC began winning local councils early in the 2000s, is fairly straightforward: Mugabe and his ZANU-PF regime control the MLG (which remains in ZANU-PF hands following the GPA), while the MDC controls most of the local authorities, including all except one of the cities and municipalities in the country. The division—often deep, if not hostile—appears not only between the MLG and MDC local authorities, but also is often replicated within local councils, resident and ratepayer associations, and the community at large.

The MLG has plenty of instruments available to control local authorities, opposition or otherwise. Most notably, the central government has the ability to replace an ostensibly mismanaged elected council with an MLG-appointed commissioner. Many observers believe the MLG is at best reluctant to assist MDC councils; at worst, it works actively to co-opt them or to ensure that they

do not succeed. In 2005, for example, the MDC lost control of Harare and two other cities when the MLG dismissed the councils and appointed commissioners to manage them. The MLG argued that such steps are necessary to ensure proper operation of local governments. "We have realized that most of these MDC people running our councils are inept," the minister stated. "From now on my ministry will take a bigger role in ensuring that our people do not suffer in towns like they were doing under MDC-led councils" (Zim Online 2006, 4).

The MLG also proposed to abolish the directly elected executive mayor and return the town clerk to the position of managing the day-to-day duties of cities (Zim Online 2006, 5). A local government bill enacted in December 2007 actually did abolish the position, although apparently with MDC agreement. MDC party leaders had objected to their lack of control over elected mayors, who established independent urban power bases, hence their willingness to acquiesce in abolishing the office.

Zimbabwe's Local Authorities in 2009

As the 2000s progressed, decentralization and local autonomy was hardly at issue. To the contrary, Zimbabwe's local authorities were as much immersed in the political dynamics of the Mugabe regime as their national counterparts. Many in the MDC believed that the central government manipulated the intergovernmental system for the benefit of its party allies. Local elections were not always fair or peaceful; the playing field was tilted heavily toward the government party.

By the mid-2000s, if anyone questioned whether the situation for local officials and institutions could get much worse, the answer would have been: yes. Because of the growing economic crisis and given international aid agencies' refusal to further support a regime they viewed as repressive and corrupt, local authorities were receiving minimal if any financial resources from the central government or donor programs. Urban authorities were better able to cope with the resource scarcity than their rural colleagues, take advantage of their stronger administrative capacity, and creatively find alternative means of local revenue generation. Local economic conditions, public services, and the quality of life suffered, often severely. By 2008 came hyperinflation—the economy essentially collapsed. A year later, however, the GPA and the Inclusive Government it established were in place.

The main local government challenges
Local government in Zimbabwe today is in dire condition, and local authorities and communities are highly stressed in their efforts to do something about it. At the time of the field study, the country was transitioning economically from hyperinflationary collapse to a measure of price stability. A multi-currency regime had been established, and few Zimbabweans had the foreign currency to pay for anything (the Zimbabwean dollar had been abolished). Local government coffers

were therefore bare, and local officials were having trouble generating even minimal operational revenue. When asked what the three main challenges of the local authority were, as shown in Table 1, finance was constantly mentioned as the primary issue by mayors, clerks, and councilors. The problems mentioned other than finance—poor roads and infrastructure—are clearly related to the lack of financial resources. Only the councilors mentioned one issue more frequently (albeit one closely tied to finance) —transport service/road repair—among the top three.

Table 1. Response to Question: What are the three most pressing challenges facing the local authority?

	Number of Times Mentioned among Top Three (percentage of N)				
	Finance	**Transport/ Road Repair**	**Infrastructure**	**Equipment**	**Human Resources**
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	10 (79)	7 (50)	n.a.	5 (36)	n.a.
Administration Officials (N=15)	11 (67)	n.a.	11 (67)	n.a.	11 (67)
Councilors (N=227)	197 (87)	201 (89)	n.a.	195 (86)	n.a.
Totals (N=256)	218 (85)	208 (81)	n.a.	201 (78)	n.a.

Note: Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and others and vary by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents
n.a. = not applicable; issue was not mentioned among top three

In reporting their problems, it was repeatedly made clear that the educational level and professional experience of both the elected officials and administrative staff of the local authorities are major issues. The fact that senior officials identify human resources as a major issue indicates the level of the personnel challenge. Local authorities often reported an inability to keep good staff because the conditions of employment are difficult. Millions of Zimbabweans have in fact fled to South Africa and other countries in search of relief from the crisis.

Table 2 shows that the education and experience of local officials and administration can also provide insight into the nature of local government operations. Mayors and councilors tended to have the least education of the four groups represented here, a result that tends to support the concerns of many respondents (including local elected officials) about the knowledge and skills of some elected officials. We found that 14% of the councilors had at most a primary school education.

The town clerks were the best educated—all had a university degree or college diploma/certificate or a graduate degree (as required by law).

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Mayors, Councilors, and Senior Administration Officials in Sampled Local Authorities

Local Official	Avg. Age in Years	Highest Level of Education Achieved (% of N)				% Female
		Primary School	High School and High School +	University Degree or College Diploma/ Certificate	Graduate School	
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	47.5	0 (0)	8 (57)	3 (21)	1 (7)	7%
Councilors (N=223)	45.6	32 (14)	106 (48)	44 (20)	1 (.01)	15%
Town Clerks/ CEOs (N=12)	54.2	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (50)	6 (50)	0%
Remaining Administration Officials (N= 80)	44.1	0 (0)	4 (.05)	49 (61)	27 (34)	19%

Note: N = Number of officials who provided their personal data. In the age column, N=13 for mayors, 212 for councilors, and 76 for other administrative officials because not all answered the age question.

About one-fifth of the mayors and councilors had degrees or diplomas; graduate degrees within the two groups were unusual. The clerks also tended to be older, indicating more years of experience than the rest of the local officials.

As one might expect, the local 241 elected officials in our sample of local authorities represent a cross-section of Zimbabwean society. Most are farmers, but they also include builders, hair dressers, electrical engineers, security guards, teachers, supervisors, librarians, businesspeople, and many others. The town clerks and other administrative staff are professionally trained, most in public administration; they often cite as their profession the position they hold within the local authority. They are also trained as accountants, lawyers, town planners, auditors, civil engineers, and in various other fields. Complaints about a lack of quality administrative staff, however, and about staff turnover because of poor service conditions, especially in urban local authorities, were fairly common.

Figure 3 provides additional insight into the experience levels of local officials. It shows that a large majority of mayors and councilors were in their first terms of office: that is, they had little experience in local affairs. At the time of this study, 78% of the councilors (57% of the mayors) were in their first terms and therefore had been serving for about one year, yet the town clerks in our sample had been serving in their positions on average more than 17 years! The average length of service for other administrative staff was a little over 10 years.

Figure 3: Mayors' and Councilors' Experience in Local Authorities
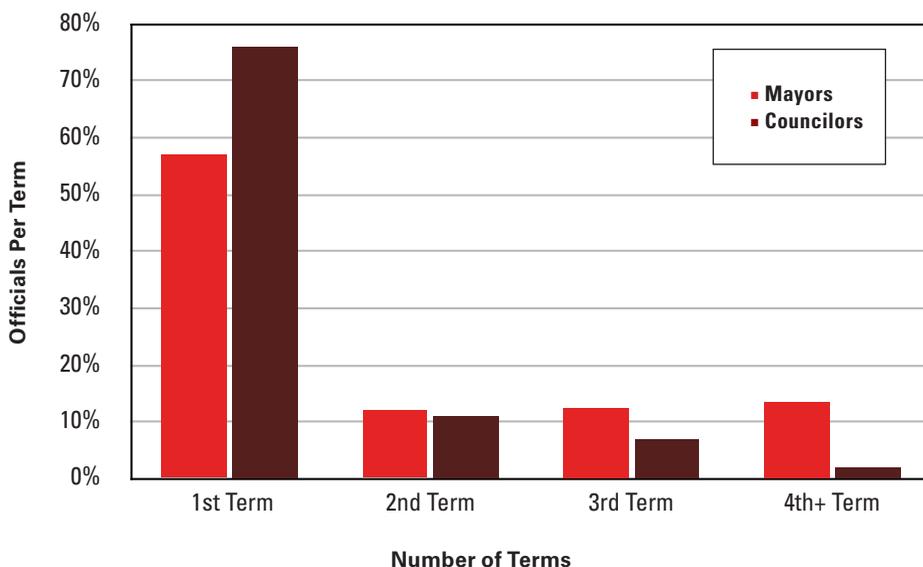
Training needs

The weak skills and experience of local elected officials and the considerable knowledge gap between them and the chief administrator concern Zimbabwean officials at all levels. The effective functioning of the local authority suffers from the lack of capacity. Elected officials, moreover, find themselves fully dependent on the town clerks and other administrative staff in the review of policy and general conduct of their duties. They complain of being bullied or having no decision-making role. This can create friction, if not outright conflict, especially in such a highly politicized environment (elected officials will complain that the town clerk and administration are ZANU-PF, hired by a previous government). Training local officials (councilors and the administration) in job roles and responsibilities, among other areas, is essential to any improvement of the local system.

Women's participation

Table 2 also shows that women are not well represented in local authorities—a mere 7% of the sample mayors were women and only 14% of the councilors were female. Administrative staff do only slightly better when it comes to female representation. As in many societies, the participation of women in elected office and the public sector has not improved much. A study found that in 2005, no mayors or deputy mayors were women, while only 13.5% of the urban councilors were female (Sachikonye 2007, 98–101). The explanation for the lack of improvement is of course multifaceted and a reflection of the broader state of women in Zimbabwean society.

Some of the obstacles, however, appear to be removable. The independent, non-partisan Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) issued a report in August 2003, for example, on the results of the recent urban council elections. ZESN reported that only 45 of the 347 elected councilors were women—an increase of only two over the previous term, in a country in which 52% of the population is female. A major reason women are not more active, according to ZESN's report, is restrictive proof of residence requirements. Many women cannot provide proof—they do not have accounts or bill statements—because they are economically dependent on their husbands. Village chiefs in rural areas may have full discretion and will sometimes deny registration to women whose husbands are believed to support the opposition. Finally, pre-election violence reduced the desire and ability of women to participate (ZESN 2003, 25–26).

Local Political and Intergovernmental Relations

In Zimbabwe, local authorities essentially report to the MLG. The mayor, whose role now is part-time and largely ceremonial, and councilors are political figures elected to represent their respective wards on the council who focus on policy in their committees. The town clerk (or CEO), who cannot be hired and fired without the minister's approval, leads the departments and general administration and is the local administrative link to the MLG. He or she—as opposed to the mayor—is now charged with executing the decisions of the council and ensuring compliance with regulations and procedures for the good functioning of the authority.

Ideally, the relationship between the council and the clerk and local administration is collaborative and therefore effective. Ideally, moreover, the local authority's relationship with the MLG (and the province and district administrator) is a productive one based on common objectives as well. Zimbabwe currently is usually not operating in the ideal. As one could expect given the political realities at play, we found that the relationships tend to be much more strained when the MDC controls the local authority. Where the MDC is strong locally, which is now common—and almost complete in urban areas—polarization between the council and the MLG predominates because the council sees the MLG as highly controlling and because the MLG cannot control the MDC councils as it would wish. Tension between the council and the administration can often be high where the MDC has a council majority; again, in some cases councilors view the town clerk and administration as political opponents who have been hired by and are loyal to ZANU-PF.

Relations with the Ministry of Local Government
First, town clerks generally have a better relationship with the MLG than the mayor or councilors. When asked to evaluate the local authorities' relationship with the MLG, the town clerks' view was much more positive than the opinion provided by the mayors and councilors. Table 3 shows that more than 71% of

Table 3. Response to Question: How would you describe the council's relationship with the Ministry of Local Government?

	Percentage of Responses					
	Mayors/Chairs (N=14)		Councilors (N=227)		Town Clerks and Administration Officials (N=15)	
	ZANU-PF (N=3)	MDC (N=11)	ZANU-PF LAs (N=64)	MDC LAs (N=164)	ZANU-PF LAs (N=3)	MDC LAs (N=12)
Excellent	0.0	0.0	3.1	1.2	33.3	0.0
Good	66.7	9.1	32.8	14.0	33.3	58.3
Fair	33.3	27.3	39.0	20.7	0.0	25.0
Poor	0.0	54.5	17.2	54.9	33.3	16.7
DK/NA	0.0	9.1	7.8	9.1	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	99.9	99.9	99.9	100.0

Note: It is important to note that the above party labels signify the party that controls the local authority, not individual party affiliations.
LAs = local authorities. In our sample, 12 of the 15 LAs were MDC local authorities.
DK/NA = Do not know or no answer. Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

the mayors and nearly 69% of the councilors view the relationship as "fair" or "poor." Only 40% of the clerk and administration staff had the same view, while 60% of them considered the relationship to be "good" or "excellent."

This table also shows the divergent views held by the political parties *vis-à-vis* the MLG. Whereas 35.9% of the councilors in the ZANU-PF local authorities had an excellent or good opinion of council relations with the MLG (the minister, who has long held the post, is ZANU-PF), only 15.2% of the MDC local authorities had this opinion. On the contrary, slightly more than three-quarters of the councilors in the MDC local authorities viewed the relationship with the MLG as either "fair" or "poor"—and more than half viewed it as poor. Considerably fewer—but still more than half of the councilors (56.2%) in the ZANU-PF local authorities—expressed their MLG relationship the same way, largely because the situation that all the councilors face is difficult, and they do not see the MLG providing assistance. Despite the small samples, the same patterns, illustrating further the institutional and political divisions, can be seen in the responses of the mayors and town clerks.

A common complaint of MDC and a few ZANU-PF local officials was the control that MLG exercises over these officials, requiring approvals and making decisions such as the appointment of special councilors without consultation.

One CEO in a ZANU-PF local authority likened the MLG relationship with the MDC to a "rider and a horse, respectively"—the local authority being the latter.[7] An MDC councilor in a major city complained of "serious interference" from the Minister in the day-to-day running of the city, "even telling us how many teaspoons [of sugar to put] in the tea."[8] Some ZANU-PF officials managed a good and regular working relationship; the occasional MDC official cited the absence of bickering as progress.

Seeking assistance through intergovernmental and international linkages

In surveying other institutional linkages between local officials and the central government, intergovernmental ties almost invariably mirror the contrasting tendencies seen in Table 3 with respect to the MLG. On the one hand, reflecting the political reality and their political roles, mayors and councilors turn to their members of parliament and senators as well as international donors for support. On the other hand, being technocratic and recognizing that administrative oversight (and ultimately their employment) derives from the MLG, town clerks and local administrative staffs have a much closer relationship with the MLG.

When asked to whom they would turn to resolve a problem, half of the mayors surveyed responded they would turn to either a member of parliament or international donors (36% responded the MLG). In fact, for elected officials, donor support can be critical. When asked to whom they turn for financial assistance, about two-thirds of the councilors explained that they would seek out donors—and less than 2% mentioned a member of parliament, a clear reflection of the severe financial condition facing the public sector and central government control over any resources that may be available. For political (61.4%), and to a lesser degree logistical, assistance (53.9%), councilors likewise turn to their local members of parliament.

Municipal associations

National associations of municipalities are found in many countries of the world because they bring together local officials and their staff around their common interest in improving the system of local government. Associations are typically engaged in three major areas: 1) developing policy responses to the challenges local officials face and lobbying national policymakers to institute reform; 2) providing training and technical assistance to local officials to help them resolve the institutional and other problems they face; and 3) promoting the spread of best practices and other information that can improve the functioning of the local administration. Zimbabwe has two functioning national municipal associations, though for differing reasons, both are institutionally

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[7]Interview, June 11, 2009.

[8]Interview, May 22, 2009.

weak. The two appear to be politically divided from one another and naturally face difficulties given the country's larger challenges.

The Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ), which was founded in 1923 as the umbrella organization for urban councils, and the Rural District Council Association (RDCAn) functioned on parallel tracks for many years. In 2003, they began to discuss merging into a new Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA). By 2006, heavily promoted by the RDCAn and strongly supported by the MLG, ZILGA was established. The merger, which was regarded as politically driven, was apparently put on hold, however, and the relationship of the RDCAn and UCAZ vis-à-vis ZILGA is unclear. At the time of this study, UCAZ was working to strengthen its training and project implementation capacity (Synnerholm and Boman 2009, 20–21).[9]

The Democratic Councils Forum (DemCoF) is the most recently established municipal association. A new umbrella organization—it was not yet legally registered at the time of this study—DemCoF seeks to promote democratic practice in local government administration. The forum emphasizes democratic values and reform, public participation, and integrated development. DemCoF is just getting off the ground, however, and has begun the effort to build its institutional, technical, and financial capacity. A strategic development plan was developed in June 2009.

The local officials interviewed for this study were well aware of all three organizations—UCAZ, ZILGA, and DemCoF—even if they had not interacted much with them. When asked which association of local authorities they were most familiar with, 25% of the mayors and councilors noted UCAZ; 24% responded ZILGA, many from rural areas; and 41% indicated that they knew DemCoF the best, reflecting the presence of the MDC councilors in the sample.

Abolition of the mayor as executive
The 2007 decision to convert the executive mayor into a part-time ceremonial mayor, as had been the case prior to 1995, was a major reform of which most local officials are aware. Only UCs were affected by the change; rural councils have always chosen their executives (the "chair") from among the elected councilors.[10] In urban areas, then, the reform transferred authority to manage the administration back to the town clerk. It erased the authority of elected mayors and their executive committees (or cabinet-like decision-making bodies), the role of which was transferred back to the councils.

For observers concerned with local autonomy and accountability, the improvement of which was the objective when the elected mayor was introduced

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[9]Also noted in an interview with the UCAZ Secretary General, May 8, 2009.

[10]Rural councilors were less likely to be aware of the change in part, it seems, because it does not affect their councils. The Zimbabwean government did at one time consider directly electing the rural chairpersons, but may have rejected the idea because the experience with elected mayors was not viewed favorably.

in the mid-1990s, this change was a major setback. Politically, the local power of the MDC also suffered to a considerable degree: the executive authority of the MDC mayors in all the major cities in the country was eliminated. This reform also meant that the MDC as a party became relatively more centralized, as its leaders apparently preferred. For observers focused on administrative effectiveness, as the town clerks generally are, the move was a positive one. It put executive decision making in the hands of the technocrats who, in their view, are best prepared to ensure effective administration.

Table 4 shows that the survey responses reflect the divergence between officials concerned more with political accountability and those interested in administrative effectiveness. Half of the elected officials (49.7% of mayors and councilors) viewed the new ceremonial mayor position negatively: none of the local administrations did. Rather, more than eight in ten of the groups of local administration officials interviewed saw it in a favorable light. Some administration officials remarked on the intra-institutional problem created by the reform, with one calling it "the single most problematic change" experienced because of the clash it created between the roles of mayor and administration.[11] One MDC chair made the point heard in some form from many elected local officials: "The reason for the shift was to disarm the

Table 4. Response to Question: What are your views about the shift in policy from the elected executive mayor to the council-elected, part-time ceremonial mayor?

Response	Percentage of Responses		
	Mayors/ Chairs (N=12)	Councilors (N=170)	Town Clerks and Administration Officials (N=12)
Executive mayor should have been retained	91.7	52.9	0.0
Executive mayor deserved dissolution	8.3	14.7	83.3
Don't know/No opinion	0.0	32.3	16.6
Total	100.0	99.0	99.9

Note: The relatively high percentage of councilors who did not know or did not have an opinion is explained in large part by rural councilors, who were not affected by the change in the election of urban mayors. Totals may not add to 100% because of rounding.

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[11]Interview, June 3, 2009.

mayor by making him ceremonial."[12] The new mayor's lack of power was a common complaint.

Our findings on this issue also indicated another serious problem. Zimbabwean law and practice did not previously define the appropriate relationship between the elected mayor and the administration, and do not currently define the relationship between the council and the town clerk. The proper relationships have never been well defined. Mayors and councilors interviewed were critical of the current weakness of the ceremonial mayor and of the dominance of the administration by unelected technocrats. For their part, town clerks, the very same unelected technocrats, expressed frustration with the politicization of administration and the weakness of the council system when the mayors were the executive authority. The weak mayor now gives officials a chance to "discuss issues on a professional basis," according to one MDC town clerk. "In the past, the mayor tended to take over the administrative duties of the town clerk."[13]

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[12]Interview, May 26, 2009.

[13]Interview, May 19, 2009.

4. Participatory Governance? Linkages among Local Authority, Citizens, and the Community

Under conditions of severe scarcity and crisis, political systems characterized by clientelism and patronage face certain stress. As the population's needs increase, the wherewithal of the state, political parties, and elected representatives to support an informal network of supporters declines. In clientelistic systems, local residents often seek out their representatives and others in positions of authority to resolve their particular problems or secure individual favors—anything from money for a family funeral, a job, food, school placement, or any other issue among a wide range of possibilities. Constituents customarily believe they need political influence, or the access to resources that it provides, to address effectively or more quickly their various concerns.

The targets of these petitions—elected officials (and indirectly the political parties they belong to)—work hard to provide help because they are public servants. The people they assist are often deeply vulnerable, suffering from disease or otherwise facing difficult situations. Elected officials also realize, as politicians, that such assistance is part of a larger process of building a political base (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007). Indeed, the inability or failure to address individual requests, which is very much a part of retail politics in the developing world, is one of the reasons candidates and their political parties begin to lose support.

Clientelism and representation

A full examination of the nature of relations between the local state and its citizens, the complexity of ethnic politics included, is well beyond the scope of this study. In reviewing the character of participatory governance, however, it is important to emphasize that strong clientelism and patronage are defining features of Zimbabwean local governance. Working within highly politicized local settings, Zimbabwe's elected officials spend a good amount of time and effort addressing individualistic requests of all types. Local officials will do what they can to help but cannot always meet growing needs, especially in the current environment. The petitioners may well be directed to an NGO or donor aid program, for example. In addition, to address these needs, some local authorities have established welfare offices.

There is strong agreement among local officials on the frequency with which they receive personal petitions or requests for specific items from local residents. Nine of the 15 groups of administration officials interviewed (60%) and 10 of the 14 mayors (71%), who have traditionally been the targets of such

petitions because of their executive authority, replied that councilors (who now include the mayors) "often" receive such requests. Among the councilors—who represent wards located throughout their local jurisdictions, are physically a little easier to reach, and are often the first to be sought out—65% responded that they often receive requests of this type.[14] Requests for food, rents, hospital fees, housing space, farm credit, help with cuts in water and electricity service—these and many more end up on local officials' to-do lists. Several local officials noted that such requests come, as one administrator stated, "very often"—for "all kinds of requests [for] all kinds of assistance."[15] One municipal mayor deals with petitions, he said, "every day."[16]

Councilors, who serve as representatives from the wards in which they were elected, are in fact the primary actors when it comes to identifying and addressing the concerns of local residents. They essentially serve as intermediaries between citizens and the council and department heads. In the large majority of cases, councilors reported holding formal and informal meetings with community residents. They then report back to the council. When local officials were asked how citizen concerns reached their councils, 9 of 14 mayors (64%) indicated exclusively or primarily that the initial contact is the councilor. Only one-third of 15 groups of administration officials responded the same way, as they tended to cite various means of contacting the local authority; in every instance they mentioned the councilor as one option, however. Residents' associations, traditional leaders, clinics, information centers, ward development committees, and the council as a whole are other options for citizens interested in contacting the local authority, but these appear to be used relatively infrequently.

About nine of every ten of the councilors themselves noted that they were exclusively or primarily the citizen link to the local authority. "The Councilor acts as the messenger between the Council and the community—carries concerns from the community to [the] Council and reports back," according to an RDC council member.[17] A city councilor made a similar point: "The citizens tell their councilor[,] who will submit the concerns to council committees then to the full council[,] or the councilor [will go] straight to the head of each department … ."[18] Elected councilors "are the ones who are responsible again to address the residents on the work in council," another city councilor responded.[19]

To the extent that mayors and councilors provide assistance to local residents, they may themselves seek out external assistance, and among the

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[14]The number of groups of administration officials (N=15), mayors (N=14), and councilors (N=227) who replied that they "occasionally" received these requests was, respectively, 20%, 21%, and 26%.

[15]Interview, May 6, 2009.

[16]Interview, June 5, 2006.

[17]Interview, May 5, 2009.

[18]Interview May 19, 2009.

[19]Interview, May 19, 2009.

first they will turn to is their party's Member of Parliament (MP). Because, as indicated above in Table 2, mayors and councilors most resemble the average Zimbabwean and may face financial limitations of their own, their ability to assist is limited. Their council allowances are minimal, and cannot provide much assistance, so MPs do serve as important political and locally influential allies. Thus, party linkages to the MPs are critical. While the MP is also unlikely to be able to access significant funding, through his or her own connections, he or she can secure fuel for the council, for example, assist in resolving problems, help find aid for poor families, organize meetings with residents, or perhaps facilitate donor assistance.[20]

Participatory governance

Local elected officials widely believe that citizen participation in affairs of the local authority is strong, and while administration officials do not take as positive a view, they report that participation is fairly strong. When asked to describe the public participation in the work of their councils, 10 of 14 mayors (71%) responded that it was "strong"—that citizens regularly participate in meetings and share their views. Some 65% of the councilors had the same view. Among the administration officials, 6 of 15 (40%) of the groups reported that participation was strong, while another 40% said it was "moderate," meaning that citizens participate occasionally and are allowed to join only some meetings.

It is of course important to delve a little further to determine what Zimbabwean local officials mean by "participation." First, many local officials tended to view any interaction with the public as participatory. One administration official, for example, explained that participation was moderate because: "[Residents] participate in cleanup campaigns, [event] break downs, and drink a lot of our beer from our beer councils."[21] An RDC chair reported that participation is strong because council meetings are open to all and people share their views in them.[22] Other mayors and councilors viewed the criticism and complaints that come from residents as important examples of strong participation. In referring to public interaction, they often explained the importance of consulting with the associations of ratepayers, informal workers, and other associations on the setting of fees and tax rates.

Second—and a primary reason for their "strong" response on citizen participation—is that most local officials say they regularly consult with ward residents and with local associations on major issues, obtain their views, and act on them as they believe necessary. Consultation especially occurs each year with the preparation of the budget. Moreover, the MLG has reportedly been requiring local officials to provide written evidence of their consultations with residents, such as the minutes of meetings, in order to get the budget approved.

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[20]Interviews, May 7, 2009.

[21]Interview, June 5, 2009.

[22]Interview, May 5, 2009.

Table 5. Response to Question: Does the council engage in participatory budgeting with the community?

	Number of Responses (percentage of N)		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	13 (92.9)	0.0	1 (7.1)
Administration Officials (N=15)	0.0	15 (100.0)	0.0
Councilors (N=227)	182 (80.2)	44 (19.4)	1 (0.4)

Note: Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and others and vary by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents.

Table 5 shows the degree to which local officials see the budget process as participatory. Most of the mayors and every one of the administration officials, when asked if the local authority engages in participatory budgeting, responded that it does. Some 80% of the councilors responded the same way.

Many local officials described a budget process that generally—but by no means perfectly or consistently—includes the following seven steps, especially in UCs:

1. Prepare a draft budget through the Finance Committee, and forward it to full council.
2. Consult with citizens in each ward to receive their inputs and/or gather a "shopping list" of needs (this step may be done first in some cases).
3. Prepare a second draft for council consideration.
4. Consult further with wards and stakeholders (this step may not occur), especially on rates and fee structure.
5. Complete and approve final budget.
6. Publish budget in local newspaper for any possible final revisions.
7. Send the budget to MLG for approval.

These seven steps, which typically begin each year in August, should be thought of as the ideal of an imperfect process that does not occur in each local authority. Any of the steps could be skipped, especially in rural areas where local officials tend to consult with the wards just once and do not report publicizing the budget. For example, a councilor from an RDC who reported participation was "moderate" explained a much less elaborate process

focused on the sensitive issue of taxation: "As councilors we are tasked to go and meet our community on proposed [tax] rates, then we return information to the full Council meeting for finalization. Then the budget will be send (sic) to the Ministry of Local Government."[23]

Weak participation

In fact, viewed from a broader perspective, public participation in local affairs is actually weak. Generally, the quality of participation, where it exists, is poor for a few reasons. First, in practice, councilor meetings almost invariably involve only political party allies. MDC supporters attend MDC councilor meetings; ZANU-PF followers attend ZANU-PF meetings. This politicization of council activities discourages general participation. One MDC municipal mayor described how the ZANU-PF district administrator (allegedly) absconded with the local authorities' food and supplies and held a separate Zimbabwe independence-day celebration in the rural part of the town. As a former MDC city mayor pointed out, echoing the comments of other local officials, when he called a general meeting "zero" ZANU-PF supporters showed up; others feared participating. If he called 5,000 residents to review a budget or strategic plan, 10% might show up. People lose interest, he noted.[24] Given all the problems facing local authorities, such lack of interest is a sobering prospect for local democratic governance.

Second, participation is weak because the entire process is centered within the local authority. Councilors provide a list of ideas drawn from their ward residents, and they make sure the rates and fees are not seriously objection-able. There should be no mistaking such interaction with actual participation in the decision-making process itself, however. The prioritization of budget projects or activities is done, often in advance of consultations, entirely by the administration and council. To some local associations and councilors, the budget consultations are mere presentations of what has already been prepared; the process is not deliberative. In addition, local officials did not report that the public was involved in or monitoring budget execution (one did indicate that the local authority did quarterly budget reviews, for example, but precisely with whom was unclear). Nearly all of the community associations we surveyed, moreover, indicated that the budget process was not transparent at all.[25] Residents also complain that what is agreed to in the meetings turns out to be much different when the budget is finalized.

Third, the groups of community representatives or associations surveyed take a dimmer view of local participation in the budget (more than half reported no involvement in the process). They tended to note that their role was at best a reactive one, and even those who were more supportive of the process

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[23]Interview, June 10, 2009.

[24]Interview, May 4, 2009.

[25]Two of the association groups indicated that budget preparation was "somewhat open"; all reported that execution of the budget was "not open at all."

agreed. The quality of the process may often be poor or disorganized or, again, highly politicized. In some local authorities as well, the idea of a formal participatory process was reportedly new.

Finally, it bears noting that among the surveyed councilors there were few if any examples of participation other than the budget consultations. Aside from the individual petitioning of the councilors, citizen involvement in local affairs appears highly restricted. As other studies report, Zimbabwean local authorities can turn to a variety of mechanisms for public consultation, including a bottom-up approach defined in the RDCA, but they are not often used or used well. By the mid-2000s, participatory budgeting—the formal process of engaging citizens in budgetary decision making—was introduced in a number of local authorities with international donor support. The reports on the results of these programs were generally positive, though the degree to which the process has been sustained is unclear at best (Shall 2007, 55-56; Sachikonye 2007, 218).

Assessing local stakeholders and their role

What community-based and other organizations are important to local governance? What role do they play? When asked to identify the major stakeholders in the community, local officials point to a variety of groups that can be organized, as indicated in Table 6, into several categories. The extent to which they are present or relatively influential in each district or urban area could not be determined. The strong presence of international humanitarian assistance

Table 6: Local Stakeholders as Identified by Local Authority Officials, by Category

Category	Examples	General Activity
Local associations or interest groups	residents, ratepayers, informal workers associations	tax rates and fee levels; budget inputs; service demands
Business community	chambers of commerce; private corporations; mining companies	financial support, equipment, services, fuel, trouble-shooting
International NGOs	UNICEF, Practical Action, World Vision, Oxfam, CARE, Action Against Hunger, Lutheran Development Service	humanitarian aid; food; shelter; infrastructure construction; water and sanitation; fighting HIV/AIDS
Labor unions	Farmers Union, Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, Trade Union Workers Committee, transport operators	labor rights, wages, tax rates and fee levels
Zimbabwean or local organizations	churches, Shelter Zimbabwe, chiefs/headmen; local NGOs (National Association of NGOs)	humanitarian aid; housing; revenue collection

Note: Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and others and vary by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents.

clearly demonstrates, however, the severity of local conditions and the near-collapse of public services. The near absence of international development agencies at the local level is further reflection of the reluctance of countries to engage the Mugabe regime. Finally, the rare mention of a national municipal association indicates the limits of their role in aiding local authorities.

The resident, ratepayer, and other local interest group associations are often mentioned and clearly can be major local actors where they are active. In urban areas especially, they can be influential in making demands for improvements, for example, in services or calling for rate adjustments. The resident association of Masvingo has traditionally been known to wield considerable influence in the historic town, for example, and Harare's is quite active. Local industry and commercial leaders can be influential as providers of budget inputs, tax rates, financial support, equipment, and other assistance. Home workers, trade unions, informal workers, and the farmers unions in rural areas protect the interests of their sectors and can weigh heavily for or against the local authority. Local churches are often noted as well for the variety of humanitarian support they provide.

The international humanitarian aid providers are frequently mentioned by local officials, who may turn to them for various needs. In a country where the state's ability to provide services has severely eroded, where poverty and unemployment have escalated, and where diseases such as cholera can flare up, international humanitarian assistance arrives in many forms. Humanitarian organizations provide food aid, seeds, school fees, construction of dams and classrooms, clothes, shelter, HIV/AIDS medicine, and many other items.

5. Local Finances:
Local Officials as Have-Nots

The financial situation that local authorities in Zimbabwe endured over the past decade, culminating as it did with ruinous hyperinflation, was severe, and it remains extraordinarily difficult today. Local officials have long been on their own with respect to revenue generation; fiscal transfers from the center dried up years ago. The political and economic crisis has severely eroded their capacity to repair equipment, improve infrastructure, and provide basic services—the linchpin of the local system. Communities' incentive to pay taxes and fees for public services they were not receiving was crumbling along with their infrastructure; local businesses suffered severely, eliminating another revenue stream; and the general population's ability to pay for anything was of course affected by declining incomes and rising poverty. Many local residents and businesses simply do not pay.

The national economic collapse left the local authorities essentially broke, and by 2009 they were very slowly emerging from rock bottom as dollars became available and some measure of stability appeared in the economy. "We need to be doing things by ourselves," one MDC mayor frustrated by the scarcity of income explained, "but we simply can't."[26]

Central government fiscal transfers

All over the world, fiscal transfers from the central government to local governments provide local officials with the additional budget they need to carry out their decentralized responsibilities. Locally generated revenue alone is usually considered insufficient. Local systems, of course, may become dependent on revenue flows from the center and thus reduce their efforts to enhance the pool of local revenue. This has hardly been the case in Zimbabwe. As shown in Table 7, the local authorities in this study—virtually all of the officials interviewed—made clear that they had not received fiscal support from Harare for years. A few mentioned access to road funds secured through lobbying the MLG, but in fact resources from the center generally stopped arriving long ago.

Local authorities have been forced to be creative in generating revenue, and they have been praised for the revenue mobilization they have consequently been able to achieve (Chikumbu, Mika, and Manikai 2006, 83). The enabling legislation for both urban and rural councils (the UCA and RDCA) includes a series of revenue mobilizing tools, including borrowing powers—though always subject to MLG restrictions. UCs in particular generate revenue through a variety of fees, rates, sales, and taxes, and their ability to set rate levels.

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[26]Interview, May 7, 2009.

Table 7. Response to Question: Which of the following best describes the nature of intergovernmental fiscal transfers received by the council from the central government in Harare?

Response	Percentage of Responses
	Mayors, Councilors, and Local Administration Officials (N=256)
Fiscal transfers are sufficient	0.4
Fiscal transfer are inadequate	1.6
We do not receive significant fiscal transfers	24.6
We do not receive fiscal transfers	73.4
Total	100.0

Types of revenue sources

When asked about the sources of revenue utilized most by the local authority, elected and administration officials' responses reflected the wide variety of means noted above, including continued involvement in retail sales. The survey results also clearly demonstrate that local governments in Zimbabwe generate most of their revenue from property taxes, licenses, and service fees, as illustrated in Table 8.

The town clerks (CEOs) and administration officials, whose responses can be considered the most accurate reflection of actuality, most often noted that property taxes and related charges are the most important source of revenue; licenses for businesses and vehicles are second; finally, service fees are third in importance. The mayors' responses were essentially the same, though they also noted the revenue generated by water charges. The councilors considered development levies, rentals (property, market stalls, etc.), and licensing fees, in descending order, as the three most important.

Local officials not infrequently mentioned the varied marketing or sales activities they engage in, which they sometimes referred to as "council projects." They are engaged in the traditional liquor sales (36% of local officials and 2 of 15 local administrative groups interviewed mentioned it among the leading three), for example, as well as sales of land, shops, pigs and other livestock, and jatropha plants. One respondent from a city administration even mentioned "dividends from our company" as a source of income.[27] Other sources of revenue include health levies, markets, penalties, and royalties.

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[27]Interview, May 6, 2009.

Table 8. Response to Question: What are the councils' three main sources of local revenue?

	Number of Times Mentioned among Top Three (percentage of N)				
	Property Taxes and Related Charges	Licenses	Service Fees	Development Levies	Rentals
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	11 (78.6)	6 (42.9)	7 (50.0)	n.a.	n.a.
Administration Officials (N=15)	13 (86.7)	10 (66.7)	8 (53.3)	n.a.	n.a.
Councilors (N=227)	n.a.	154 (67.8)	n.a.	182 (80.2)	169 (74.6)

Note: Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and others and vary by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents
n.a. = not applicable; issue was not mentioned among top three

Local authorities, according to survey responses, were clearly not receiving appreciable funding from external sources. A city or two cited short-term loans from banks, but local authorities' broader ability to borrow is dependent on authorization from the MLG, which had not been forthcoming in any of the cases in this study. In some cases, private businesses provide support. The most common external assistance, which was frequently mentioned, is material support (supplies, water treatment chemicals, equipment, pipes, etc.) from international NGOs, UNICEF, Plan International, and donors such as the Germans or British. Local organizations, such as churches, do provide some assistance. Much of this aid is provided directly to communities or the beneficiaries, however, and does not pass through the local government.

Spending priorities of the local authorities

There is little doubt about the spending priorities of local authorities. With the resources they do have, local officials noted, they spend on three items: wages, general expenses, and infrastructure repair. They clearly are not taking on larger quality of life and development issues, such as investments in services or local economic development. Table 9 shows that all local officials, elected and otherwise, made it clear this was the case.

Salaries consume a large proportion of local authority income, especially as staff size remains fairly constant and the proportion increases as the overall budget shrinks. Responses from the town clerks/CEOs and other administrative staff (the only officials who consistently provided figures) demonstrate that salary payments consume 28–60% of their respective

Table 9. Response to Question: What are the three largest expenditures in the budget?

	Number of Times Mentioned among Top Three (percentage of N)			
	Wages	**General Expenses (incl. bills)**	**Infrastructure Maintenance**	**Infrastructure Construction**
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	13 (92.9)	8 (72.7)	13 (92.9)	n.a.
Administration Officials (N=15)	15 (100.0)	11 (73.3)	12 (80.0)	n.a.
Councilors (N=227)	203 (89.4)	166 (73.1)	n.a.	116 (51.1)

Note: Some 86% of the councilors mentioned "other," which includes a variety of items that do not fit into a single category. Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and others and their composition varied by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents
n.a. = not applicable; issue was not mentioned among top three

budgets.[28] Officials surveyed complained of the large staff expense, and an MP put the salaries in one large city at 90% of the budget.

Local officials are constantly concerned with infrastructure deterioration—roads and bridges in particular, as well as water and sanitation—and the need for repair. The availability of workable roads, as roads have been deteriorating for years, is obviously critical to local communities.

Capital development

Serious capital investment in infrastructure or anything else is essentially non-existent and has been for years, which means that local officials are relying on stopgap measures to keep services running. Again, though they may budget for it, local authorities simply have not had the resources to sustain any type of development project. When asked about the level of resources dedicated to capital projects, 25 of 29 mayors and administrative officials (86%) reported that it was either low (17) or non-existent (8).[29] Almost all of them echoed the comment of a municipal mayor: "We are failing to do capital projects because of lack of financial resources."[30]

Auditing of accounts

In the interest of assessing the level of good financial and accounting practices among local authorities, local officials were asked when they had last

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[28]One CEO from an RDC reported the salary level at 16% of the budget.

[29]Well over half of the councilors interviewed did not know when the last audit was completed.

[30]Interview, June 1, 2009.

completed an external audit. External audits are required by law 80 days after the end of the year. Audits, however, generally don't occur, and many local authorities have not done them for a number of years. Only one local authority of the 15 had, according to the mayors and local administrative staff, completed an audit in 2008; at most half had done one in 2007, and the rest reported having gone longer without one. The most important explanation for the failure to audit is, naturally, a lack of funding, though the lack of staff to support the process is also an issue.

6. The Service Delivery Crisis

Long the so-called *raison d'être* of local authorities in Zimbabwe, public service delivery will prove fundamental to the renewal of the local government system, if not the country as a whole. In post-conflict or crisis environments, the ability to restore the effective provision of public goods and services is considered an effective means of building state legitimacy and stability (Brinkerhoff, Johnson, and Hill 2009). Restoring services in turn requires taking advantage of existing local capacity, reconnecting with citizens and civil society at-large, and producing tangible improvements in the quality of life. A better understanding of the state of local service delivery today will facilitate the targeting of improvements or assistance efforts in the future.

Urban and rural council service provision

Given the difficulties they have been facing for so long and the deterioration across several service areas, it bears considering what services the councils are actually providing today. Table 10 provides a good estimation of what they

Table 10. Response to Question: What are the three most important services the council is providing to the community?

Local Officials	Number of Times Mentioned among Top Three (percentage of N)			
	Water and Sanitation	Refuse Collection	Road Maintenance	Primary Health Care
Mayors/Chairs (N=14)	8 (57.1)	10 (71.4)	n.a.	7 (50.0)
Administration Officials (N=15)	14 (93.3)	n.a.	5 (33.3)	11 (78.6)
Councilors (N=194)	103 (53.1)	n.a.	64 (33.0)	97 (50.0)
Totals (N=223)	125 (56.1)	10 (4.5)	69 (30.9)	115 (51.6)

Note: Administration officials, interviewed as a group, include the town clerks, heads of department, and other officials, and the composition of the group varied by local authority.
N = Total number of survey respondents
n.a. = not applicable; issue was not mentioned among top three

currently most often do. Local authorities report that they are involved most importantly in providing water and sanitation, primary health care, and road maintenance. Refuse collection, moreover, was noted by mayors as among the three most important. These four plus education (helping manage schools) were considered by all local officials interviewed as the top five most important services they provided (refuse collection and education [both at 26.7%] were ranked fourth by administration officials; refuse collection was ranked fifth [21.1%] behind education [29.9%] by the councilors).

The degree and quality with which the local authorities actually provide these public services, however, is a separate issue. Local officials made it clear that while they were providing water, health, and road repair, they were only doing so minimally—often just barely scraping by or relying on financial support from some external source, usually an international NGO. In a number of instances, it is worth noting, local officials replied that they were not providing any services because there was no money to pay for them.

In addition, local authorities are not supposed to be entirely responsible for all of these services—that is, central government ministries are supposed to be supporting health care, water in rural areas, salaries for teachers, etc. The fact is, however, that support from the center is mostly nonexistent (indeed, as noted and according to many officials, MLG interference makes life more difficult). Councils are left to do what they can on their own, which is minimal as well. At the time of the surveys, the central government, for example, had only just begun making basic payments to teachers of $100 a month.

The service activities local councils engage in vary somewhat by size and capacity of the local authority. Table 11 provides a brief summary of some of the main ones, as discussed by the local authorities (it is not necessarily an exclusive list), in five service sectors. Again, there are many problems in each of these areas with delivery capacity; the table indicates some of the problems councils face.

Housing, as we have seen, is also a major local issue, though apparently it does not rise to the highest level of local officials' attention. Local authorities sell housing stands (or lots), with and without basic services, and they raise some revenue doing so. Some UCs are able and disposed to support housing. Space, however, is frequently limited and waiting lists are huge, giving rise to corruption; construction in most places has ground to a halt. Available homes, however, are well short of the demand—the waiting list is now in excess of one million (Zvidzai 2009, 5). The problem is reflected in overcrowding and the growth of shacks and in increasing numbers of squatters and homeless. Needed repairs, maintenance, and extensions of the existing housing stock are also believed to be many years delayed (Synnerholm and Boman 2009, 21–24).

Table 11. Local Authority Support for Service Delivery by Sector

Service	Key Activities
Refuse Collection	• Remove garbage as much as possible. • Use tractors for refuse collection if trucks are unavailable. • Provide dump sites. • Maintain trucks (often few in number).
Roads and Transport	• Provide continuous maintenance, some reconstruction of road network. • Grade roads if tow grader is working. • Fill potholes with gravel if needed; tar not always accessible. • Maintain vehicle fleet.
Health	• Provide primary care (curative care on minor issues). • Administer hospitals and polyclinics and some construction in urban areas. • Provide ambulance services. • Pay (and possibly provide food for) nonprofessional staff (security guards, janitors, etc.) and nurse allowances when possible. • Provide medicines and other basic supplies (soaps, candles, etc.). • Conduct clean-town campaigns. • Open new council clinics in rural areas.
Education	• Oversee primary and secondary school administration (not typically salaries). • Provide for school construction and maintenance; libraries, Internet cafes in urban areas. • Provide stationery, books, furniture, and other supplies.
Water and Sanitation	• Conduct continuous maintenance. • Provide water and water treatment. • Drill boreholes. • Provide water and sewer pumps, pipes, and tanks when possible. • Repair leakages; address sewer spills. • Construct toilets. • Rehabilitate and construct irrigation screens, dams.

The state of service delivery today

Service provision among local authorities in Zimbabwe is a matter of trying to make something of a crisis situation. Local officials are, of course, well aware of the situation they face across a variety of service areas. When asked to describe the general state of service delivery in their locality, there is strong agreement: typically poor, fair at best.

With one exception, every mayor and community association considered service delivery to be either "fair" or "poor," with the large majority reporting that service was poor. The groups of administration officials, who are charged with overseeing services on a day-to-day basis, tended to be more optimistic; 80% reported services were "fair" while the rest reported they were on the poor end. As Table 12 makes clear for five services, including the four that local authorities considered most important, the councilors reported that delivery is generally dismal. With the slight exception

Table 12: Response to Question: How would you describe the state of service delivery today (percentage of total responses)?

Service/ Service Rating	Health	Education	Transport/ Roads	Water and Sanitation	Housing
Excellent	3.3	2.7	1.6	3.8	0.5
Good	18.7	9.9	7.1	7.7	9.9
Fair	41.8	33.5	23.1	24.2	41.2
Poor	30.2	42.3	53.3	54.4	36.3
Nonexistent	1.1	2.2	4.9	2.2	1.6
DK/NA	4.9	9.3	9.9	7.7	10.4
Total	100.0	99.9	99.9	100.0	99.9

Note: N= 182 and includes only the councilors from 12 local authorities. DK/NA = Respondents who did not know or did not answer the question. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

of health (72.0%), over three-fourths of the councilors rated each of these services as either "fair" or "poor." More than half of the councilors considered roads and water and sanitation services "poor," a point that is further confirmed below.

What specifically are the challenges local authorities face in attempting to meet service needs? Table 13 provides a list of the major problems, as reported by the councilors. The lack of financial resources tops the list: more than nine of ten local officials mentioned this problem among the top three. Local authorities are simply starved of the funding that is needed to sustain any service (though the situation has probably improved slightly as the economy under the new currency regime has stabilized over the past year). Another core challenge is equipment and machinery. If local authorities are lucky enough to have the proper item, their machines and equipment are in poor condition or inoperative, or they have been cannibalized so that something else can be put to use. Nearly 90% of the local officials noted this as among the top three problems. Finally, as mentioned by more than 80% of local officials, finding sufficient material stocks to keep services functioning—pipes, tanks, lights, etc.—is a serious issue. Clearly, the remaining three issues—roads, land for housing, and human resources—are also major problems for service delivery.

Table 13: Service Delivery Challenges as Reported by All Local Officials

Challenge	Frequency Mentioned among Top Three Issues (in descending order by percentage)
Finance	92.6
Equipment and machinery	87.5
Material stocks	82.4
Accessible roads	80.9
Land for housing	71.9
Human capital	65.6

Note: N=256. Respondents include mayors, councilors, and groups of administration officials.

Local officials at times seemed resigned to their fate, recognizing that they could not make much progress without some outside assistance, yet hopeful that things would improve. " …[W]e can't get back on our feet," one mayor reported, thinking that maybe the central government could put together rescue packages for local authorities.[31] "We are struggling," an RDC chair reported.[32] A lead administration official stated that his local authority had no cash flow: "We're not a bankable organization at present," he said.[33] Local officials reported many difficulties, and they turned to donors, churches, "well-wishers," and NGOs again and again for support. One mayor recalled that they had approached 10 foreign embassies for a tractor—with no luck yet.

While some local officials are resuscitating old equipment, others simply dig pits for refuse disposal. Some just do not have the funds to repair trucks. One councilor commented on the services in his RDC as follows:

> We try to offer services in the areas of water, sanitation, and education but [they are] very minimal… [O]ur [health] clinics and District Hospital and schools are in a deplorable state. Much needs to be done to improve the state of health and school infrastructure.[34]

The European Union was funding the rehabilitation of water tanks in one locality. Another council had borrowed cars from NGOs and a central government

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[31]Interview, May 7, 2009.

[32]Interview, May 5, 2009.

[33]Interview, May 7, 2009.

[34]Interview, May 5, 2009.

agency. In one local authority a local refuse collection company was helping collect garbage, and the officials provided a token payment for the assistance. Indeed, the determined local officials had to be entrepreneurial, networking with potential providers, civil society groups, donors, MPs and other party leaders, ministries if possible, or international aid organizations. When efforts failed, the problem was left unaddressed or local officials often manufactured some solution to address the issue at hand at least temporarily.

Infrastructure and maintenance

Infrastructure and maintenance are clearly, then, at the core of the service delivery problems facing local authorities. We attempted to delve a little further into these two areas and found that the seminal problems, according to local authorities, are roads, water and sanitation, and plant and equipment—especially road improvement.

Both administration officials and mayors/chairs identified roads as the most serious issue, and road condition was among the leading three concerns for 93% of the councilors, who are most affected by travel to their often-distant wards. Roads have long deteriorated, they are in terrible condition still, and local officials can make only temporary measures at best to fill potholes or repair gaps. They do not have the resources to build more roads. Repair and upgrade of roads is not only a service in itself, it is also crucial to access, particularly for RDCs. Road quality therefore affects the councils' ability to deliver the whole range of public services.

The following is an excerpt from the travel diary of a U.S. actor who was with Oxfam examining the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe in April 2009, when our surveys began. This is a description from Kadoma, one of the local authorities included in this study:

"We are visiting the lavatories for the town—due to condensed homes, sewage for each individual home is no longer available, and one large lavatory is now being built by a crew of about 12 men and women … Soon, they say, this new lavatory system will be available to use. But only thirty yards away, there is one of the already in-use public toilets. As I walked up to the concrete house-like building, I notice a squishy, dark, dampness on the ground surrounding it for 15 feet in all directions… The moisture reflected the shimmering sun in some of the puddle-like area, and it looked like it was moving. It was moving. All around the toilets was a sea of little white maggots, growing and wriggling around in the poop."

Source: Emile Hirsch, "Confronting Cholera: My Zimbabwe Diary," in the Huffington Post, January 27, 2010, available at: www.huffingtonpost.com.

Local officials (84.7% of them) indentified plant and equipment as the second most important maintenance and infrastructure problem. Fourteen of 15 groups of local administration officials (93.3%) noted this issue; half of mayors did. Again, the problem arises in part because of the poor budget situation, and the lack of plant and equipment can affect all services to some degree.

More than three-quarters of the councilors and almost two-thirds of the mayors and groups of administration officials reported that water and sanitation infrastructure and maintenance are a lead issue. In fact, today water supply and sanitation service in many areas is running at 30% of its design capacity, if it operates at all (Richards, et. al. 2009a, 3). In increasing numbers of local authorities, "the water supply has broken down completely and the people have to fetch water from often contaminated sources of water (streams, ponds, shallow wells)" (Richards, et al. 2009a, 3). A cholera outbreak in 2008—which is estimated to have resulted in the deaths of over 4,000 people and affected 91,000 more—indicates the dramatic decline in the quality of water and the seriousness of the problem.[35] Water and sewer repair and expansion are sorely needed, and local authorities do not have the pipes or pumps to upgrade or extend the systems. Chemicals to treat water that may well be contaminated are badly needed as well.

In the late 2000s, the central government decided to take over water service delivery in several towns and cities, reportedly because the takeover would allow it to control the largest revenue source among the local services. Both water and sewerage service was placed under the control of the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). The strong consensus, supported by local officials and other reports, is that this centralization of the service exacerbated the decline in water and sewer systems, worsening the outbreak of cholera in some locales (Richards, et al. 2009b, 4-5). Before the decade ended, the provision of water and sewerage was being transferred back to local authorities. "We got back whatever was left," one city clerk reported.[36]

Fee generation and cost recovery

Fees generated from water and sanitation services, including sewer systems, and refuse collection fees are reportedly the most important to local authorities. These two were mentioned more than twice as many times as others by mayors and administration officials. Roads and transport (vehicle licenses, bus terminal fees, etc.) and health fees are additional revenue providers. Councils also generate some revenue from fees at markets, schools, housing, and street lighting, among other activities. Local authorities were hardly recovering their costs, however, and the great majority reported heavy subsidization of services like health and water.

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[35]United Nations estimates (Richards, et al. 2009a, 3).

[36]Interview, May 6, 2009.

Virtually all of the local officials recognized that their community residents could not afford to pay much if anything for the services they were providing. Many reported at the time of the survey that residents were not paying or that they expected to pay less. Local officials tend to base their rates and fees on what they think they need to accomplish and charge per unit when they can. Local authorities may review the proposed fees with residents and civic leaders, but often what they actually charge—or collect—is nominal. "Our people do not have the capacity to pay," declared an administration official in Epworth, echoing many others.[37] It is also worth emphasizing that residents are reluctant to pay because, as they see services crumble around them, they believe they do not receive much in return for the money they contribute. In the end, local officials recovered in virtually all cases half at best or much less of their costs.

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[37]Interview, May 26, 2009.

7. Conclusions and a Prospective View of Reform

Like so many of Zimbabwe's institutions, the local authorities have long been caught up in the destructive polarization and economic calamity that the country has suffered over the course of a decade. The years of neglect of local investment in services and infrastructure, among other deficits, have further contributed to the erosion of the quality of life of the average Zimbabwean. The politicization and polarization of the intergovernmental system have generally made the objectives of local government even more difficult to achieve. Overall, the consequences of these problems for Zimbabwe's citizens, which can be considered part of the broader national crisis, have been disastrous. What makes the current situation tragic is not that local authorities have been unable to develop the institutional wherewithal to serve their communities, which is so common in the developing world. Rather, it is that Zimbabwe's local system ten years ago had so many advantages—installed service delivery capacity, a variety of revenue streams, strong personnel and procedures, etc.—that have now wasted away.

The economic and political setting within which the urban and rural district councils are operating is therefore unquestionably poor. The collapse of the economy and political polarization was so thorough that it seemed to leave many locals officials with whom we spoke wondering what to do next. We hope to have found some answers in this study.

We addressed, first, the local system and the politics and intergovernmental relations that drive its operation. Local government in Zimbabwe is highly centralized. It is unusual that despite the councilors' political legitimacy as elected officials—especially in the cities—their room to act is so circumscribed by administrative controls exercised by the MLG.

On the one hand, the legislation governing the operation of local authorities provides them with a wide range of functions. Direct election provides significant political authority. Their long tradition of engaging in service delivery and money-making economic activities and their general ability to raise revenue in a variety of ways further points to a system that offers local officials significant latitude to operate on their own. On the other hand, however, the institutional framework allows them to be ignored, controlled, or co-opted with relative ease. Local officials derive their authority from the MLG, not from the constitutionally protected commitment to local representation that is seen in much of the developing world. Elected officials are readily removed from office for political reasons, moreover, and the administration is subject to MLG

restrictions on approval of their budgets, by-laws, staff, and other matters. In the polarized environment that characterizes Zimbabwe, central control of the periphery has for too long trumped the need for responsive governance and effective provision of goods and services to community residents.

Among a series of 2007 local reforms, as we discussed, was the abolition of the directly elected executive mayor for UCs. The mayor has been demoted to a part-time, ceremonial position within the council, and executive decision making is now in the hands of the town clerk, who ultimately reports to the MLG. Most local elected officials object to this change because it diminishes political accountability; the more technocratic clerks and staff see it as beneficial. This issue is cast as a classic debate that is both political, involving concerns about the quality of local representation, and managerial, involving concerns about the efficiency with which local administrations perform.

Elected councilors are without doubt inexperienced—most are in their first terms—and not well prepared to do their jobs. Their ability to participate effectively when faced with the town clerks or other administrative staff with much more experience and training clearly suffers as a result. Municipal associations are weak, dealing with leadership questions (UCAZ, ZILGA), or just getting off the ground (DemCoF). The participation of women in local office has always been weak as well.

Local officials are in agreement that the major challenges they face include severe financial constraints; dilapidated infrastructure, especially roads, and equipment; and limited human resources. When seeking help, mayors and councilors turn to their party allies in the parliament or perhaps within the ministries (under the GPA)—and especially to the international NGO community. Clerks and administrative staff are more likely to turn to the MLG. Political party linkages, ministerial connections, and ties to international assistance are therefore crucial to entrepreneurial or, more likely, desperate local officials in search of help.

The second area of investigation of this study was participatory governance. We found clientelism to be a core feature of the council-citizen relationship. Sometimes facing dire circumstances, the average citizen petitions the ward councilor for a specific, personal need or assistance of some kind—food, credit, hospital fees, service issues, for example. The councilors usually view responding to these requests, which are numerous and constant, as their duty and as part of building a base of political support. It is striking that local officials widely believe that their direction of the local authority is strongly participatory. In this regard, they most often cite the budget consultation process in which most councilors report engaging within their respective wards and with civic leaders and associations. Councils do describe to varying degrees a series of steps that together constitute a budget process. The primary link between the average citizen and the local authority is the ward councilor, who is seen as responsible for relaying citizen concerns to the council and for informing citizens about council activities.

As community associations will confirm, however, citizen participation is weak for various reasons. Communities are polarized and local council activities are seen as highly political, so few Zimbabweans—especially not those perceived to be from the opposing party—get involved or most lose interest. In addition, the budget consultations do not involve citizens in decision making; many decisions have already been made by the time the wards are consulted or the prioritization of lists of activities is done exclusively by the councils. Councils are especially concerned that the rates and fees they intend to charge do not generate protest.

Local officials identify a variety of stakeholders within their communities. Community associations—of ratepayers, informal workers, and residents, for example—can be influential and highly political. They channel citizen demands for service delivery and are consulted on tax rates and fees, among other concerns. The importance of the provision of supplies, services, food, and other basic aid by international NGOs was a constant refrain from local officials. When they need assistance, the entities they often turn to first are the NGOs.

Third, we investigated in this study the status of local finances. The financial situation for local authorities is extraordinary. Local coffers were near empty (and are perhaps only slightly better today) because citizens had no way to pay under the new currency regime (they did not yet have any U.S. dollars, for example); they were disinclined to pay because many were dealing with their own financial impoverishment; and as the local infrastructure was deteriorating, they saw no benefit coming from the tax and fee payments they made to the local council.

Local administrations have for years been without fiscal transfers from the central government, which are a mainstay of local financial solvency around the world. They have adapted in many cases to the lack of central support by creatively raising revenue through service fees and profit-making commercial activities. Most of their local revenue is drawn from property taxes, licenses for vehicles and other activities, and fees on water, garbage collection, and other services. External funding sources are not significant, though, again indicating the depth of the financial limitations, in-kind assistance directly to beneficiaries from the international (and some local) NGO community is seen as vital.

Expenditures are focused in three areas: wages, infrastructure, and general expenses. Salaries in particular consume much of the budget, reportedly up to 90% in some cases. This leaves little for other needs. The financial constraints and the concentration of spending in nondevelopmental activities explain clearly why infrastructure and services have deteriorated so badly. Capital investment is rare, and even the legally mandated annual auditing of accounts has been put on hold in almost all local authorities because of the lack of funds to carry it out.

Finally, we examined the traditionally important function of public service delivery. We confirmed, not surprisingly, that local authorities' ability to provide

or simply maintain service levels has long been in crisis. The leading services provided locally are, first and foremost, water and sanitation, primary health care, road maintenance, and then refuse collection. The lack of adequate housing and of the land to support it is also serious. The consequent growth of shack dwellings, squatters, the homeless, and a huge waiting list for homes is indicative of the depth of the problem. Local authorities generally provide only minimal service in these areas at best given the financial constraints, and they turn to any outside support they can find.

Service delivery is poor generally, fair at best in some cases, according to the large majority of local officials. The major problems are financial resources of course, inadequate or non-functioning equipment and machinery, and insufficient material stocks to keep the services operating. Local officials really had limited options in addressing these needs, and they often would jury-rig some solution to address the issue at hand at least temporarily.

Water and sanitation management is not only the most important service provided by local authorities. Its deterioration has also proved to be dramatic—and deadly. "Clean water in adequate quantities for domestic and industrial use," according to the Deputy Minister of Local Government, "was always available" in the past. Now, it is a "disaster" (Zvidzai 2009, 3). An outbreak of cholera, a water-borne disease, claimed more than 4,000 lives in 2008 and sadly demonstrated the dangers associated with the neglect of water and sewer systems. Water and sanitation management is important as well because the service has been a major source of revenue for local budgets. Refuse collection, roads and transport (license fees), and health clinics also generate relatively significant revenue. Services are heavily subsidized, however, as local officials do not recover the costs allocated to them. The fact is that Zimbabweans have minimal or no capacity to pay. What were once basic amenities have now become luxuries.

Some Thoughts and Suggestions on Reform and Recovery

Zimbabwe local government has a long road to go to recover, assuming all goes relatively well nationally. Clearly, the best outcome for local authorities and all Zimbabweans would be the achievement of a national consensus based on respect for democracy and on securing sustainable, long-term economic growth. Successful implementation of the GPA and the return of international development assistance would be the first critical, achievable steps in this regard. After all, after only a few months of the Inclusive Government most of the local officials we interviewed were already optimistic about the future. A firm national consensus alone would help bring about the proposed constitutional protection of local government institutions, basic regeneration of local finances, some depoliticization of local politics, and less concern about manipulation of the intergovernmental relationship for political ends.

Institutions change slowly for the worse as well as for the better. Culture and behaviors that have been ingrained for so long take time—sometimes decades—to take new shape. In Zimbabwe, the roots of a local system with sufficient administrative capacity and political accountability to effectively serve the public interest remain in place. Fortunately, despite the trauma and the challenges ahead, the future of local government is more about rejuvenation and rebuilding than starting anew.

In this light, drawing on the conclusions of this study, we present the following approaches and general suggestions for reform for consideration.

Decentralization

The institutions of local government must be part of the national constitution and, as we have seen, that reform effort is part of the GPA annexure and seems to have some support. Ideally, Zimbabwe should develop a strategic conception of the future of the intergovernmental regime, a path for reform that sets objectives and removes inherent contradictions in the current system—most obviously the coupling of strict central control with elected officials who are supposed to be responsive primarily to their community residents. The GPA annexure is, again, an important first move in this direction. Removal of some of the oversight requirements of the MLG, such as mandatory approval of budgets and by-laws, is eminently reasonable and long overdue. Laws or regulations can ensure proper development of budgets, laws, and other provisions. Required approval from the central government is an unnecessary and burdensome (for the center as well as the local level) restriction on local autonomy.

Mayoral election

To strengthen public accountability and legitimacy, restoration of the direct election of mayors in urban areas and chairpersons in rural areas should be given serious consideration. Mayors need not be accorded all the powers they held previously, and such reform should be considered within the larger vision of reform noted above, but direct election fortifies local democratic competition and has been standard practice for a decade. It also provides for the rise of new local leaders within and without the dominant parties, thereby promoting political renovation.

Definition of council/mayor authority vis-à-vis the town clerk

There remains considerable confusion over the respective roles, especially with regard to executive authority, of elected leaders vis-à-vis the town clerk. Better definition of the respective responsibilities would improve the functioning of local authorities, especially if a return to direct mayoral election were to occur.

Participation of women

Multi-faceted efforts are required to increase the participation of women in local affairs. This is not an easy task, dependent as it is on deep-seated societal norms and customs. To strengthen the participation of women and promote female leadership, some developing countries have established party quotas for female candidates in local elections. These can be effectively mandated; quotas must be enforced. Other mandates for female involvement in local public activities, such as participatory budgeting, should be considered.

Training and human resources

Local councilors badly need training in the skills necessary to work effectively in the council. Even a basic understanding of their rights and responsibilities would prove helpful. Training programs were once available, and perhaps they can be resumed eventually with international support. The municipal associations could help perform this function. Comprehensive analysis of the extent and impact of the human resource drain that has affected local administrations would be a valuable first step toward refilling local posts with qualified staff.

Municipal association development

Any association that is serious about municipal development should be considered for assistance and incorporated into any local government development program. The political divisions surrounding the association movement will complicate any efforts, however. An amalgamation of the various associations into a single organization, such as ZILGA—if it can be accomplished for the benefit of local development, with minimal politicking—is an objective worth further consideration. Efforts to promote collaboration among the associations around common institutional interests would be a second-best option.

Participatory governance

It is important that during any reconstruction process local authorities and local residents are encouraged on all fronts to reconnect. Service delivery or infrastructure investment priorities should be developed in concert with communities and their representatives. The budget consultation process, for example, should be better developed into a more participatory activity in which available financial resources are linked to decision making—as part of a truly deliberative process. This could be legally mandated; institutionalization of the process must be a core objective. Genuinely deliberative participation can encourage residents to engage in local affairs. A focus on the achievement of tangible results can eventually help restore the legitimacy of local institutions.

Service delivery

Zimbabwe's recovery requires massive reconstruction of services and related infrastructure, which experience has shown is particularly important to post-

crisis transitions. Water and sanitation especially, roads, health clinics, schools, and refuse collection should be targeted for major investments.[38] The goal should in effect be a return to the past—the effective provision of services to improve the quality of life and promote democratic legitimacy. This would clearly require economic growth, major international support, and a focused, collaborative effort domestically on the part of local authorities, national ministries, and international development agencies. In many areas, however, the needs are so basic that relatively little assistance through development programs would likely have considerable impact.

In addition, clear strategies for service delivery improvements must be developed and instituted. These plans should include the utilization of renewed or innovative approaches such as public-private partnerships, models for cooperation and joint-delivery schemes among local authorities, targeted use of incentive funds, intergovernmental and NGO collaboration, participatory planning and budgeting, and mechanisms for dissemination of best practices.

Fiscal transfers

Pending macroeconomic stability and growth, local financial management and revenue generation practices should be examined in detail with the aim of developing a central government policy of regular fiscal support for local authorities. Yet some measure of intergovernmental fiscal cooperation should be considered early on, especially for those services such as health and education in which localities and the central ministry share responsibilities.

Infrastructure development funds

Years ago infrastructure investment funds financed by international donor grants and loans provided local authorities access to scarce technical assistance and funding. Creative programs that produce local incentives for citizen involvement in the prioritization of investments in water, sewer systems, roads, and other critical services will likely need to be developed as soon as the international community is confident enough in the democratic future of Zimbabwe to re-engage.

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[38]The German development agency GTZ is conducting a series of studies in five localities on water service problems and possible solutions.

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Survey of Local Authorities in Zimbabwe

<u>Respondent Background Information</u>

Please Print Clearly

Name of Local Authority: _____

Date of Interview: _____

1. Please provide your full name: _____

2. Please provide your position on the Council,
if applicable: _____

3. For how many years have you been a Council member?: _____

How many terms?: _____

4. What previous public positions have you held?: _____

5. What is your professional occupation?: _____

6. What is your sex (circle one)?:   Male   Female

7. What is the highest education level you achieved?: _____

8. What is your age? _____

9. What is your marital status (circle one):   Single   Married   Widowed

10. What is the economic base of the community?: _____

General Institutional and Transitional

1. What would you say are the three most significant opportunities facing the city, town, or rural Council?

2. What would you say are the three most significant challenges facing the city, town, or rural Council?

3. Over the past year, since the election of new councilors and the emergence of the Inclusive Government, has the situation in the city or town:

   a. Improved
   b. Remained the same
   c. Become worse
   d. Don't know

Please explain.

Local Politics and Intergovernmental Affairs

4. How would you describe the Council's relationship with the Ministry of Local Government?

   a. Excellent
   b. Good
   c. Fair
   d. Poor
   e. Don't know or there is no relationship.

Please explain the nature of the relationship, if any.

5. How would you describe your relationship with the following institutions?

Institution	a. Excellent	b. Good	c. Fair	d. Poor	e. Non-existent	f. Do not know/No opinion
Provincial government						
Other councils						
Local Govt. Board						
District administration						
ZINWA						
Other parastatals						
Central government (Ministries, etc.)						
Member(s) of Parliament						
Senator(s)						
Local CSOs						

6. What is the relationship between traditional leadership and the local authority?

7. If the Council must turn to someone from the outside for support in resolving a problem (financial, political, logistical) or perhaps a favor, to whom would you turn first and why?

8. Which of the following associations of local authorities are you most often in contact and why?:

> Democratic Councils Forum (DemCoF)
> Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ)
> Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA)
> Other: _____

9. Do you have knowledge of the shift in policy on the mayor, from the fully elected Executive Mayor to the council-elected, part-time Ceremonial Mayor?

Is so, what are your views on this?

Public Participation and Civil Society

10. How would you describe the public's participation in the work of the Council?

   a. Strong, citizens regularly participate in meetings and share their views.
   b. Moderate, citizens participate occasionally/only allowed to join some meetings.
   c. Weak, citizens generally do not participate/not permitted in meetings.
   d. Poor, citizens participate rarely or not at all.

Please explain.

11. Please identify the leading stakeholders (CBOs, civic institutions, housing associations, etc.) and areas of collaboration in your community.

Stakeholder	Area of Collaboration

12. Does the Council engage in participatory budgeting with the community? If yes, please describe that process.

13. How does the council go about receiving and addressing citizen concerns about issues of service delivery or other functions of the local government?

14. How often do citizens approach the mayor or council to make personal requests or petitions for specific items (medicine, food, etc.):

   a. Often
   b. Occasionally
   c. Rarely
   d. Never

Finance and Planning

15. What are the Council's 3 main sources of local revenue?

    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____

16. Which of the following best describes the nature of intergovernmental fiscal transfers received by the Council from the central government in Harare:

    a. Fiscal transfers are greater than needed
    b. Fiscal transfers are sufficient
    c. Fiscal transfers are inadequate
    d. We do not receive significant fiscal transfers
    e. We do not receive any fiscal transfers

Please comment.

17. What other sources of revenue or material support (borrowing, international assistance, etc.) does the Council/community receive?

18. What are the 3 most important services for which user charges or fees are collected?

    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____

19. What are the 3 largest expenditures in the budget and about what percentage of the budget do they comprise? Please comment.

    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____

20. Would you say the amount of financing in your budget that is available for capital development is:

      a. High
      b. About right
      c. Low
      d. Non-existent?

Please explain.

Service Delivery (health, education, housing, transport, water and sanitation, solid waste)

21. How would you describe the state of service delivery in general in your area today?

Service	a. Excellent	b. Good	c. Fair	d. Poor	e. Non-existent	f. Do not know/No opinion
Health						
Education						
Housing						
Transport						
Water and sanitation						
Solid waste						

22. What are the 3 most important services the Council is providing to the community?

23. What are the 3 most important service delivery challenges you are facing today?

      1. _____
      2. _____
      3. _____

24. Are these problems being addressed? If so, how?

25. Does the Council recover the cost of providing each of these 3 services? How does the Council determine their cost?

26. What role does the Council play in the provision of:

    a. Health services?
    b. Education?

27. What are the most important maintenance and infrastructure needs for service delivery improvements?

Transparency and Accountability

28. When was the last external audit conducted and how often have they been conducting them? Please explain.

29. To what extent does the Council follow procedures with respect to the conduct of the Council's business (staff recruitment, procurement, budgeting, etc.)?:

    a. Always
    b. Often
    c. Sometimes
    d. Never

Please comment.

30. Would you say that the degree of transparency around the preparation and execution of the Council budget is?

Budgeting stage	Very transparent	Somewhat transparent	Not transparent at all	Don't know
Preparation				
Execution				
Evaluation				

Please comment.

31. Which of the following best describes how the Council procures goods and services from individuals or contractors:

     a. Procurement is always made public or is readily accessible
       to the public.
     b. Procurement is sometimes made public
     c. Procurement is rarely a public process
     d. Procurement is never open to the public?

Please comment.

Survey for Community Associations' Group Discussion

<u>Questionnaire</u>

General Institutional and Transitional

1. What would you say are the three most significant opportunities facing your municipality/town/city and community?

2. What would you say are the three most significant challenges facing your municipality/town/city and community?

3. What do you as a community do together to address these challenges?

4. Who do you turn to for assistance in addressing these challenges?

5. Over the past year, since the election of new councilors and the emergence of the Inclusive Government, has the situation in the town/community:

     a. Improved
     b. Remained the same
     c. Become worse
     d. Don't know

Please explain.

Local Politics and Intergovernmental Affairs

6. How would you describe the community's relationship with the Local Council?

> a. Excellent
> b. Good
> c. Fair
> d. Poor
> e. Don't know or there is no relationship.

Please explain the nature of the relationship.

7. What roles are the traditional leaders playing in the community today?

Traditional Leader	Role in Community	Comments
Kraaal/Village Head		
Head Man		
Chief		

Public Participation and Civil Society

8. How would you describe the public's participation in the work of the Council?

> a. Strong, citizens regularly participate in meetings and share their views.
> b. Moderate, citizens participate occasionally/only allowed to join some meetings.
> c. Weak, citizens generally do not participate/not permitted in meetings.
> d. Poor, citizens participate rarely or not at all.

Please explain.

9. Please identify organizations in the community and the type of organization or description of what they do in the community.

Name of Organization	Type of Organization	What They Do in the Community

10. Is the community involved in developing the Local Council Budget?

Please explain how.

11. How does the Local Council go about receiving and addressing citizen concerns about issues of service delivery or other functions of the local government?

12. How often do citizens, either individually or collectively, approach the mayor or council to make personal (or collective for the community) requests or petitions for specific items or assistance.

      a. Often
      b. Occasionally
      c. Rarely
      d. Never

Finance and Planning

13. What are the three primary sources of income for community members?

      1. _____
      2. _____
      3. _____

14. What services in the community must you as citizens pay fees for?

Services	Are you getting value for money paid?

Service Delivery (health, education, housing, transport, water and sanitation, solid waste)

15. How would you describe the state of service delivery in general in your area today?

Service	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Please Explain
Education					
Health					
Housing					
Sanitation					
Transport					
Water					

16. What are the 3 most important services the Local Council is providing to the community?

17. What are the 3 most important service delivery challenges of the community today?

18. How are these problems being addressed?

19. Is there anything more that you would like to tell us about the services in your community?

Service	Comments
Education	
Health	
Housing	
Sanitation	
Transport	

Transparency

20. How would you assess the degree of openness/public knowledge about the preparation of the Council Budget and how the money is spent?

Community Assessment of Budget Transparency	Very Open	Somewhat Open	Not Open at All	Please Explain
Preparation				
Execution (knowledge of how the budget is spent)				

21. Which of the following best describes the processes by which the Council procures goods and services from individuals and/or contractors?

   a. Procurement is always made public or is readily accessible to the public.
   b. Procurement is sometimes made public
   c. Procurement is rarely a public process
   d. Procurement is never open to the public

Please explain.

22. What are the community's views on the running of the local authority?

Sub-Group	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Please Explain
Women					
Men					
Youth					
Business Owners					
Faith-Based Organization Representatives					

23. Do you have knowledge of the shift in policy on the mayor, from the fully elected Executive Mayor to the council-elected, part-time Ceremonial Mayor?

If so, what are your views on this?

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