

## The Successes and Failures of the Local Government Associations of Zimbabwe since 1980



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**ABSTRACT:** Since the attainment of political independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has made tremendous progress in instituting local government reforms such as institutional consolidations, and realignment of legal and policy frameworks. The Local Government Associations are one institution that emerged as the voice articulating policy and legal interests of local authorities through lobbying, representation, and advocacy. However, since 1980, their endeavors in the promotion and advancement of the Zimbabwean local government system have eluded serious scholarly inquiry. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to establish the contributions of the Local Government Associations to the Zimbabwean local governance system. This qualitative study adopted the case study research design and purposive sampling was used to identify respondents from former and current local government practitioners as well as civil society representatives. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews and documentary analysis was used in the collection of secondary data. Thematic analysis was used to make meaning from the themes that emerged from the data. The constitutionalisation of local government in 2013 ranks as the major achievement by the associations. Despite these achievements, the associations are faced with challenges like limited funding, political interference, and failure to conclude the issue of qualifications for councillors. Local Government Associations remain as key players in amplifying the voice of their members on local governance issues. Leadership capacitation is needed for them to remain relevant and effective.

**KEYWORDS:** Advocacy, Lobbying, Local governance, Constitutionalisation, Local Government Associations.

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Local Government Associations (LGA) are institutions that amplify the voice of their members in pursuit of desired favourable legal and policy outcomes. VNG International (2008) states that the principal role of LGAs is to clearly articulate the concerns and needs of local governments through advocacy and lobbying to the central government as well to other agencies. For Babeu-Braun and Noupadja (2019), LGAs are key players in advancing local governance issues through influencing legislation and policies as well as providing agoras between local governments and central governments. Similarly, Akbar (2018) states that LGAs provide a voice for their members in advancing political interests as well as fiscal decentralization. From the above, it can be stated that LGAs are important institutions that give traction to local governance issues on behalf of their members. Regarding the number of association(s) a country can have, Babeu-Braun and Noupadja (2019) state that this was dependent on preferences and context, but one or more can exist.

Zimbabwe attained its political independence in 1980 and with that, it inherited a segregated local government system divided by legislation, institutional as well as spatial. On one hand, there were urban councils that catered mainly to the white minority population whilst on the other hand rural councils served the black majority populace. To improve the local democratic landscape, the post-independence government instituted major local government reforms such as the creation of a single Ministry of Local Government as well as the establishment of a framework to regulate grassroots participation in local governance issues by issuing the Prime Minister's directives of 1984, (Chatiza, 2007). Additionally, the government initiated the amalgamation of the fragmented 220 African Councils to form the 55 Rural District Councils which has since increased to 60, (Muchadenyika, 2014). Concerning the legal framework, the government promulgated the Urban Councils Act, Chapter [29:15], and the Rural District councils Act [29:13] as the principal acts.

This realignment of the local governments resulted in the formation of the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA) to advance the interests of its members. Whilst there is extensive literature by researchers like (Mapuva, 2015; Chikwawawa, 2019; Muchadenyika, 2014) highlighting local government reforms implemented since 1980 by the government, the contributions of the LGAs to the promotion and democratisation of local governance have eluded serious scholarly inquiry. Therefore, this paper aims to identify the successes and challenges faced by LGAs in Zimbabwe since the attainment of political independence in 1980. This paper is arranged in the following sections. Firstly, a critical review of related literature will be done under II; Research methodology

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will be under section III; Results and Discussions will be under section IV; Conclusion and Recommendations will be under section V.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

#### 2.1 History of Local Government Associations in Zimbabwe

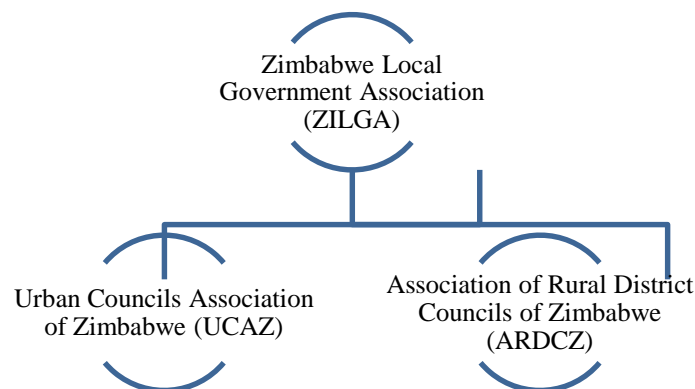
The formation of LGAs in Zimbabwe predates the attainment of political independence in 1980. The Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe (UCAZ) is considered one of the oldest local government associations in Africa having been established in 1923 with a membership of four urban councils namely Salisbury now Harare, Bulawayo, Gwelo now Gweru, and Umtali now Mutare. For rural areas, Chatiza (2007) states that the formation of the National Chiefs Council for African areas heralded the creation of a LGA for Africans in 1961. Whilst the pre-independence LGAs were created along racial lines, the post-independence LGAs became inclusive but they continued to operate as two separate institutions. Whilst UCAZ maintained its identity and had no major institutional transformations, the National Chiefs Council went through a major transformation as it was viewed to be a tokenistic association because of its failures to make any meaningful contributions to the affairs of the rural populace. Hence, the formation of the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) in 1994 is held as the reference point for a serious association for rural councils in Zimbabwe.

Despite its historical legacy of having a dual local government system, Chatiza (2007) noted that late 1990s, it became apparent to the local governments that separate associations lacked a firm voice to effectively advocate for policy changes. Because of this, the associations then decided to have a single developmental local government system and this culminated in the formation of an umbrella national association called the Zimbabwe Local Government Association (ZILGA). This narrative is in agreement with observations by VNG International (2008) when it stated that:

Where there are several LGAs in a country, serious consideration should be given to bringing them together, whether in a single organisation or a federation, in the interest of a united local government. The local government must speak with one powerful voice! (p.11)

For the Zimbabwean local governance system, the concept of a single national local government was favoured so as to conform with other countries that have a single association such as the Local Government Association of Zambia (LGAZ), South Africa Local Government Association (SALGA), Association of Local Authorities of Kenya (ALAK), Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR). The structure, membership, and objects of the Zimbabwean LGA are discussed below.

**Figure 1. Structure of Local Government Associations in Zimbabwe**



ZILGA sits at the apex of the associations and its membership is outlined under article 9 of its draft constitution which reads: there shall only be two members of the Association and these shall be the Association of Rural District Councils and the Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe who is the founding members of the Association and has established ZILGA for their own and their members' benefit. (p. 4)

In terms of the presidency of ZILGA, Article 28 reads, "the President of the Association shall be appointed on a rotational basis from the two organisations ARDCZ and UCAZ".

The membership of the founding associations that is ARDCZ and UCAZ are distributed as sixty and thirty-two respectively. This gives a total of ninety-two local governments in Zimbabwe. The list of affiliated members is tabulated below:

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**Table 1. Membership of the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe**

Province	No	Names of Rural District Councils
Mashonaland West	7	Makonde; Chegutu; Sanyati; Hurungwe; Nyaminyami; Mhondoro-Ngezi; Zvimba
Mashonaland Central	8	Rushinga; Bindura; Pfura; Chaminuka; Mazowe; Muzarabani; Guruve
Mashonaland East	9	Hwedza; Goromonzi; Manyame; Marondera; Murewa; Mutoko; Zvataida; Mudzi; Mutoko
Manicaland	7	Makoni; Buhera; Mutasa; Mutare; Chimanimani; Chipinge; Nyanga
Masvingo	6	Gutu; Bikita; Chiredzi; Chivi; Mwenezi; Zaka
Midlands	8	Tongogara; Chirumhanzu; Zibagwe; Mberengwa; Vungu; Runde; Gokwe North; Gokwe South
Matebeleland North	7	Binga; Bubi; Hwange; Kusile; Tsholotsho; Umguza; Nkayi
Matebeleland South	7	Beitbridge; Bulilima; Insiza; Gwanda; Mangwe; Matobo; Umzingwane
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>60</b>	

Source: Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe

**Table 2: Membership of UCAZ**

Cities	Municipalities	Towns	Local Boards	TOTAL
Harare	Redcliff	Chiredzi	Ruwa	
Bulawayo	Chegutu	Norton	Chirundu	
Gweru	Chitungwiza	Shurugwi	Epworth	
Masvingo	Chinhoyi	Zvishavani	Hwange	
Kadoma	Gwanda	Gokwe		
Kwekwe	Marondera	Beitbridge		
Mutare	Bindura	Rusape		
Victoria Falls	Kariba	Karoi		
	Kadoma	Chipinge		
		Mvurwi		
		Plumtree		
8	9	11	4	32

Source: Chakaipa and additions by researcher

In terms of mandates, article 8 of the draft constitution has eleven objectives, however, Chatiza (2007) pointed out that amongst these objectives, two were critical mandates that ZILGA had to focus on. Firstly, a mandate to lobby and advocate for the full realisation of decentralisation and local government financing. Secondly, the association was tasked to ensure that there is visibility, effectiveness, and acceptability of its members taking into account the negative perceptions regarding the operations of councils.

### 2.2 Theoretical Framework

Formations of coalitions or alliances between partners who share similar interests is key to influencing policy changes. According to Sabater and Jenkins-Smith, as cited in Stachowiak (2013), coalition theory posits that institutions or individuals who are outside government and have core beliefs on certain policy areas, their causes, and possible solutions can unite together to pursue these interests. Therefore, to effect policy changes, these institutions, and individuals based on their common policy interests, will have to coordinate their efforts to push for their realization. The underlying principles of the coalition theory are that firstly, institutions, groups, or individuals with common policy interests can converge together to achieve a common purpose despite their other differences. Secondly, to achieve desired outcomes, influencing public opinions through the publication of research documents is considered an effective option for coalitions. Further, coalitions can use media either public, private or social platforms to influence the public to support the policy position(s) they will be advocating for. Through engagements of decision makers, coalitions have the potential to influence them to make favourable policy changes that support their cause(s).

The local government sector is crowded with many actors with some being institutional whilst others are individual and all have different interests. Therefore, LGAs are the ideal institution that unifies the interests of these diverse groupings in pursuance of favourable policy changes that will be able to positively improve the local governance system. Informed by the coalition theory, LGAs can enter into coalitions with institutions like civil society organisations such as resident associations despite their antagonistic relationship to advocate for capacitation of local governments to have improved service delivery. As noted by Mapuva (2011) such union is possible because resident associations are also key participants in the democratisation of the local governance space. Such convergence is driven by issues of common interests especially when it comes to influencing central government policies that will

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be mutually beneficial to all of them and the community. In the same vein, the same coalitions can be built with non-governmental organisations either locally based or international because some have the expertise and financial muscle when it comes to enabling and pursuing local government reforms that promote the attainment of international standards such as sustainable development goals. Through research, publications, and lobbying institutions like parliament and central government ministries, the LGAs in Zimbabwe and its other coalition members can influence them for better local government reforms. Even though coalition theory provides a good grounding for lobbying and advocacy in democratic societies, its main weakness is that it is not clear if it is applicable under authoritarian regimes that are known for detesting issues of human rights such as freedom of association and participation in decision making.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was informed by the interpretivism philosophy that Wahyun (2012) indicated that is concerned with how social actors of diverse backgrounds, assumptions, and experiences construct reality. The case study research design was adopted as it enabled an in-depth analysis of the LGAs in Zimbabwe. Both primary and secondary data collection techniques were used in this study. Purposive sampling techniques were used in identifying respondents for primary data collection. For primary data collection, key informant interviews using semi-structured questionnaires were held with two former Presidents of the ZILGA who were also presidents of sector associations namelyUCAZ and ARDCZ. Additionally, the same approach was used to collect data from the two Secretary Generals, one fromUCAZ and the other from ARDCZ. This was also reinforced by similar interviews with six Chief Executive Officers of rural district councils, four Town Clerks from urban councils, and three representatives of Non Governmental organizations. Secondary data was collected through documentary reviews from legal documents such as the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act of 2013, constitutions of the associations, and published journal articles and reports. From the data collected, thematic data analysis was used to decipher and make meaning from the themes which emerged from the various sources.

### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Major Achievements by the Local Government Associations

Since 1980, there have been some notable achievements by LGAs in Zimbabwe as outlined below.

##### 4.1.1 Constitutionalisation of the Local Government System

From interviews with key informants, there was consensus that the legal framework for local governance in Zimbabwe was strengthened following its constitutionalisation in the 2013 constitution under chapter 14. This ranked as the major milestone achieved by the lobbying and advocacy of LGAs and civil society in Zimbabwe since 1980. Regarding this achievement, one interviewee retorted that:

The major success we achieved was the constitutionalisation of the local government system in Zimbabwe. Before lobbying and advocacy for this change, local government was created by statutes by whoever would be occupying the portfolio of Minister of Local Government. We started lobbying for the constitutionalisation of local governments in 1997, unfortunately, this was rejected in the aborted 2000 constitution referendum. We restarted lobbying again in 2009 and we finally succeeded in 2013.

Mapuva (2015) concurred with the above assertion when he retorted that, before 2013, Zimbabwe operated a delegated local government system which was a creature of statutes. Because of this, the local government sector in Zimbabwe was weak and ineffective and it endured serious interference by the Minister responsible for Local Governments through the issuance of directives. Further, other central government departments usurped the powers of local governments by implementing projects without their involvement. Through research and production of a policy paper titled, "The Local Government we want", ZILGA managed to articulate issues they wanted to be included in the constitution. Significantly, the inclusion of a devolved local government system under section 264 cemented the status of the local governance system in Zimbabwe.

Importantly, ZILGA and its civil society partners managed to have fiscal decentralisation included under section 301 (3) of the constitution. The inclusion of a 5% share of the national budget to local governments is another milestone achieved through representation, lobbying, and advocacy. This was a major departure from the pre-constitutionalisation local government system that relied on the benevolence of the Minister responsible for Local Government and also the Minister of Finance for government funding. The availing of funds has since been confirmed by Munyede et al. (2021) that it was making a significant positive impact on the fulfillment of socio-economic rights for citizens through the construction of health facilities, educational facilities, and access to potable water.

Given these achievements, it can be pointed out that ZILGA managed to fulfill one of the mandates it was established to achieve (Chatiza, 2007). Therefore, a unified LGA has a better voice to pursue issues of common interests even thoughUCAZ and ARDCZ have sectorial differences. Further, the formation of coalitions with civil society organisations such as Combined Harare Residents Trust, Gender Links, and Commonwealth Local Government Forum helped in achieving the desired outcome. This collective effort is in sync with the coalition theory which states that when an issue of common interest has emerged, actors of different backgrounds and persuasion will put aside their differences and pursue the same objective.

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### 4.1.2 Promotion of Local Governance

A perusal of documents shows that ZILGA and its affiliates that is UCAZ and ARDCZ were formed as non-profit-making bodies duly established according to the laws of Zimbabwe. The associations have constitutions and they cover areas of membership, objectives, and governing bodies. From interviews with key informants, they indicated that this legal status gave the associations legitimacy to promote local governance issues through engagements in formal constructive legal and policy dialogues with institutions like the Parliament Portfolio of Local Government, government ministries, and parastatals like the Zimbabwe National Road Authority (ZINARA). Further, the associations managed to affiliate with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) at regional, continental and international levels. In addition, the association managed to create a working relationship with other associations like the Association of Local Authorities in Namibia (ALAN), Botswana Association of Local Authorities (BALA), and South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in which they share the best practices in local governance. Finally, the legal status enabled the LGAs to collaborate with civil society and non-governmental organisations on areas of mutual interest. Representatives from non-governmental organizations stated that the LGAs have been very helpful in the advancement of local governance as they have been helping them identify training needs which then model for their training curriculums. This training has strengthened the local government sector in Zimbabwe.

### 4.1.3 Contributions to the Enactment of Some Subsidiary Legislations and Policies

Over the decades, the LGAs played significant roles in the enactment of enabling acts of parliament and these have become the anchors of the local government system in Zimbabwe. Because of its long years of existence, UCAZ and its experienced membership contributed immensely to the enactment of the Urban Councils Act, Chapter (29:15). This act remains the principal act that provides functions for areas classified and administered by Urban Councils in Zimbabwe. The enactment of the Rural District Councils Act, Chapter (26:13) in 1988 was heavily influenced by local government practitioners in the rural councils as well as input from urban councils. The purpose of the act is to provide functions of Rural District Councils as well as to regulate the administration of all areas classified as rural. Following its establishment in 1995, the ARDCZ managed to lobby through parliament and civic organisations for amendments to the Rural District Councils Act, Chapter (29:13). In addition to these acts, the combined association through their mother body ZILGA, managed to advocate for amendments to the Regional, Town, and Country Planning Act, Chapter (29:12). This act is the principal act that guides all developmental planning processes in all local governments in Zimbabwe as well as land management. The LGAs have also been very instrumental in the drafting of the devolution and decentralisation policy that was approved by the cabinet in 2020. From the above, it's apparent that some achievements were made by individual associations whilst those of common interests were done through the combined national association.

### 4.1.4 Women's Quota for Councillors

Since the attainment of independence in 1980, elected women representatives at all levels of government have been insignificant due to several barriers, and this negatively affected decision-making, especially at the local level where women are the majority. Whilst the 2013 constitution was held as progressive in regards to women's representation because section 124 (1) (b) it provided that:

For the life of the first two Parliaments after the effective date, an additional sixty women members, six from each of the provinces into which Zimbabwe is divided, are elected under a party-list system of proportional representation based on the votes cast for candidates representing political parties in a general election for constituency members in the provinces (p. 54)

This provision was limited to women parliamentarians only and excluded women at the local government level. Even though section 17 (1) (a) of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 provides for gender equality and equal participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean. These guarantees failed to be realized for women at the local government level as reported by Gender Links (2018) when it said that from the 1 958 councillor's positions available at the local government level, women managed to garner a paltry 14% in the 2018 local government elections and this was a decline from the 16% garnered in the 2013 elections.

Given the above omissions and decline in women's representation, the Zimbabwean LGAs in collaboration with non-governmental organisations such as the International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD), Gender Links, and Institute of Young Women in Politics managed to lobby and make representations to the President of Zimbabwe, parliamentarians as well as the Ministry of Local Government and Public works for the inclusion of a women's quota in local governments starting with the 2023 general elections. These engagements culminated in the insertion of 277 (4) under Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No (2) Act, 2021 which reads;

An Act of Parliament may provide for the election, by a system of proportional representation referred to in subsection (5), of at least thirty *per centum* of the total members of the local council elected on a ward basis as women. (p. 13)

Whilst the women's quota is not the panacea to challenges affecting women's representation at the local level, it provided a stepping stone for women to effectively participate in decision-making at the local level.



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### **4.1.5 Establishment of Gender Committees in Councils**

In local governments, committees play an important role as they are the workshops from which all policy deliberations are exhaustively done. Issues that councils will make a final decision on, are first introduced in these committees and a position will be taken. Despite the importance of committees at the local governance level, most councils had their traditional standing committees provided by the Rural District Councils Act, Chapter (29:13) and the Urban Councils Act, Chapter (29:15) namely, Finance committee, Audit Committee, Environment Management Committee, and Health and Housing (Social Services) committee. The setup of these committees meant that even though women constitute 52% of the Zimbabwean population and are also the main users of local government services had no committee to deliberate issues affecting women. Given this lacuna, the LGAs and non-governmental organisations such as Gender links lobbied through workshops with councillors, managers of local governments, and paper presentations to the Ministry of Local Government and Public Works for the creation of a committee responsible for streamlining gender issues. This was achieved and to date, most councils now have stand-alone gender committees, gender champions, and gender focal persons.

### **4.1.6 Presidential Interfaces (*Indaba*) and Improved Centre-Local Relationship**

Since 2018, the LGAs have managed to hold two interfaces (*indabas*) with the President of Zimbabwe. Attendees at the interfaces included some Ministers, all Mayors, Council Chairpersons, Councillors Chief Executive Officers, Town Clerks, and other local government practitioners. At these interfaces, ministers clarified most legal and policy frameworks that had been creating tensions with local governments. Because of these interfaces, there has been a massive improvement in center-local relationships compared to the period before 2018 when serious accusations of poor service delivery were dominant between these two tiers of government. Some interviewees from the urban councils stated that there have been positive improvements in the relationship between the central government and local authorities because the LGAs have been acting as a catalyst and neutralizing tensions

### **4.1.7 Creation of Specialized Forums and Chapters**

The associations managed to create specialized forums for councillors such as the Provincial Chairpersons forum and the Women in Local Government Forum. In addition, other specialized forums for council executives such as Chief Executive Officers/ Town Clerks, Engineers, Director Finance/ Treasurers, and Auditors among others were established. The members of the forums are specialists from the local authorities from each province. Respondents stated that these forums were acting as incubators as they allowed peer-reviewing through service level bench markings and sharing of knowledge. Therefore, these platforms allow marginalized local authorities to remain abreast with new advancements in the local government sector as they will be a cross-pollination of ideas among the specialized group of local government practitioners.

### **4.1.8 Collaborations with Institutions of higher learning**

The associations have managed to create synergies with Institutions of higher learning especially those that offer local governance degrees such as Midlands State University and Great Zimbabwe University. Because of the experience and numbers of their memberships, the associations provide a repository of valuable information, so universities approach them looking for training needs for their membership with the view of enriching their degree programs. In return members of the associations provides students of these universities with places for work-related learning or attachments as part of the requirements for fulfilling their degrees.

## **4.2 Failures of the Local Government Associations in Zimbabwe**

The LGA in Zimbabwe faced innumerable challenges in its quest to entrench the local governance system in Zimbabwe.

### **4.2.1 Inadequate Funding**

The issue of limited funding emerged as one of the challenges bedeviling the Local Government Associations in Zimbabwe. From key interviews with former and current Secretary Generals of the associations, it was highlighted that financial resources were impeding the proper functioning of the associations as they relied mainly on subscriptions of their members. It was highlighted that the economic challenges affecting the Zimbabwean economy were hurting the revenue generation capacity of local governments and this negatively affected their ability to pay their subscriptions to the associations timeously. Because of the limited funding, the association was failing to subscribe to the international association and this was depriving them of the opportunities of attending international training conferences and conventions resulting in the Zimbabwean local government system lagging behind.

### **4.2.2 Politicisation and Failure to form a single local government association**

In the 1990s the local government sector was engrossed in the idea of having a single LGA to represent the rural and urban councils. Discussions with key informants from ARDCZ and UCAZ provided contrasting views regarding the issue of a single local government association. On one hand, respondents from ARDCZ stated that by 1995 there was a consensus between urban and rural councils to abolish the two associations namely UCAZ and ARDCZ, and have a single local government association named ZILGA. One of the interviews stated that:

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By 1996 we had resolutions and dissolved the two associations and the local government in Zimbabwe was being run under one body ZILGA. We believed that local government is local government regardless of whether it's urban or rural and at that time ZILGA became very effective and local governance in the country managed to assert itself.

On the other hand, respondents from UCAZ stated that ZILGA was a good idea when it comes to presenting common issues at the national level such as legislative, planning, financial management, and decentralisation. However, as urban councils, the respondents revealed that they wanted their association to continue existing because they had some peculiar issues that affect them as urban local authorities. They also stated that ZILGA failed because at its inception it was agreed that the presidency of the association was to be guided by article 29 of the constitution that calls for rotation from ARDCZ to UCAZ after every five years. However, since 1996 ARDCZ has refused to abide by the rotational principle and they have continued to monopolies the presidency.

Further, the emergency of the opposition political party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 and its subsequent win of most seats from the ruling party the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in urban councils contributed significantly to the demise of the single association under ZILGA and the return to the revival of ARDCZ and UCAZ. The result of this was that the associations were now split along political lines with ARDCZ being aligned to the ruling party (ZANU-PF) whilst UCAZ became associated with the opposition party the MDC. This political set-up has resulted in polarization and interference in matters affecting local governments and this has resulted in disunity among the associations. A respondent from ARDCZ stated that "because we were no longer united some ministers and government officials started manipulating us using the wedge of urban vs rural". This sentiment is similar to findings by Mbolela (2014) in his study of the Zambian Local Government Association when he said:

The major challenge relates to the influence of political party interests and political bias in matters of the association and its member local authorities...The reality, however, has shown that there has been open political dominance on matters, of interest to local government, that contradict those of the political party in government, especially where the association's leadership is affiliated with the political party in power. The situation has, in certain instances, led to subordinating the independent judgment of the association to the opinion and wishes of a political party (p.205).

From interviews with key informants, it was highlighted that ZILGA was now just a shell with an ad hoc secretariat but it was a vehicle that was being used for convenience purposes by the two associations. Whilst UCAZ and ARDCZ have physical offices, ZILGA was operating the without any designated offices thereby making it ineffective. The reality is that the two associations, namely ARDCZ and UCAZ operate independently from each other and pursue their agenda. Because of the political interferences, ZILGA has weak leadership and lacks the muscle to effectively fight for some issues affecting its membership as a late release or partial release of funds allocated under devolution.

### **4.2.3 Poor Services by Local Governments**

The core function of local governments is the provision of services to communities. However, for the last three decades, services such as road maintenance, street lighting, refuse collection, and water and sewerage services have deteriorated to unprecedented levels in most councils in Zimbabwe. Whilst respondents from local governments attributed this decline to non-payment of taxes and poor economic performance of the country, respondents from civil society argued that the decline in services was a result of rampant corruption, maladministration, and poor governance practices by local government officials. The decline in the capacity of local governments to offer services required by their citizens has rendered them ineffective and their visibility is now overshadowed by other actors like central government ministries, parastatals, and non-governmental organisations who are also competing for relevance at the local level. Given this, it can be said that ZILGA did not succeed in making local governments effective, visible, and acceptable to its stakeholders as envisaged by (Chatiza, 2007).

### **4.2.4 Failure To Decentralize Offices**

The LGAs are domiciled in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe and have failed to open offices in other regions. The failure by the LGAs to decentralise has resulted in its members incurring unnecessary costs as they have to travel to the capital city to access services.

### **4.2.5 Qualifications of Councillors**

Currently, there are no educational requirements for an individual to be elected as a councillor and this has been the trend since the attainment of independence in 1980. However, over the years there have been intense sentiments by members of the public asking for councillors to have some form of qualifications taking into account the complexities found in a constitutionalized local government system that has to deal with topical issues like human rights, sustainable development goals, and policy formulation. From deliberations in workshops majority of people were in support of some form of a minimum qualification to be set for anyone who would want to become a councillor. Whilst the LGAs concur with this notion that they supported some form of qualifications to be set for aspiring councilors, they did not commit themselves to propose the qualifications but they deferred the matter to parliament for final determination. Therefore, the failure to take a firm position on the subject matter has been interpreted as an unwillingness to ruffle the feathers of its members.

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### 4.2.6 Limited on-the-Job Training, Research, and Publications

Local government is a sector that involves interactions with various stakeholders and this calls for specific skills to be imparted to practitioners. Regarding skills, some of the Chief Executive Officers interviewed stated that the local government sector requires a person to have skills such as lobbying, advocating, communication, and interaction with various stakeholders. In this regard, LGAs have only been facilitating limited training through workshops and these were said to be inadequate as members felt that on-the-job training was more effective. In addition to this, there has been minimal research and publication by the LGAs and this has affected the sharing of emerging issues in the sector.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper highlighted that since 1980, LGAs in Zimbabwe have made tremendous contributions to the promotion of a sound local government system domestically, regionally, and at the global level. Through lobbying, advocacy and representations, the LGA managed to have the local government framework transition from being a creature of statutes to Constitutionalisation. Additionally, fiscal decentralisation was ingrained in the constitution and this has resulted in local authorities receiving funding from Treasury this has enhanced the capacity of the local governments to deliver services such as health and educational infrastructure. Further, through amendments to the constitution, the LGAs managed to secure guaranteed seats for women representatives at the local level and this has the potential to improve and diversify decisions in councils. Collaboration with institutions of higher learning is a breakthrough in cementing and entrenching local governance as a distinct field of study in the country

However, despite these achievements, the associations have challenges that are militating against their desire to fulfill the objective of amplifying the voice of local governance. Firstly, the associations are facing serious cashflow challenges because most of their members were in dire financial constraints due to the general economic environment in the country and this was negatively affecting their ability to pay membership fees. Secondly, in its current state, the umbrella body, ZILGA was very weak because of polarization because leadership was being shaped based on political party affiliations as well as power struggles between the two affiliate members. Thirdly, the association has failed to give a solid policy position on the minimum qualifications that an individual must possess if he/she intends to become a councillor. Despite these challenges, the LGAs remain the institutions that can still provide a united voice to positively and effectively influence policies and legislation for the benefit of their members. However, there is a need for the umbrella LGA to be strengthened especially at the leadership level. In conclusion, there is a need for the LGAs to establish if the constitutional provisions covering its members are being fully fulfilled by the central government.

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