Introduction

This paper explores the dilemmas faced by the Zambian electorate when it was suddenly thrust into a pluralist political system after years of one-party rule. It describes the efforts made and the constraints encountered by the Adult Education Association of Zambia (AEAZ) in its crusade to sensitise voters to their rights and obligations. The paper concludes with a discussion of the campaign successes and suggests how NGOs might influence national development.

Background

The Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD), Zambia’s ruling party, called for Presidential and General elections for November 1996 for the second time after the return to pluralism in November 1991. Since independence, Zambia has gone through three socio-economic phases. The First Republic (1964–1972) was characterised by pluralist politics while the Second Republic (December 1972–October 1991) saw political power legally ceded to one party [the United National Independence Party (UNIP)]. The economy was then marked by centralised planning with the government playing a strong interventionist role through para-statal organisations. Today’s socio-economic arrangement is one of economic and political accommodation based on the restoration of a free-market economy which prizes the creative and optimum use of human resources in national development. This arrangement has also challenged Zambians to desist from over-dependence on government largesse, and to develop an inquiring mind and a spirit of self-reliance.

The position is still more challenging because Zambia has witnessed a proliferation of political parties (more than 30), each with competing manifestos and logos, all vying for support from the very electorate that had experienced 19 years of forced acquiescence under one-party rule. Citizens were cast as mere observers of national development. Suddenly thrust into a political melting pot, this electorate was thus susceptible to manipulation and confusion as candidates cashed in on their ignorance in seeking their support. This situation is further accentuated by high illiteracy, particularly in the rural areas. The challenge for the government of Zambia, enlightened nationals, and development-oriented agencies was to facilitate a quick but smooth transition from a mentality anchored on dependence to one of creativity and self-reliance. The AEAZ sought to contribute through seminar programmes directed at inculcating a sense of confidence in Zambian society. This paper outlines the workshop topics, challenges encountered, and outcomes of the education campaign.

Workshop topics

Six papers on interrelated topics were presented at various civic awareness campaigns organised throughout Zambia.
**Leadership qualities**

The facilitator noted that 'leadership is a position in an organisation/community ... in which the incumbent wields power, authority and influence over others for the purpose of achieving set task/objectives'. Leadership style refers to three main strategies deployed by leaders in their quest to achieve planned goals: autocratic, laissez faire, and democratic. No one leadership style is suitable for all situations. Rather, a combination of styles is needed depending on the circumstances. Leadership abilities refer to the attributes necessary to accomplish tasks, such as maturity, intelligence, motivation and drive, as well as flexibility and good human relations.

**Community participation in national development**

Key terms such as community and development need to be defined. The former can be conceptualised as a group of people in one locality who share the same beliefs and culture. Development might imply change leading to an improved life-style of a community or nation. Contrary to the orthodox view of development as primarily economic, it is a process of transformation which permeates the entire web of human life. Key to shaping this is the participation by the intended beneficiaries in planning and implementing development programmes, and sharing the dividends which accrue. This position also counters modernisation thinking which values only the participation of technocrats and politicians in the planning and execution of national development efforts. The term 'participation' encompasses people's involvement in the management of national issues, including the notion that people should have the opportunity to select leaders of their own preference. Participation is central in sensitising people towards the fact that development is neither the prerogative of, nor should it only favour, privileged citizens. It should also cater for the traditionally poor and pauperised sectors of society. However, effective social participation in national development should be preceded by consciousness-raising or educational programmes, which are a prerequisite in fostering justice, liberation, and social self-reliance because it is on these that the elements of consensual democracy are anchored.

**Responsible citizenship**

The development of a nation depends on the stability of and meaningful contribution by families and other groupings within the community to national advancement. It implies that citizens should be accountable for their deeds and actions. For instance, responsible parental citizenship means that it is parents' duty to promote and sustain the well-being of their families, such as meeting their needs for shelter, clothing, security, and health. Viewed from community and national perspectives, responsible citizenship embraces responsibilities ranging in scope from being a worker, a taxpayer, or a voter, to being a follower or a leader. Responsible citizenship also implies active participation in concerns which promote gender sensitivity, good governance, and national security.

**Electoral process and the management of elections**

Since Zambia had re-entered the arena of plural politics after a long absence, during which time the country had experimented with a one-party political system, it was important to revise the relevant statutes to reflect a new political and government profile. Although the government had enacted a new Electoral Act and created an Electoral Commission to administer it, the Act became bogged down in a political quagmire as opposition parties contested its impartiality, claiming that it favoured the ruling party. It was argued, therefore, that a new Act should be passed which should
satisfy all political stakeholders, and which should include the establishment of an autonomous and impartial Electoral Commission to administer all elections.

The role of a Member of Parliament (MP)

An MP is a politician who has been elected to serve as a representative of a given constituency in the National Assembly and so should desist from partisan politics as their electorate are often of diverse political orientation and are not necessarily members of the MP’s own party. An MP’s responsibilities include serving as a link between the electorate and parliament and contributing to the process of making policies and laws. An MP must, therefore, be intelligent and possess basic formal education qualifications as a prerequisite for effective participation in the complex parliamentary, judicial, and executive processes. Other responsibilities are to represent their constituencies on issues being debated within parliament and beyond, and to influence the nature of laws and public opinion.

An MP should ensure that all sectors of government (i.e. the judiciary and the executive) carry out their responsibilities according to the law and refrain from overstepping their powers. An MP also has a watchdog role on the excesses of civil servants so that their decisions and actions respond to the public interest. MPs must also be accountable. In the past, MPs were largely accountable only to the Head of State for their actions, and the electorate was silenced.

Human rights

Rather than analyse various UN and Organisation of African Unity legislation on human rights, discussion focused on traditional, customary, and other circumstances unique to Zambia which have militated against respect for human rights. For instance, gender inequality, where women are more disadvantaged than men, age, level of literacy, employment, and habitat (i.e. whether one resides in urban or rural areas). The analysis of the concept of human rights was conducted from the family and community perspectives.

Within the family, the rights and obligations of children, of mothers/wives, and of fathers/husbands, were all discussed. In the Zambian family set-up, the man has more than his share of rights while women and children are subject to abuse and exploitation. Although the latter perform the bulk of the work, they are often discriminated against when it comes to sharing development outcomes.

Looking at wider social arrangements in Zambia, the exploitation and abuse of women and children is commonplace. As a result, people on the fringes (such as children, illiterates, women, and the disabled) are the ‘cannon fodder’ of development as they are not involved in its planning, execution, and evaluation. Yet, the abundance of human resources is all that Zambia boasts in its efforts to achieve meaningful and sustainable development. Thus legislation to promote positive discrimination in favour of the marginalised is needed. Further, civic campaigns should be organised to make disadvantaged citizens aware of their rights and obligations. These initiatives would lead to the emancipation of the poor to participate in national development.

Challenges encountered

This campaign was beset by several challenges, the most intractable of which was that of language. Although English is preferred in urban areas, in rural areas where the poorest live and where illiteracy is highest, the campaign had to be conducted in several local languages, some of which were unfamiliar to the campaigners. Attempts were made to circumvent this by recruiting individuals from linguistic groups not yet represented in the campaign team, and training them in facilitation skills so
that they could then organise civic awareness campaigns in those parts of the country yet to be visited.

Another factor which affected the AEAZ outreach efforts was the lack of reliable transport. An exercise of this scope depends on efficient transport for the campaigners. Since the AEAZ was totally reliant on public transport, this proved a major constraint. Despite improvements in urban areas, the situation in the countryside is characterised by an erratic provision of public transport to a point where it is non-existent in some areas, to say nothing of the bad roads. The campaigners either had to walk or cycle in some areas.

The Association’s civic education campaign initiatives also faced underfunding. Campaign sponsors included the Southern University Democratic Project from the USA. Several NGOs competed for funds from this agency, although not enough money was available to meet all their demands. A related problem had to do with the fact that these sponsors came from the USA. It was felt within government circles that the USA was exerting undue pressure on Zambia to democratise and privatise. Therefore, anyone who received any US funding was viewed as suspicious. This, to an extent, is the reason for the low attendance of members from the ruling party at our civil education campaigns.

In spite of this low-key presence, the exercise attracted keen and substantial attendance from the church and opposition parties. The latter’s enthusiasm to attend our civic education campaigns related to their desperate search for support to supplant the ruling party; and this in turn reinforced government suspicions that NGOs colluded with and served as fronts for opposition parties—a factor which further soured the relationship between the government and NGOs. The government’s hostility towards NGOs undermined any sense that NGOs are partners in national development.

It must be reiterated that since 1996 was an election year, the electorate was inundated by petitions from individuals seeking election. The rural electorate in Zambia hardly had the capacity to handle the influx of crafty urban politicians prodding them for their votes. In contrast to the urban electorate, the rural population is disadvantaged in various ways. First, high illiteracy levels make it susceptible to manipulation and corruption. Second, since Zambia had recently emerged from a political system which had proscribed multi-partyism, elections in a plural political system were ferociously contested with underhand methods being applied by vote-seeking politicians. The electorate, particularly those in the rural areas of Zambia, were bewildered, confused—and in need of guidance.

It also warrants mention that initially, the electorate had misconstrued the AEAZ’s initiatives as another covert strategy to attract votes towards its own candidates. This changed when it became apparent that the Association’s concern was to promote public awareness rather than masquerading as an NGO to conceal its political designs. To change social attitudes called for concerted and persuasive efforts on the part of the AEAZ, which depended on major resources in terms of time, effort, and money—resources that were not sufficiently available. The situation was further exacerbated by the delayed start of the civic awareness campaign because of funding hold-ups. These challenges notwithstanding, the AEAZ achieved remarkable successes, as the section which follows attempts to show.

The impact of the campaign

The campaign was especially successful in encouraging an apathetic electorate to vote, lobbying, advocacy, and holding political representatives (i.e. MPs and Ward Councillors) accountable for their actions.

As already stated, in the Second Republic, the electorate was sidelined from national development and ignored. There were few reasons for Zambians to vote as most individuals did not depend on the electorate...
for their entry into parliament. Central to becoming an MP was membership of the UNIP and the goodwill of the President, to which the drop in voter numbers in successive elections during the Second Republic is largely attributed (Chikulo 1979; Good 1988; Chakanika 1989).

In contrast, the 1996 Presidential and General Elections recorded an upswing in voter numbers (Sunday Times 1996). This is partly attributed to sensitisation campaigns successfully undertaken by several NGOs, of which the AEAZ’s was the best planned and most efficiently executed. More importantly, the rise in voter participation was the result of people’s realisation that they were central in an individual’s election to parliament. This differed markedly from the Second Republic where elections served to camouflage the reality that individuals owed their entry into the National Assembly to circumstances other than their electoral success.

Similarly, the electorate was sensitised to the understanding that the new socio-economic arrangement upholds the practice of dialogue between them and their political leadership (i.e. MPs and Councillors), as well as being able to hold the latter accountable for its actions and deeds. As a result, it has not been uncommon for the electorate to seek explanations from the political leaders over conduct which may be seen as objectionable or at variance with expectations. Some leaders who have responded inadequately to charges levelled against them have attracted various forms of disciplinary measures, ranging in intensity from dismissal from political parties and parliament, suspension form parliament, fines, or a warning. In addition, the electorate in Zambia has now caught up with the culture of dialogue and is engaging the politicians in meaningful dialogue on issues of national development. Essentially, the supposed beneficiaries of development concerns are at last contributing to the direction, nature, and implementation of national development. The electorate has also used other forms of lobbying such as publishing open letters to the President, organising peaceful demonstrations, conducting radio and television discussions, and interviews with eminent political and civic persons.

Seminars/workshops have also served as useful forums for making society aware of its members’ rights and obligations. Issues which have featured prominently include police brutality, the debt problem, high levels of poverty, and the ever-escalating levels of illiteracy, particularly among women. A more empowered Zambian electorate can now attest to the fact that NGO initiatives towards this end are starting to bear fruit. Further, these developments have goaded the ruling party to honour some of its pre-election promises, over and above serving as a check against political and economic excesses. Perhaps the greatest achievement of these campaigns has been that it is unlikely now that the tide can be reversed to the point where Zambian society would accept a regime reliant on top-down forms of governance, which is in marked contrast to the Second Republic where divergent viewpoints were misconstrued as reasonable and inimical to state security.

Conclusion
This paper has argued that the long exposure (almost two decades) of Zambians to a one-party system of government, which also privileged a central or command economy, rendered them susceptible to poor governance, fatalism, and voicelessness. The advent of pluralism and a privatised economic system called for attitudinal change as a prerequisite to people’s informed and meaningful participation in shaping Zambia’s new development profile. To achieve this change, the AEAZ and other NGOs organised campaigns aimed at sensitising voters to their rights and obligations. The Association concentrated its efforts on the rural population, who have often served as the cannon fodder of development in the Third World.
Although the Association's efforts were beset by several intractable constraints and were misconstrued by some political stakeholders (opposition parties, the party in government, and initially the electorate), these initiatives have started bearing fruit. The 'bottom line' of these campaigns was to rouse the Zambian people from their slumber and dormancy so that they could participate in efforts to re-design the national socio-economic scene. Alongside these campaigns, a new culture has crystallised in Zambia where accountability to the electorate serves as a guide to the behaviour and conduct of political and civic leadership. Further, lobbying, advocacy, and dialogue have, among others, been used as effective strategies for the participation of the electorate in national development.

Despite these successes, the outreach of the campaign would have benefited immeasurably from more resources. Another area in need of attention is that NGOs and other organisations involved in sensitisation campaigns should endeavour to coordinate and collaborate in order to enhance their capacity. The current efforts of some NGOs are desperate, disjointed, less frugal in the use of resources, and merely duplicate each others' initiatives.

In retrospect, the AEAZ civil awareness campaign represents a novel approach never before used in sensitising the rural masses. Its long-term significance was to tackle the passivity, fatalism, and dependency, and to reduce the 'culture of silence' that characterised the era of the one-party state in Zambia. Ultimately, the aim was to enable people at the grassroots to read their socio-political environment so that they could act on it in an effort to bring about desired outcomes—something that would restore their confidence and dignity. In terms of the wider political process, the campaign fostered virtues that characterise a democratic political system. Foremost among these is that a society should display tolerance and be willing to accommodate divergent political views. In addition, it must exercise transparency and accountability in all its dealings, while encouraging free and unimpeded expression in the nation at large.

References


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A participatory approach to community-based HIV/AIDS awareness

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Introduction

The Department of Health in South Africa has recently estimated that approximately six million South Africans will be HIV-positive by 2005. The Department concluded that the largest concentration of people with HIV will be in KwaZulu/Natal. The latest ante-natal survey found an infec-