

## Reflections on challenges to Youth Development: Lessons from Ward Youth Officers in Hurungwe district.

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### Abstract

*Zimbabwe is a youthful country and there is a growing recognition of the need to prioritize youth development. This stems from the realization that youth have been entangled in a complex web of socio-economic challenges and disenfranchised of opportunities that can transform their lives. In the previous decades, a number of policy blueprints and national youth development initiatives have been put in place. However, all these efforts have marginally contributed to positive youth development in Zimbabwe and Hurungwe district in particular. This study therefore sought to take reflective analysis of the challenges to youth development when Ward Youth Officers under the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment facilitated youth work between 2009 and 2018. In 2018 however a number of ward youth officers were relieved of their duties nationwide as government's transformative effort to rationalize the civil service. The study was conducted in six selected rural and urban wards. It was guided by the youth development framework. The study employed a qualitative methodology and a case study research design. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify the youth, key informants and other key stakeholders. Key informant interviews and semi structured interviews were used for data collection. The study found that youth development challenges were as a result of the politicization of youth work, lack of professionalism, resource constraints, and poor monitoring mechanisms in the district. The study recommends the depoliticization of youth work, improved professionalism through capacity building, ensuring adequate resources, and enhancing monitoring systems to improve the overall effectiveness of youth development initiatives in the district.*

**Keywords:** Youth, youth development, youth work, politicization, professionalism.

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### 1. Introduction

Youth constitute the largest segment of Africa's population. Unfortunately, for many countries the same youthful population exists against the backdrop of skewed development, deteriorating social services, limited economic growth and employment opportunities (Muchemwa 2019). Such challenges have been a common phenomenon even to youth in Zimbabwe and this has compromised the realization of young people's full potential. By and large, Zimbabwe's youth development challenges have remained complex. Surprisingly, these challenges have persisted despite the fact that Zimbabwe has a youth policy blueprint, councils informed by the African Youth Charter and a government ministry with the mandate to address youth issues. However, while Zimbabwe has had her equal share of youth development challenges, it is worth noting that this has been compounded by lack of clarity about the role of youth workers.

### 2. Background

Youth development is particularly crucial in Africa's developing countries given the unique challenges and opportunities young people face. The demographic significance of this large young people is increasingly taking centre stage in discussions to achieve socio economic development agenda of the continent (Jalata 2014). With a significant youth population, investing in their development is essential for harnessing their potential as agents of positive social change and economic growth (Kabiti, Francis & Kativhu, 2019). This explains why the African Union Agenda 2063 has prioritized youth development as a critical component of the continent's transformation and development. Under the auspices of the national youth policy, 'the Zimbabwean government recognised the role and significance of the youth, hence the establishment of the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and

Economic Empowerment (Muchemwa 2019, p. 223).’

Youth workers have ‘an essential, but often under-recognised and under-resourced, role in engaging and supporting young people to be these positive and productive citizens who contribute to national peace and prosperity’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2017, p. 9). The period between 2009 and 2018 saw ward youth officers at the forefront of Zimbabwe’s youth engagement and community development. As such, youth work in Zimbabwe was purportedly done by Ward Youth Officers (WYOs). WYOs were among the youth integrated through appointments by the Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenization, and Empowerment during the Government of National Unity (GNU) (Hodzi 2014). Their role was controversially established within the broader framework of youth empowerment and political mobilization. The Zimbabwean Youth Policy defined their role implicitly and probably drawing from the goals and objectives of the policy towards youth development. This also left the role of youth officers vulnerable to political manipulation. Resultantly, active and meaningful engagements of young people in their respective communities was a challenge. Therefore, their legacy, contribution in addressing challenges and empowering young people to overcome barriers to their development has remained subject to and scrutiny.

Moreover, scholars such as McGregor (2013), have argued WYOs’ recruitment into the civil service was part of a prominent strategy used by the ruling party to extend its control to the local level. The Public Service Commission staff audit in 2015 revealed that over 70 000 youth officers were employed outside the remit of the PSC. The audit report also indicated that during the head count by the Public Service Commission, ward youth officers could not be located at their work stations, they however later surfaced for enumeration (The Zimbabwe Mail, 2017; *Newsday*, 2018). During the same period, Oosterom & Gukurume (2019) noted that ‘an audit conducted by a foreign consultancy firm revealed there were an estimated 75,000 ghost workers, the vast majority of which were youth, and graduates of the National Youth Service programme.’ The Public Service Commission attempted several to implement measures to curb the growth of ghost workers including to retrench ward youth officers. However, the then president R. G. Mugabe posited that ward youth officer had to be put back on the payroll because their retrenchment was not sanctioned by his cabinet despite the fact that it was a Civil Service Commission rationalization programme meant to reduce the state’s wage bill (The Zimbabwe Mail, 2017, Aug. 10). On the same note, the then Minister of Youth Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, Patrick Zhuwawo vowed that anyone who would attempt to fire the ward youth officers would be dismissed instead (Chiseva, 2015).

Against this revelation, it became commonly held that youth were integrated through appointments considered ‘ghost workers.’ There also remains the need to explore their contributions, diverse challenges, and the political dynamics which shaped their operations. This study therefore aims to shed light on the complex nature of ward youth officers’ work. By revisiting their work in Hurungwe district wards, the study underscores the ongoing need for comprehensive reforms to fully realize the potential of Zimbabwe’s youth development initiatives. For the purpose of this study and aligning with Zimbabwe’s National Youth Policy (2013), “youth” can be defined as individuals aged 15 to 35 years.

### 3. Conceptual explanation

The study was guided by the Youth Development (YD) approach. This holistic approach mainly focuses on young people’s growth, well-being and empowerment. Youth Development is a strategic approach with a focus on practices for engaging entire communities in helping all youth thrive (Whitlock, 2004). It also ‘a set of principles that are concerned with promoting the inclusion of youth by building on their strengths, and addressing their economic, socio-cultural, and psycho-social needs (Patel, 2009, p.13).’ In the context of Hurungwe District, it connotes a tailored approach that takes into account the unique cultural, economic, and environmental factors of the district. The importance of youth development lies in its potential to bring positive outcomes while enabling young people to reach their full potential. Whitlock (2004 p.1) noted that, youth development emphasizes ‘long term, systemic strategies for cultivating qualities and traits desirable in young people through the creation of environments that support their developmental needs and capacities.’ This approach is relevant in for Hurungwe district, where young people faced significant challenges, such as poverty, limited access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities. Given these challenges investing in youth development in Hurungwe could have a transformative impact on individual youth, families, and their respective communities. Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins (1999) noted that positive youth development (PYD) programs are designed to optimize youth developmental progress. By focusing on the holistic development of youth in Hurungwe, initiatives could be designed to equip them with life skills, entrepreneurial opportunities and vocational training. This means is that, there ‘is no single program model or curriculum that

makes a program youth development, rather there are certain features and practices that programs using this approach share (Youth Development Executives of King County, 2020 p. 1).’ Moreover, positive youth development is both a vision, an ideology and a new vocabulary for engaging with youth development (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas & Lerner, 2005). In the context of Hurungwe, had young people been provided with the necessary resources and opportunities, they were more likely to thrive and make positive contributions to their wards or communities.

#### 4. Methodology

This study was done qualitatively. The rationale was to explore of various perceptions of the targeted population. These included young people, WYOs, Youth Development Officers (YDOs), government officials and ward councillors on youth development in Hurungwe district. The research was case study based, with a particular focus on Hurungwe district, one of the 72 districts in Zimbabwe located in the Western part of Zimbabwe. It was ensured that all the interviewed young people resided within the district from 2009 to 2018 in selected 4 rural wards and 2 urban wards. In-depth and key informant interviews were conducted among participant with a sample size of 25 ( $n=25$ ). Fifteen were males ( $n=15$ ) and ten were females ( $n=10$ ). Twelve males ( $n=12$ ) and nine females ( $n=9$ ) had attained Ordinary to Degree levels and the remaining participants had lower education attainment. The study employed a non-probability sampling technique, purposive sampling to be specific. Ward youth officers, YDOs and the DYDO were considered in the sample basing on their relevance to the problem under study within Hurungwe district. Ward councillors and other government officials were as well considered as holders of data given their engagement with ward youth officers at ward levels whilst community youth as assets or active participants in youth development. Field notes were recorded in notebooks and subsequently transcribed for analysis purposes. The researchers also used secondary data collection methods such as newspaper articles, electric journals, books, monthly reports among other secondary sources. As such, data analysis was performed using interpretive thematic analysis and content analysis.

#### 5. Literature review

Youth development is considered a key area of focus in countries with a predominantly youthful population such as Zimbabwe. This approach is particularly relevant in developing countries, where young people often face significant challenges, such as poverty, limited access to education, and high rates of unemployment, and where investing in youth development can have a transformative impact on individuals, families, and communities (Larson, 2011; Wiium & Dimitrova, 2019). Lerner, Almerigi, & Theokas, (2005) noted that the concept encompasses various processes and outcomes that support positive and sustainable growth of young people into engaged, responsible and productive adults. Youth development is founded on the idea that when youth serving organizations, businesses, civic organizations and government institutions intentionally provide services and opportunities to youth, it helps create environments that support their developmental needs and capacities (Whitlock, 2004). In other words, ‘it is *developmental*, with emphasis on growth and an increasing recognition that youth can (and should be) deliberate actors in the production of positive development (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma 2007). In this regard, the history of youth development in Zimbabwe is also characterized by a number of policy blueprints and initiatives that aimed to address socio-economic challenges affecting young people. The National Youth Policy (2000, revised in 2013), Zimbabwe Youth Council Act (1983) have targeted youth development by providing a framework to integrate youth into the mainstream economy and enhance their participation in national development. Despite these efforts since gaining independence in Zimbabwe, the efficacy of youth development policies has been limited.

As result of endemic and multifaceted challenges that Zimbabwe youth face, it has been argued that several policies are only ‘on paper and there is no holistic approach to implementing them’ (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2019). A review by Chigunta, & Mwanza, (2016, p.54) also highlights that, ‘young people are not being actively engaged as partners in the process of policy and programme implementation hence are unable to assert their role in informing the development of relevant strategies to address their concerns.’ For example, in rural areas, initiatives such as Indigenization and Economic Empowerment have not significantly transformed youths’ access to strategic economic resources, such as land (Hlungwani, Masuku & Magidi, 2021). At provincial and local levels, the National Youth Policy maintains that it is determined to ensure that government authorities work in a cooperative and harmonious manner when designing and delivering programmes and services which address youth development needs and opportunities (Zimbabwe Youth Policy, 2013). However, scholars such as to Pswarayi, (2023) noted that ‘the government’s approach is top-down, tokenistic at the very

best, and overridden by political overtones of dominance. This power dynamic is characterised by mistrust with an emphasis on control and management of the youth, rather than addressing their concerns in collaboration with youth stakeholders.' Apart from its top-down approach, the National Youth Policy has also been criticized for failing to adequately engage with young people at the grassroots level. Against this background, it can be noted that this disconnect between policy formulation and implementation has marginally impacted the lives of the youth in Zimbabwe.

Moreover, youth workers are critical in bridging the gap between national policies and the implementation of youth development initiatives. Youth workers play a crucial role in helping young people to reach their full potential. They encourage personal development, autonomy, initiative and participation in society (European Commission, 2018). As such the Zimbabwean youth policy has also highlighted the need to enhance and develop professional skills, standards, competencies and behaviors amongst youth workers (Zimbabwe Youth Policy, 2013). In Zimbabwe, from 2018 Ward Youth Officers (WYO) had the youth work role to mobilize youth for community projects, facilitate youth programs, provide support and guidance to youth, and ensure that youth development policies were effectively implemented at ward level. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of WYOs in promoting youth development was dissuaded by several factors. Ward youth officers were youth appointed to the Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenization, and Empowerment during the Government of National Unity. They were recruited from both urban and rural areas. In rural areas, ward youth officers were instrumental in mobilising support for ZANU-PF at the grassroots level and spearhead election campaigns (Newsday, 2018). Despite being civil service members, in many instances ward officers 'protected their jobs by obeying the demands of ZANU-PF politicians' (Hodzi 2014, p. 63). This concurs with the fact that most ward youth officers are ZANU-PF militia who double as the party's political commissars during the elections as they mobilize support for the ruling party (All Africa News, 2016, Dec. 21). This political interference in their recruitment and deployment complicated their work, in many cases being viewed as political agents rather than neutral youth development facilitators. Undoubtedly, their role became heavily debated, with significant concerns regarding their impartiality and the politicization of their duties.

Hurungwe District, like many other districts in Zimbabwe, has faced challenges in the implementation of youth development initiatives. Young people face challenges such as 'high unemployment rates, poor quality education and limited educational opportunities, limited civic engagement opportunities, high HIV prevalence rates, teenage pregnancy, and early marriage (Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission, 2019 p. 2).' These factors have contributed to the socio-economic disenfranchisement of young people and created significant barriers to their development. Among other challenges is the fact that the Ministry of Youth, Indigenization, and Economic Empowerment has had limited capacity in as much as the delivery of youth services in Hurungwe District is concerned. The ministry's limited material, financial and skilled human resources have not been adequate to support the implementation of youth development programs (Hlungwani et al., 2021). As a result, this lack of capacity has seen a fragmented and inconsistent approach to youth development in Hurungwe, with many programs failing to achieve the desired outcomes or reach the intended beneficiaries (Macheka and Masuku, 2019). Moreover, political interference in Hurungwe district has been a major obstacle to effective youth development. According to Gukurume (2018) opportunities were distributed based on political party affiliation and loyalty, as youth affiliated to the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) benefited more from these programs. This undermined the principles of equity and inclusivity in youth development. As such, the work of WYOs was also affected, considering that they were often pressured to align with the interests of the ruling political party rather than focusing on the needs and priorities of the youth in the district.

## **6. Findings**

The findings of this study are presented as follows.

### **6.1 Politicized youth development**

The study findings showed that for ten years the work of ward youth officers was greatly swayed by the political tides of the country. Many participants argued that the main challenge was the politicization of the youth government ministry which in most cases prioritized partisan agendas. The appointment of ward youth officers within the youth government ministry was perceived to have been based on political loyalty rather than merit or expertise. The study found that it created a rift between the priorities of young people in many wards of Hurungwe district and the actual actions taken by the ward youth officers. Section 200 of the 2013 Zimbabwean Constitution clearly states that, 'no member of the civil service may, in the exercise of their functions a) act in a partisan manner; b) further the interests of any political party or cause; c) prejudice the lawful interests of any

political party or cause; d) or violate the fundamental rights or freedoms of any person. However, the study revealed that the conduct of ward youth officers in Hurungwe in many ways contravened this constitutional provision. For example, ward youth officers mobilized support for events such as Youth interface rallies which were in most cases campaigning rallies for the ZANU-PF party in 2017. On the other hand, youth from different political affiliations argued that youth development became a political battleground leading to the exclusion polarization and divisiveness. Moreover, findings indicated that there were youth officers who held the key posts like district commissar, ward councillors, national ZANU PF Youth League positions and campaigning managers at ward and constituency levels. In this sense, inconsistently reporting for duty was not necessarily regarded as misconduct, as long as it concerned political business they were seen as workers on national duty. Reports against the work of ward youth officers who held key positions in party structures were futile as political elites often defended ward youth officers in many respects. This is in line with the sentiments by the then Minister of Youth Indigenization and Economic Empowerment, Patrick Zhuwawo who threatened that anyone who would attempt to fire the ward youth officers would be dismissed instead (Chiseva, 2015). This also reflects that patronage has been a major feature of the last decades closely linked to the transformation of state institutions and remaking of ZANU PF powers (Alexander and McGregor, 2013). As such, one would find that some youth programs in the district were driven by political motives and short-term electoral considerations, rather than evidence-based strategies that could address diverse youth challenges.

## **6.2 Lack of professionalism**

The study revealed that lack of professionalism and merit compromised the prospects of youth development in Hurungwe district. For example, there was a significant number of ward youth officers had no basic 5 Ordinary passes, some had short course certificates in community development from Magunje Vocational Training Centre or were graduates of the National Youth Service. While a few had academic qualifications, they had no youth work expertise to effectively facilitate youth development roles within the district. This posed a challenge considering that youth development can best be accomplished by youth workers with the skills and knowledge to act as effective agents of change. Similarly, the provision of youth work qualifications in particular, supports the building of capacity within the sector to enhance effective service provision and practice (Krauss and Suandi, 2008; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2010). The policy states that amongst other goals, it aims at enhancing and developing professional skills, standards, competencies and behaviors amongst youth workers (Zimbabwe Youth Policy, 2013). Unfortunately, there were no systematic efforts to enhance ward youth officers' skills, knowledge, and competencies. Youth development in Hurungwe therefore suffered from unclear standards and expectations for ward youth officers' behaviour and ethics. Perhaps a clear code of conduct would have come along with provisions for professional development and training necessary for ward youth officers. The findings highlighted that many ward youth officers lacked essential knowledge regarding effective youth engagement strategies, adolescent development and psychosocial support. It also emerged that without basic academic qualifications, let alone youth work qualifications, a great number of ward youth officers failed to gain the trust of many youth, ward community members and other stakeholders. In other words, the lack of credibility hindered ward youth officers to effectively advocate for Hurungwe youth needs and mobilization for support. This partly explained their limitations in designing and implementing appropriate interventions that addressed the specific needs of youth in the district.

Owing to the lack of professional standards and standardized qualifications, there was evidence of inconsistencies in the quality and effectiveness of youth development interventions also leading to inefficiencies regarding resource utilization. For example, among the youth who were assisted to access CABS youth fund loans for projects between 2012 and 2014, some projects never existed, some did not pay back, some were defunct while some youth relocated and could not be tracked. As a result of these experiences, it was noted that in the following years ward youth officers had limited access to funding for innovative projects and, effective and sustainable partnerships with other youth development stakeholders. Against this backdrop, it is clear that lack of professionalism and merit limited ward youth officers' abilities to effectively support positive youth development and respond to the needs of youth across Hurungwe district.

## **6.3 Resource constraints**

Among many other reasons, it was found that the quality and effectiveness of youth development work in Hurungwe district suffered because of limited resources. It emerged that, this was mainly due to a trend of an underfunded national budget towards the ministry of youth as a whole. The underfunding of youth ministry in Zimbabwe has perpetuated inequalities and hindered efforts to address social challenges. The limited resources had an impact upon the youth in the sense that there were no funding opportunities to initiate self-help projects. A number of youth lamented that they could not access funding to start projects. A number of youth also argued

that they did not benefit from youth development fund because they had different political affiliations. As argued by Hlungwani (2020, p. 4) ‘the rural context imposes challenges such as a limited market, higher prices of inputs, and neglect by policy implementers. Within this policy environment, youths in rural Zimbabwe are unlikely to be as competitive as their urban counterparts.’ On the other hand, the scarcity of resources had a significant impact on youth development work in Hurungwe district as a whole. For example, it was found that infrastructure was limited and the administration space was being rented. Due to cumulative arrears, there were water and power disconnections by the owner of the office premises or district offices in Karoi.

In most cases the rented space was in arrears to the extent that for more than a year the owner of the premise would disconnect water and electricity supply, seriously affecting day to day operations. Travelling and subsistence allowances were in many instances not available for staff. Guided by the Ministry’s core values, which include patriotism, teamwork and commitment, a great number of Hurungwe district staff however voluntarily felt duty-bound to ensure normalcy prevails at its offices by regular monthly contributions towards administrative functions. This helped to augment money for purchasing of cobra and other cleaning utensils for a clean working environment, stationery, typing and printing (minutes, letters, work-plans) internet services, transport to attend meetings and collection of mails from provincial office. Another challenge was that, the district vocational centre in Magunje where ward youth officers mobilized youth to go had no adequate resources. Without adequate resources, it was a struggle to provide job training and placement services and entrepreneurship support, hindering efforts to curb high youth unemployment rates in Hurungwe. Although resource constraints was an issue, some participants argued that, had ward youth officers been neutral civil service workers, they could have accessed funding through collaborations with other youth development stakeholders. Also considering their large number, they could be better positioned to provide evidence-based recommendations and also influence decision making regarding budgetary allocations. The study also found that lack of funding was partly the reason why ward youth officers lacked further training and capacity-building opportunities. Nevertheless, some were of the view that the government should have employed competent people in the first place such that more resources could be channeled to address diverse needs of Hurungwe youth.

#### **6.4 Poor monitoring mechanisms**

Another challenge that affected youth work and youth development in Hurungwe district was the lack of monitoring mechanisms. The study revealed that it was a challenge for Youth Development Officers to visit all the 26 rural wards without either reliable transport or adequate travelling and subsistence allowances. The found that without regular oversight, ward youth officers became complacent and their accountability and motivation to perform their ward duties effectively was reduced. In this regard, the study found that the absence of monitoring resulted in a lack of quality assurance and negatively impacted the effectiveness of youth development interventions in Hurungwe district. Without monitoring it emerged that ward youth officers lacked the necessary support and supervision to address young people’s needs, reflect on their practice, and constantly improve their effectiveness. Additionally, there were no effective systems to assess the impact of skills acquired from the programmes such as Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) if they genuinely helped the few beneficiaries to be actively involved in income generating projects.

The study also found that it was difficult to evaluate programmes such as Food Security and Nutrition Demonstration Plots Programme within the districts as some youth did not witness the implementation despite having registered their names. Ward youth officers lacked essential youth development skills and as such struggled to implement meaningful programs in Hurungwe or even accurately assess the impact of self-funded youth initiatives. Many participants doubted the monitoring role of WYOs as they argued that they had not initiated any project that could help young people but rather tried to monitor projects which were not funded by the ministry. There was no evidence of specific projects that ward youth officers have undertaken in urban or rural areas (All Africa 21, December, 2016). In line with the national policy, youth workers had the mandate to make available and accessible accurate data disaggregated according to gender, disability and rural versus urban area on youth employment, unemployment and under employment to facilitate the prioritization of issues in development programs (Zimbabwean Youth policy, 2013). However, the skills gap among WYOs undermined their ability to collect reliable data and this hindered the evaluation process, leading to a disconnect between the intended outcomes and the real progress of youth development efforts within the district. The study found data banks questionable and unrealistic given the weak monitoring and evaluation system that the Hurungwe district office had. Furthermore, the lack of supervision of WYOs due to logistical constraints further complicated monitoring efforts in Hurungwe. The study also found that on the status of some projects which were funded through the Youth Development Fund (loans), the WYOs officers could not explain the high default rate. District reports revealed that while some youths’ projects functioned and loans were paid up, some youths’ whereabouts

were not known and their projects never existed despite having been assisted to access loans.

## 7. Discussion

Findings from this study highlight several critical challenges which impacted youth development in Hurungwe district, centered around political interference, lack of professionalism, resource constraints and inadequate monitoring mechanisms. The politicization of youth development initiatives within the district undermined the effectiveness of ward youth officers, whose roles were compromised by political allegiances rather than merit-based appointments. This reflects that patronage politics has been a major feature of the last decades closely linked to the transformation of state institutions and remaking of ZANU PF powers (Alexander and McGregor, 2013). As such, this led to a misalignment between the actual needs of the youth in the district and the interventions implemented. The fact that ward youth officers often engaged in politically motivated activities rather than concentrating on genuine youth development needs shows that the constitutional mandate for civil service impartiality was frequently breached. It can also be argued that, this politicization not only compromised the quality of youth programs in the district but also contributed to a divisive and exclusionary environment, further exacerbating the challenges faced by youth.

The study established that issue of professionalism was also a significant barrier to effective youth development within Hurungwe district. The majority of ward youth officers in Hurungwe district lacked the necessary qualifications and expertise, while some only had basic education rather than comprehensive youth work training. Their inability to design and implement effective youth development strategies can therefore be attributed to this deficiency in professional capacity. Also, by not having a clear code of conduct and systematic professional development, for a decade the district bore the brunt of inconsistent service delivery and limited effectiveness in the addressing of youth needs. Without proper training and qualifications, ward youth officers struggled to earn the trust of the youth and other stakeholders within the district. This had an impact on their credibility and effectiveness in mobilizing support and resources for youth initiatives.

Resource constraints have further contributed to the difficulties faced in youth development efforts in Hurungwe. The study established that underfunding of the youth ministry translated to significant limitations in resources available for the district youth programs. Although youth workers have ‘an essential role in engaging and supporting young people to be these positive and productive citizens who contribute to national peace and prosperity, they are often under-recognised and under-resourced (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017). Resource constraints did not only limited the ability to initiate and sustain projects but also resulted in inadequate infrastructure and administrative challenges. For instance, the reliance on voluntary contributions from ward youth officers to cover operational costs underscored the severe financial limitations affecting the district. Additionally, the lack of funding constrained further training and capacity-building opportunities for ward youth officers and this perpetuated a cycle of underdevelopment and inefficiency.

Finally, the lack of effective monitoring mechanisms contributed to the inefficiencies observed in the district youth development programs. The study findings highlighted that the lack of reliable transport and oversight bred complacency among WYOs and this impacted their accountability and motivation. Similarly, inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems within the district youth ministry resulted in a failure to assess the impact of programs accurately and ensuring effective youth development interventions. This lack of oversight arguably complicated efforts to evaluate the success of projects which were funded, leading to high default rates and unaccounted-for project statuses. Therefore it is noticeable that there was need for a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to address these issues and ensure that youth development initiatives in Hurungwe could be both impactful and sustainable.

## 8. Conclusion

This study’s findings emphasize major difficulties in the youth development field in Hurungwe district, Zimbabwe, such as the politicization of youth programs, lack of professionalism, limited resources, and inadequate monitoring systems. The research shows that political involvement has greatly diminished the efficiency of ward youth officers, resulting in partisan priorities taking precedence over actual youth requirements. Moreover, the absence of professionalism and appointments based on merit has detracted from the credibility and effectiveness of youth development efforts. Resource limitations worsened these problems, reducing the capacity to carry out effective and lasting initiatives. Furthermore, insufficient monitoring and evaluation processes have impeded the assessment of initiatives for youth development, resulting in a gap between policy goals and real results. To tackle these obstacles, youth work needs to be taken out of the political

realm, professionalism should be improved with training, resources must be sufficient, and monitoring systems need to be strengthened to enhance the overall impact of youth development efforts in the district.

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