

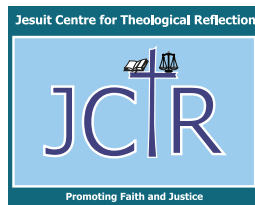
Active Citizenship



PARTICIPATION BEYOND ELECTIONS

"Contributing to good governance and
improvement of quality of life of citizens"

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection
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Our Values

- ◎ **The dignity of the human person:** The focal point of Church's Social Teaching (CST) is the human person, made in the image of God. Therefore fundamental freedom and dignity is the basis for human rights. Recognising this image in our neighbor, the teaching rejects any policy or system that reduces people to economic units or passive dependence but encourages the organization of society that puts a human person at the centre of every activity. (See especially *Pacem in Terris* & *Laborem Exercens*).
.....
- ◎ **The Common Good:** People exist as part of society. Every individual has a duty to share in promoting the welfare of the community and a right to benefit from that welfare. This applies at every level: local, national and international. Public authorities exist mainly to promote the common good and to ensure that no section of the population is excluded. (See *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*).
.....
- ◎ **Solidarity:** As members of the one human family, we have mutual obligations to promote the rights and development of peoples across communities and nations. Solidarity is the fundamental bond of unity with our fellow human beings and the resulting interdependence. All are responsible for all; See *Populorum Progressio*, *Sollicitudes Rei Socialis* & *Centesimus Annus*)
.....
- ◎ **Subsidiarity:** All power and decision-making in society should be at the most local level compatible with the common good. Subsidiarity will mainly mean power passing downwards, but it could also mean passing appropriate powers upwards. The balance between the vertical (subsidiarity) and the horizontal (solidarity) is achieved through reference to the common good. (See *Quadragesimo Anno*)
.....
- ◎ **Option for the poor:** Fidelity to Christ means seeing him above all in the faces of suffering and vulnerable people, and with a Christian attitude, this calls for action. (See *Sollicitudes Rei Socialis* & *Centesimus Annus*)

Introduction and **Background**

Zambia witnessed historic elections on 20 September 2011 in which the Patriotic Front (PF) emerged winners ousting the former ruling party the Movement for Multi Party Democracy MMD. The September elections, ended 20 years in power for the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, and were acclaimed by many as a rare example in Africa of a peaceful transition of political power to an opposition party. Zambia's had demonstrated their commitment to exercising their democratic right to vote.

Prior to actual exercise of voting in 2011 elections, the JCTR provided platforms for citizens to discuss among others; the values that should determine one's choice of a public office holder, what makes for free and fair elections, peaceful election environment etc. These platforms illustrated the keenness of most citizens to get involved and influence political change through an election. Recognizing that exercise of one's democratic right does not end when the votes are tallied and the winners announced, JCTR saw the need to sustain the momentum and the political activity demonstrated during election by educating citizens on the concept of active citizenship beyond elections. Although voting is among the most important acts a citizen can engage in, there are other means to influence as a citizen.

The Centre has sustained debates on governance issues beyond elections through public forums on Active Citizenship in different towns. The forums are aimed at encouraging public participation in political processes as well as any issues of common concern.

This booklet is a product of JCTR's interaction with the public. It is intended to educate the public on the role of a citizen, by exploring different dimensions of citizenship. It also reminds different actors, such as the Church, Government, Political Parties and CSOs of their role in building Active Citizenship for democratic participation. The booklet will also serve as a resource for JCTR Outreach Teams, in their awareness raising on citizenship.

As JCTR, we recognise the importance of building a strong democracy with active participation. We would therefore appreciate any thoughts on how best

development can be realised through providing spaces for citizens' engagement, beyond elections, in the governance of the country.

Elections and their purpose

Elections are a formal process of choosing candidates for public office. They are not an event that happens in specific and stipulated intervals but are ongoing given the different aspects there are in the electoral process such as voter registration, voter education etc.

“Elections represent a platform for the expression of a people's political decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power. They provide a privileged opportunity for healthy and serene public political debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political groupings. If conducted well, elections call forth and encourage real and active participation by citizens in political and social life.”

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When citizens who are eligible voters vote in elections, they exercise their civil right to determine who occupies public offices. In several democratic states, citizens attach great importance to this civic duty to ensure right leaders are chosen. For many, however, active participation in governance affairs begins and ends with elections; that is, they register, vote for their preferred candidates and wait for the next elections. Although citizens have a choice of not participating in other governance affairs and processes, when they confine themselves to participating in elections only, they neglect their wider social responsibility as citizens to contribute significantly to the common good, that which benefits everyone.

The choice of not following up on significant political decisions and policies made by the people elected to take public offices, limits their contribution to the development of their particular area and the whole country. In democratic states, the power to govern lies in the people, but, when in between elections the citizenry choose to have little say in what actually transpires, power remains in the hands of the few holding public spaces. The exercise of citizenship therefore demands that all citizens go beyond voting in elections and take part in other public affairs in between elections. Active citizenship therefore begins with an individual citizen's recognition of their duty to vote leaders for public office and to hold them accountable for their policies and actions and generally

take part in what is happening within one's particular community.

Understanding Citizenship

There are several ways of thinking about citizenship. Citizenship can be seen a legal relationship between an individual and the state, as membership of a particular state, a broader sense of social responsibility and as political participation. The discussion however will focus much on the last two dimensions which often call for action.

Citizenship as Legal Status: This dimension of citizenship refers to the relationship between the individual and the state. This dimension tends to distinguish nationals from non-nationals such as refugees and is often considered a prerequisite to the exercising of other senses of citizenship

Citizenship as a broader sense of social responsibility: Citizenship in this sense goes beyond being able to enjoy a wide range of civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights such as the rights to education, health care, employment, food and shelter to recognising that these rights come with a range of responsibilities required to promote the common good.

It calls for one to take particular interest in seeing what is happening around their community so that they can be a part of its development according to their giftedness, while putting the interests of the community first.

Citizenship as democratic participation: The political dimension of citizenship demands participation in democratic processes, engaging in political discussion and decision making as well as serving in public office at various levels. The kind of commitment is often driven by a sense of social justice and care for other members of the community.

It instructs an individual to contribute to the exploration of ideas that can offer positive change, a change that makes a difference in the daily lives especially those of the poor people in their society.

Citizenship in the Zambian Context

The Constitution of Zambia (1996), which is the supreme Law of the land, outlines what citizenship means in Zambia. According to part IX of the current

Zambian Constitution (As amended by Act No. 18 of 1996), it is the duty of every Zambian citizen to:

- ⊙ Be patriotic and loyal to Zambia and to promote its well-being
- ⊙ Contribute to the well-being of the community where that citizen lives, including the observance of health controls
- ⊙ Carry out with discipline and honesty legal public functions
- ⊙ Pay all taxes and duties legally due and owing to the State and assist in the enforcement of the law at all times.

It is clear from the above that the Zambian Constitution captures the several senses of citizenship as discussed earlier and bestows responsibility on each citizen. Within the legal status of citizenship is embedded the roles a citizen has to play in order to contribute to the building of the nation. This sense of duty a citizen has, leads us to the idea of Active Citizenship.

Active Citizenship is essentially about citizen's engagement in the political, social and economic affairs of one's nation at any appropriate level where they are able to play this duty effectively.

The Importance of Active Citizenship

- ⊙ Active Citizenship is key to development. There is a very strong link between Active Citizenship and development, which the Church defines as a "movement from less human to more human conditions". As members of the nation-state, citizens often tend to have common goals for development, and the same desired future.

However, development cannot just happen if none of the citizens played their particular role. In a democracy especially, citizens are offered, a unique opportunity to determine their future collectively. Active citizens, for example, take part in arguing for the enactment of Laws that ensure justice for all, they debate public issues of concern, and they pay tax so as to make available enough national resources for development among other duties.

- ⊙ Active Citizenship enhances good governance, a necessary condition for development. When development does not happen in a way citizens envision, complaints often border on leadership and usually the lack of it. If the answer for development lies in good governance, citizens then have an important duty to ensure that public leadership plays its role effectively. When citizens bring to the attention of the public leadership their concerns, perspectives, good government policies and actions etc, public leadership is informed of what citizens are thinking and this enhances possibilities of good governance.
- ⊙ Citizens' participation is a cornerstone for transparency and accountability. In democratic states where citizens merely vote and leave the rest of the public affairs to elected leaders, leaders tend to abuse their power and pay little attention to public interests. However,

when citizens are actively involved in national affairs beyond elections, the demands placed on leaders help them to be both accountable for and transparent about their actions that have significant implications for the daily lives of their citizens.

- ⊙ In a democracy, the participation of citizens in public affairs is critical as the whole idea of democracy rests on citizens governing themselves. To form a democratic government, for instance, would be impossible if citizens do not participate in elections in which they choose leaders to represent them. Thus, success of democracy is largely dependent on the participation of citizens.
- ⊙ Active citizenship promotes implementation. Citizenship does not just demand of citizens' engagement at policy level but also at their own local levels where implementation takes place. An example of this is the following up on loans meant for local initiatives such as the building of schools and clinics in a particular community. When citizens are not actively involved, resources reserved for such important initiatives are prone to corruption as there will be no one to question what happened to the resources with active citizenship is lacking.

Putting Citizenship into Action in Zambia

Zambia, being a democracy offers immense opportunities for active citizenship which citizens must seize in order to enhance our democracy. Currently, there are a significant number of important political processes and campaigns going on which calls for the involvement of more Zambian citizens. Among these are: the Constitution-making and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) processes and the Access to Information (ATI) and Tax System campaigns.

- i. **The Constitution-making Process:*** Zambia has, for the past four decades, has been attempting to enact a Constitution that advances the needs and interests of the people. This process has seen trillions of Kwachas go to waste in the past as the past processes yielded no desired fruits. It is clear that the current Constitution is inadequate and for a good Constitution to be enacted needs participation of all Zambians. The Patriotic Front (PF) government since assuming power after the 20 September, 2011 elections has set another Constitution-making process in motion and there is a Technical Committee

established to spearhead the process. Questions however arise with regard to whose vows are being incorporated, who has access to the draft Constitution that was made public few months and how many are truly making contributions to such a process? Is the incorporation of or removal of contentious issues in the Draft Constitution based on what the majority want? Are citizens themselves eager to effectively participate in this process?

- ii. The African Peer Review Mechanism:** Zambia in 2006 acceded to the APRM, an initiative of the African Union (AU) intended to promote good governance which should help African states to realize development.

The APRM is a tool for self- assessment as well as assessment by peers, that is, other African states that have also acceded to this process. Zambia has been scheduled for review a number of times, but this did not happen due to circumstances such as the elections in both 2006 and 2011. This year (2013) towards the end of January Zambia is going to be reviewed. The question is how many people are aware about UPRM, and how many have pushed in their report in evaluating Zambia's performance. Evaluation is best done by outsiders.

The Zambia situation therefore is best judged not by the Government which is the implementer but by the citizens who are supposed to benefit from the commitments the Zambian government committed itself to.

- iii. Access to Information (ATI) Campaign:** Access to Information (ATI) also referred to as the Right to Information (RTI) or Freedom of Information (FOI) is about being able to obtain information from public and sometimes private institutions with functions of a public nature.

To access information is a both human right and a human need. The basis for such access is that the information contained in public institutions belong to the public, thus institutions only play the role of custodian. This information largely relates to development, for example, it could be information about how much money has been allocated to the Farmer Input Support Programme in a particular area

and who has accessed such money, how many students have qualified to University of Zambia and the basis for qualifying etc. Such access to information is vital for transparency and accountability in public institutions, strengthens democracy and curbs corruption among other benefits.

Unfortunately, Zambia does not have adequate legislation to deal with access to information. For slightly more than ten years ago, there has been a campaign to enact an ATI Law to ensure citizens and others enjoy this particular right.

The 2002 Draft Bill went as far as consideration by Parliament but it was sent back to the Executive for further consideration. Progress in this regard has, mainly been hindered by fear among the Legislature, fear of, for example that the Media will embarrass government or public leaders if it exposes such issues as corruption, the security of the country although such fears are unfounded where an ATI Law classifies some information to prevent state insecurity.

The PF Government established a Task Force, which comprises Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Government itself and the Private sector. The mandate of the Task Force is to draft the ATI Law and to educate the public about the ATI. The Draft has been ready since July, 2012 but its launch has been delayed.

It is our hope that Government will soon announce the date of the launch so that they adhere to the policy pronouncements made consistently since taking office in September, 2011 that they would ensure the enactment of an ATI Law.

iv. Active Citizenship and Public Resource Mobilization and Utilization: It is commonly said that Politicians only give to the public that which the public demands. This is because politicians are equally citizens and have their own needs which tend to preoccupy them to the neglect of other people's needs. If this statement holds some truth as it seems to do, then citizens have a responsibility to make demands to their political and civic leaders.

One of the responsibilities entrusted with political leaders is to mobilize

public resources to address public needs such as infrastructure development, provision of public security, provision of education, health and other social services and overall poverty reduction.

These resources are largely mobilized through taxation from individuals and business that earn income and profit respectively. Other sources include debt, aid and other non tax sources. It is always crucial that these resources are raised in an efficient and equitable manner, or else other sections of society will disproportionately bear the burden of financing Government programmes.

Equitable and efficient mobilization of resources cannot be achieved without effective participation of citizens. Often politicians are concerned about mobilizing sufficient revenues to finance the budget without any concern about whether some people are disproportionately bearing the burden of financing the budget. Citizens are to be alert in scrutinizing the budget if issues of equity in the way resources are being mobilized are to be addressed.

Active participation in the way resources are allocated is equally important. Often resources end up in individuals' pockets and not the intended beneficiaries. Misallocation and misapplication of resources has been at the heart of underdevelopment in so many countries and therefore it should be every citizen's duty to demand accountability in the way public resources are raised and distributed and this duty goes beyond electing leaders to public office.

Monitoring and evaluation of public resource management should be done throughout the Governments terms and there are various processes that offer us an opportunity to do such as budget formulation.

The above processes, like many others definitely require participation of all citizens. However, it is important to acknowledge that only few citizens tend to take part in processes such as the above. There are reasons for this state of affairs.

During the JCTR's post 2011 elections public forums held to discuss Citizenship beyond elections, the public cited a number of barriers to citizens' participation

in governance processes other than elections. Below are some of the reasons expressed:

Barriers to Active Citizenship in Zambia

⊙ **Lack of clear structures for participation:**

“ *Many of us want to participate, but we do not know where to go to get involved. When we go to the Constituent offices, we do not get any information about such important processes, so we do not know where to start from. After elections, MPs also become invisible and we have no one to ask questions*”.

In other words, although structures at local levels may be in place it is not just clear where citizens should obtain information and begin to take part. The presence of the civil servants from the Constituency offices confirmed such sentiments as they indicated that they could not release any information unless they are instructed by their supervisors to do so.

They too often do not have sufficient information to help citizens find where they should go to get involved in a particular process such as the campaign on ATI.

⊙ **Lack of or limited access to information:**

“ *We realize the importance of active citizenship beyond elections and we are eager to participate. However, information tends to begin and end in Lusaka. Sometimes, NGOs like you come once and never return till the next elections, just like politicians. So where can we get information such as you have given us today?*”

Information sometimes does not go far enough to allow many citizens to participate. Government has the primary role to ensure information goes to every citizen, but since NGOs have also taken up this role to complement government efforts, citizens expect NGOs to avail them of the information.

- ⊙ **Low levels of education:** Another point raised at the forums was that many citizens fail to participate in governance apart from elections because; they do not understand complex processes due to low levels of education. During elections, they are able to do so because, politicians take time to go to the lowest levels to explain the issues, but that is not the case between elections. Furthermore, many issues are presented in English, which also creates another barrier for comprehension and eventual participation in governance.

- ⊙ **Poverty:**

“ Many of our people have a desire to get involved in public affairs even after elections but they have no time. What occupies their minds is where they would get the next meal. This can be taken as lack of interest, but that is not the case. I am a Pastor and I encourage people to be active citizens. However, if they spent their time on governance issues, they will have no food”.

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Poverty was presented as a major barrier especially for citizens in Zambian rural communities. It was pointed out that in fact after elections, fewer people, mostly from urban areas are the ones expected to speak on behalf of the masses whose time is spent on making ends meet.

- ⊙ **Disillusionment due to Governments' lack of commitment to development:** The failure of governments to deliver development also poses a challenge to active citizenship. Participants at different indicated that when governments' policies do not translate into citizens have access to basic needs such as clear water, education, good health care, food and shelter, they see no incentive to become active citizens since there are no benefits to being one.

The only thing they do not give up is voting because it allows them to remove the government that is not performing even if they have to replace it with one that too will not affect their lives much. The satisfaction in this case lies in just being able to indicate to a seating President that we have the power to remove you through the vote.

Building Active **Citizenship**

Given the above, challenges to being an active citizen, how can active citizenship be encouraged? Below are some suggested ways of building or encouraging citizens' participation:

- i. **Linking faith with democratic participation:** Active citizenship begins with an individual's willingness to take up their role in shaping the development of their community or the nation. However, this is only a starting point that needs to be nurtured and encouraged. For it to be nurtured, it needs to be a value a society holds. This requires learning and the Church can take formation in such a value as their primary duty.

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It is important that faith is demonstrated through participating in all spheres of life and democratic participation should be an important aspect in one's life. This calls for love of one's neighbour which often finds its expression in promoting the common good- that which benefits a society. This significant role may not exclusively be played by the Church, but by all including politicians.

Politicians too can prevent this value in their political statements beyond campaign times. If citizenship beyond elections is embraced as a value, democratic participation would appear almost a part of life.

- ii. **Accessible Political Structures in Place:** Active citizenship cannot exist in a vacuum. It needs clear and accessible structures to enhance it. Structures for participation such as Constituency offices may be in place but if there are no clear guidelines for the people to gain knowledge on whom they should see, how and when, such structures become inaccessible.

These structures are key in providing citizens with platforms on which they can debate issues of common concern so that everyone's point of view is heard and a consensus is reached which should lead to

some agreed upon action. Thus, these channels should exist at all levels beginning at village level. Lack of such structures and their inaccessibility where they exist discourage participation.

The desire for these important structures in rural areas especially was emphasised when the Coalition on Access to Information (for which JCTR is a member) held public forums on ATI in various Chiefdoms. The people's cry was the absence of government structures especially at village level and where they exist inaccessibility to these structures.

It was not surprising therefore, when Chief Mumena of the Kaonde People in Solwezi pointed out that he was unable to access a copy of the Draft Constitution long after its release; thus he could not participate in the discussion on the issues raised in the draft at that point. It is important then that government considers this point seriously.

- iii. Non-form training for citizens:** Citizenship education is significant in building active citizens. However, it needs to go beyond formal education. With a significant number of people in the Zambian population with little or no formal education, Government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) should develop strategies that encourage non-formal training for the citizens.

Such training should be sustained so that marginalized groups can develop skills needed for active citizenship. Empowered with such skills, marginalized groups will have an opportunity to join active citizens who are generally people with a higher education.

Conclusion

At the JCTR, we are clearly proponents of active citizenship but we by no means deceive ourselves that simply calling Zambians to speak out and come together to identify and find solutions to their problems, will necessarily address all the challenges confronting them. For active citizen to thrive, we need an environment and a culture that promotes it. There are certainly hurdles that exist that should be overcome but we have to start from somewhere and embrace a wide range of citizen behaviours from registering to vote, actually voting, participating in community affairs, lobbying representatives and officials.

An active citizen is not necessarily a “good citizen” in the sense that they follow the rules. An active citizen may challenge the rules and existing structures provided they do so within the bounds of the democratic process and not become involved in violent acts.

About JCTR

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is a centre operated by the Zambia and Malawi province of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), working on issues of faith and social justice and established in 1988 with a vision to see a society where faith promotes justice for all, especially for the poor. The Centre does research, education and advocacy on issues that affect the day-to-day lives of Zambians with the aim of promoting the fullness of human life of all people, especially for the poor.

Mission Statement

The mission of JCTR is to foster, from a faith-inspired perspective, a critical understanding of current issues. To fulfil this mission, the JCTR works through three core Programmes and an Outreach outside Lusaka. The Programmes are Faith and Justice, Economic Equity and Development, and the Social Conditions.

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Active Citizenship Participation Beyond Elections

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