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**New Initiatives in the Democratisation of Zimbabwe: Visionary
Leadership and Strategic Consideration in Civil Society Activism**

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New Initiatives in the Democratisation of Zimbabwe: Visionary Leadership and Strategic Consideration in Civil Society Activism¹

Introduction

The weak constitutional framework of Zimbabwe- the Imperial or Executive Presidency lacking in adequate checks and balances in the system of government- has undoubtedly contributed to the country's governance challenges.

This makes the constitutional reform agenda an imperative so that whoever comes into power comes into a system with adequate checks and balances that takes care of dictatorship tendencies. The example of constitutional frameworks of countries like USA and SA serve as good example indicating the importance of good constitution in ensuring democracy and good governance.

Given the above, there is need for civil society to ground its activism in a campaign for a sustained constitutional reform agenda which will not just provide the framework for the next elections but also the governance structures/ framework of post-election Zimbabwe.

Setting the Scene for a New CSO Agenda

First, while it is important to acknowledge the problems in the current constitutional process, it is important for *civil society to keep its eyes on the bigger picture when it comes to engaging with the outstanding stages/aspects of the process.*

Second, there is need for maximum utilisation of the opportunities and strategic entry points presented in the drafting of the constitutional draft to have CSOs perspectives integrated into the draft. *The presence of the CSOs in the thematic committees presents civil society with good opportunities for influencing certain aspects of the draft.*

Third, *CSOs need to identify strategic and priority areas* on which the members in the thematic committees seek to influence.

Fourth, there is an imperative need for *civil society to be very strategic on deciding on whether to accept or reject the constitutional draft* that will emerge (there will be need to look at the bigger picture and not to throw the baby away with the bath water).

Fifth and most importantly, *CSOs need to work for the institutionalisation of a culture of constitutionalism among Zimbabweans.* The problems of Zimbabwe are not just about the absence of a good constitution, but the absence of a culture of constitutionalism among both political parties/leaders and the generality of the population. The challenge for civil society is therefore about how to ensure that there is a strong culture of constitutionalism.

¹ The original version of this paper was presented by James Muzondidya (Research Manager, ZI) at a conference organized by NANGO (National Association of Non-Governmental Organisation) Conference- *Civil Society Leadership Conference: Towards Democratisation of Zimbabwe*, held at Rainbow Hotel, Bulawayo, 4-5 November 2010.

Sixth, *there is an imperative need for the civics to work towards broadening the struggle for democratisation beyond constitutional politics.* While a democratic constitution is important, the problems of Zimbabwe will not necessarily be solved by the delivery of a new constitution. A new democratic constitution does not necessarily translate into good governance.

Conclusion

CSOs need to look at a broader democratisation project in which constitution making is just one important aspect of the democratisation struggle. The focus should not just be about democratising the central state but also other aspects of Zimbabwean society, particularly in the local state/peripheral rural areas where institutions of decentralised despotism are still very strong.
