



ZUNDE RAMAMBO AS A TRADITIONAL COPING MECHANISM FOR THE CARE OF ORPHANS AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN: EVIDENCE FROM GUTU DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

RINGSON, John

ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the feasibility of rejuvenating and strategically repositioning the Zunde raMambo (King's granary) as a traditional orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) coping mechanism in Zimbabwe with a special reference to Gutu District. The study was motivated by the intellectual and theoretical paucity of a harmoniously synchronised and integrated approach of OVC coping strategies. Particularly, addressing the centralization of the Zunde raMambo community oriented OVC coping strategy caused by colonialism in Gutu District was the main thrust of this study. The basic human needs and Ubuntu philosophy were used as the underlying theories of this study. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews were used to collect data from the OVCs, care-givers and key informants. The study established that the Zunde raMambo OVC mechanism which was formerly and traditionally owned by the communities is now centrally owned and controlled by the government. The traditional leaders who were formerly custodians of this cultural intellectual heritage have been absorbed into the mainstream of modern government and politics in contravention to their core traditional ethics. The implementation of the Zunde Ramambo in the local rural communities is cosmetically packaged in modern contemporary strategies such as the policy and legislative frameworks. These contemporary strategies are formulated and implemented through a top-bottom or elite-mass approach that does not promote ownership and participation of the local communities in their programmes.

KEY TERMS: Zunde RaMambo, Orphans & Vulnerable Children (OVCs), Basic Human Needs Theory

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INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's social security is confronted with various hurdles due to the adverse socio-economic conditions gripping the country. The crisis is manifesting itself in the form of deteriorating standards of living in ordinary households. Muronda (2009) posits that before independence there were two streams of social security operating in Zimbabwe; namely the legislated formal policy for the white minority and the informal welfare arrangements organized along traditional practices for most of the black people. Despite the government's policies and efforts since independence to redress such social imbalances for the majority population and uplift the livelihoods of the society, the rate of poverty is escalating and also does the gap between the more fortunate and those who have less. Underpinned with the basic human needs (Maslow, 1973; Max-Neef, 1991) and Ubuntu theory (Mbigi and Marwe, 1995; Samkange, 1980) this study focused on the Zunde Ramambo as a traditional coping strategy for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in Gutu District.

Samkange (1980) argues that Africans were forced by circumstances to live together and work communally for their livelihood. These social structures and ways of life had a profound impact on their productivity within their communities. It is because of these entrenched practices that Mbigi and Maree (1995) emphasise that the adoption of any management practice, either from the east or the west, can only be to complement indigenous development paradigms. In the same context Mosana (2002) adds that it is necessary, if Africa is to resume its place as a competitive partner in the global market, to leverage and capitalise the wealth inherent in indigenous knowledge systems with which the Zunde Ramambo coping mechanism is predicated upon. This study is aligned with the above positions and proposes that there is a need to draw upon cultural practices that are steeped in tradition and social structures in developing effective, productive and sustainable OVC coping strategies for modern day Zimbabwe.

Teffo (1994) observes that in the traditional communities the existence of humans was understood in the context of socialization. People could only exist in concert with others. This is the underlying tenet of Ubuntu, "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" in Zulu, which translates into "a human being is human being through other human beings" (Mosana, 2002:25). Hence, this understanding of "community mutualism" is expressed through group solidarity of the "collective finger theory" (Mosana, 2002), which pronounces: "a man is a man only through others". "I am" because "we are". Mosana further emphasizes that the collective finger theory envisages that one must encounter the "we" before the "I". This model of thinking has the potential of recalibrating the contemporary governance systems and intensifying various ethnic and socio-cultural formations within the context of OVC care and support. Accordingly, Mbigi (1995) further argues that instituting western models of development has dehumanized large populations of black people by destroying and submerging their social structures.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Zimbabwe's socio-economic status has been strained by the prevalence of OVC challenges (Masuku, Banda, Mubvurira & Frank, 2012). Social economic challenges that beset communities have been a permanent feature and can be characterised as old as human society (Masuka et.al, 2012). Prior to the advent of contemporary strategies to cope with OVC challenges in Zimbabwe, local communities had the capacity to cope with OVC through indigenous strategies. There is extensive evidence of the traditional mechanisms such as Zunde Ramambo where community leadership would spearhead the welfare of the disadvantaged. However, the emergence of HIV/AIDS exacerbated OVC challenges to unprecedented levels. For instance, in the second decade following the discovery of the first HIV/AIDS cases in 1985, about 1.3 million children fell into this vulnerability category in Zimbabwe (National AIDS Council, 2011).

This study was therefore prompted by the institutional weaknesses, high levels of poverty and economic recession in Zimbabwe to examine the feasibility of strategically repositioning the Zunde Ramambo into the mainstream OVC coping strategies. Further to this, the unreliable nature of the public and private sectors' interventions to the OVC socio-economic challenge suggests that the local communities should play a pivotal role in the provision of OVC care and support. This study is premised upon bridging the intellectual and theoretical paucity of the integration and demassification of these seemingly antagonistic coping strategies of OVC care and support in the Gutu District. Thus, the main research question of this study was as follows: Despite the prevalence of the contemporary OVC coping strategies and the resources invested in them, why are they still failing to achieve sustainable livelihood of OVC in the Gutu District of Zimbabwe?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The basic human needs theory is an established theory propounded by Maslow in 1943 and subsequently developed by exponents such as Burton in 1990 and Max-Neef in 1991, among others (Huitt, 2004). The

expression 'basic human needs' connotes the idea of things that human beings cannot live without (Armstrong, 1994). Thus, from a conventional perspective, typical examples would include food, shelter, education and/or health care, to cite but a few. In this regard, Reyneke-Barnard (2005) postulates that the Basic Human Needs Theories incubated the inalienable and immutable human rights declared in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Burton (1990) argues that Maslow's theory is predominantly used in developing models for categorizing needs to prioritize assistance, but also emphasises the importance of addressing all human needs in a systematic manner. For instance, in his hierarchy of human needs, Maslow posited two major groups of human needs: deficiency needs and growth needs (Maslow, 1971). Within the deficiency needs, each of the lower needs (physiological, security, belongingness, love and esteem needs) should be met before moving onto the next level.

According to Maslow, a person is ready to embrace growth needs only when the deficiency needs have been met (Burton, 1990). These growth needs are, firstly, cognitive need, that is the need to know, understand and explore. Secondly, there are aesthetic needs which connote the need for beauty and order. Thirdly, the self-actualization need connotes the individual quest to achieve self-fulfilment and realize his/her capabilities in life. Fourth, there is self-transcendence, which is the quest for one to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others achieve self-fulfilment and realize their capabilities. The basic human needs were further developed and re-conceptualized by Max-Neef (1991) as the Fundamental Human Needs Theory. In his argument for the re-conceptualization, Max-Neef noted that basic needs have been traditionally defined as most important needs, implying that there is a hierarchy of needs. Thus, the basic needs are listed as being food, water, clothes and shelter.

Mbigi and Marwe (1995) argued that whilst the contemporary and traditional coping strategies look different, their common objective is in their endeavour to holistically fulfil the basic human needs. Max-Neef (1993) and Maslow (1973) emphasise that the basic needs incorporates the social, physiological, spiritual and emotional needs that are being sought to be fulfilled by the contemporary coping strategies through the legislative and policy frameworks or formal approaches. Informally, the Zunde Ramambo was also meant to fulfil the needs of people but contextually with the cultural values of the local people. Socially, people would come together to share ideas. Physiologically, after growing their crops people would benefit food and skills from the Zunde and activities. Thus, all the basic needs enshrined in the Maslow and Max-Neef was fully addressed by the Zunde Ramambo Coping Mechanisms.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON ZUNDE RAMAMBO

Concept of Zunde raMambo

Zunde raMambo is a Shona method of growing and storing grain for use during the time when food supplies are either high or low. During the time of plenty, the grain would be used to take care of the disadvantages and when it is low the poor will benefit as well. It was a traditional practice associated with the feeding capacity of the Shona kings/chiefs (Machingura, 2012). Mararike (1999) pointed out that Zunde raMambo was also practiced in the Ndebele communities in Zimbabwe and is still called "*Isiphala SeNkosi*". Mararike (1999) further attests that *Zunde* or *isiphala* is a Shona word with various meanings at communal and also at family level. The term, according to Machingura (2012) and Mararike (1999), implies a large gathering of people taking part in a common activity. The *Zunde raMambo* concept resonates well with Joseph's advice to Pharaoh the Egyptian King on storage of grain in preparation for the long famine (Genesis 41:1-57, Holy Bible NIV, 2012).

Zunde is the communal storage of grain. It is an informal, according to the contemporary government laws, in-built social, economic and political mechanism. Zunde raMambo is still practiced in some parts of Zimbabwe but not with the same vigour it used to have in ancient Shona times. The concept of Zunde raMambo is geographically understood in various ways. For instance, in some areas of Zimbabwe it is understood as the plot and in other areas it refers to a granary in which the food is stored, whereas in some places it connotes the yield from the land which is stored in granaries at the chief's compound (Machingura, 2012). In this view, it is common in Zimbabwe to find central food storage facilities at the chief's homestead.

The Zunde also played important religious, economic, social and political functions. Members of the society would take turns to participate in planting and harvesting of crops. Harvesting was normally done by both men and women. People would collectively come together and do the work. Participation in the Zunde raMambo was an expression of oneness, belonging, reinforced collaboration, solidarity, relationships and loyalty to the king (Mararike, 1999). The idea of Zunde raMambo resonates well with the Ubuntu philosophy which emphasizes humanness, respect, solidarity and hospitable spirits within the African communities (Mbigi, 1995). When undertaking the Zunde Ramambo activities, it was also regarded as a training opportunity for the young boys and girls to work for themselves. It was thus a development, educative and

empowerment model. The *Zunde raMambo* was largely intended to cater for the disadvantaged people in the community; namely those with disabilities, poor people, strangers, widows and OVC.

Members of the community would take turns to participate in the farming process, for example, preparing the land, sowing, weeding and harvesting. Harvesting was done by both men and women. The activities done at the *Zunde raMambo* were the same as *nhimbe* or traditional weeding field ceremonies (Mararike, 1999). Machingura (2012) posited that participation in the *Zunde raMambo* was an expression of oneness, belonging, reinforced collaborative relationship and loyalty to the Chief. People would bring their own resources and inputs for planting. It was through these meetings and activities that would help the King to see his people and identify those families that are in need to assist them. In this case, everybody was expected to offer their services; even those without cattle could do something like weeding as other would be ploughing. However, women by their numbers were to be given extra responsibilities such as preparing food, fetching water and firewood. In addition to other benefits such as solidarity, networking, empowerment and social cohesion, the *Zunde raMambo*'s main purpose was to ensure that the community had adequate food reserves that could be used in times of food shortage or special occasion such as rituals for the clan or rain ceremonies.

The most drought prone regions of Zimbabwe are mooting for the revival of the *Zunde raMambo* mechanism because of various reasons that include but not limited to, the failure of the contemporary coping strategies of food supply, destabilization of the traditional institutions due to modernity and the creeping in of individualism in their local communities. Oliver (1995) argued that the Shona communities understood the Chief's responsibility in feeding the hungry or the disadvantaged in their societies just as the responsibilities played the father to his own biological sons or daughters. The Shona Kings through the *Zunde raMambo* were respected as generous donors as well as benevolent lords to the people. To ensure his legitimacy, Mararike (1999) argues that the King was supposed to make sure that his subjects had enough food, hence the *Zunde raMambo* philosophy.

The Kings through the *Zunde raMambo* in OVC care and support of the disadvantaged would not only end in giving food. In fact, they were responsible for giving and allocating land to OVC, strangers and widows. This was also associated with providence of the ancestral spirits to their living children. Accordingly, this would affirm the belief that ancestral spirits take care of the living through the Kings and Chiefs of the land. In the post-colonial era, the *Zunde ramambo* concept was adopted by Christian organizations like the Zion Christian Church (ZCC). The members of the ZCC would periodically visits their farm at Mbungu in Masvingo to voluntarily work so that food can be found for the poor, OVC and the disadvantaged.

The Johanne Marange Apostolic Sect has since adopted this *Zunde raMambo* concept as it has a vast piece of farm land in Bocha which the congregants cultivate for the purposes of bailing out the disadvantaged families. The *Zunde raMambo* system promotes self-sufficiency through hardworking. This symbolically displays the prosperity of the King and his leadership capacity (Oliver, 1995). The Shona Chiefs were regarded by their subjects as the main repository of wealth whose function was to assist the OVC or the needy in the society with land, food, drink and hospitably treating the strangers. Samkange (1980) avowed that the Chiefs were not supposed to be selfish but were stewards and custodians of their ancestral belonging. Thus, such wealth or grain gathered did not belong to him as a person. The grains were distributed with special priority to the OVC, elderly people, disabled, widows and sick people and other who were in dire need of food. The food was also meant to feed the Chief's soldiers (*Machinda aMambo*) due to their roles as protectors of the community, subjects (awaiting trial), the Chiefs' advisors (*Zvikonzi zvaMambo*), the destitute and strangers.

The depletion of the *Zunde raMambo*

The coming in of colonialism in the 19th century in Zimbabwe had some negative impact on the status, office, duties and person of the Chiefs (Ayithey, 1999). He further emphasized that Chiefs became the target of the colonial masters because of their religious and political powers. It is important to note that the traditional powers of the Chiefs were compromised when colonial and contemporary packaged administration was introduced. The colonial administration introduced the Roman-Dutch Laws which limited the powers of Chiefs in conflict resolution or trying cases and other malefactors. Mbiti (1976) argued that the colonial administrators extricated the traditional leaders' authority in diverse ways. In some cases, they incorporated them into their colonial and political structures for easy control. Some Chiefs were put in the payroll by the whites' administrators in contravention to their traditional tenets. This caused Chiefs to be very unpopular with their subjects and resulted in the depletion of their influence in executing and managing the traditional mechanisms such as the *Zunde raMambo*.

ZANU-PF in Zimbabwe further depleted the powers of Chiefs through patronage, a replay of the colonial style of governance (Machingura, 2012). Machingura (2012) believes that the sacredness associated with the

office of the Chief and traditional monarch was lost resulting in African communities plagued with misfortunes of the recurrence of droughts, erratic rains and incurable sickness such as HIV/AIDS. The coming in of Christianity through colonialism also contributed, the extinction of the authority of the traditional monarchies in Africa. The reason being that Christianity managed to successfully replace the African Traditional Religion (ATR) as the orthodox religion. By way of doing that it demonised the African gods (ancestral spirits) which was, according to the African tradition, the spiritual source behind African traditional leaders, with the capability of cursing or blessing, removing or installing the leaders. Given all this the Zunde raMambo suffered a lot of setbacks because it was regarded as a sacred practice firmly associated with the religious and ritual practices of ATR.

Orphans and vulnerable children

The concept of OVC is a combination of two principal terms: 'orphan' and 'vulnerable children'. Both these terms are too complex to be universally understood and people conceptualize them contextually. For instance, an 'orphan' or 'vulnerable child' may mean one thing to policy makers and another thing to the service providers as well as another to the OVC and the community at large. German (2005) postulates that to draw out the best meaning out of these two main concepts, they should be separately conceptualized and subsequently combined as a single concept. Thus, a child was conceptualised first, followed by an 'orphan' and ultimately the term 'vulnerable children' and lastly as a combined concept 'orphans and vulnerable children'. There is some tension in the definition of the term child from the traditional and legal understanding. This misunderstanding as argued by the studies carried out by Hodgson (2008) created a tension between modern and traditional approaches in child-rearing. The Child Protection and Adoption Act of 1997 (Chapter 5.06) defines a child as anyone below the age of 18 (GoZ, 2013). The challenge comes in reconciling the legislation such as the Marriage Act (Chapter 5.11) which stipulates the minimum age of marriage to be 18 years for boys and 16 years for girls. This may be interpreted as a contradictory statement as it defines both children in the bracket of 18 years and below but regarding marriage girls are regarded as adults at 16. Thus, this concomitantly corroborates issues of cultural relativism and contestation as an impediment in achieving sustainable community-based OVC care and support mechanisms. Thus, harmony must be created between the culturally oriented approaches in child rearing with rights-based and legal approaches. Orphans are children under the age who lost one or both parents. Vulnerable children are also children under the age of 18 with either one or both parents but living in abject poverty manifesting itself in a gross lack of necessities of life.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study predominantly employed the qualitative research approach within a phenomenological framework which sought to interpret the existing socio-economic and political institutions and systems in OVC care and support within its context. The study sought to qualitatively gain in-depth understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and perceptions of people towards the feasibility of the Zunde raMambo mechanism in OVC care and support. The purposive sampling method was used to select the most appropriate respondents to participate in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. As such, 20 care-givers and 10 OVCs participated in FGDs, while 10 key informants who comprised of government line ministries' representatives and community leaders responded to the in-depth interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis where it was inductively analysed from the general to the particular. A written informed consent for all the respondents and participants was obtained. Proxy consent for the minor children was also sought before the studies embarked on. Issues of confidentiality and privacy were also spelt out. To ensure anonymity, false names were used.

FINDINGS

Data were collected from the care-givers, OVCs and the government officials from education, social welfare, health, the District AIDS Council, traditional leaders (Chiefs, Headmen and Village Heads) and representatives of faith based organizations in the Gutu District. In total, all the participants in this study were 40.

Care-givers and OVCs

Different views were gathered from the focus group discussions where the majority indicated that the Zunde raMambo is still relevant but has been affected by modernity, greediness and corruption of the chiefs. This was unfired by one of the participant who said:

The Zunde raMambo is a useful model even today if it was not affected by the modern technologies and approaches of living I suggest that Zunde must be upgraded in its approaches to suit and compete with the modern ways of living

Whilst the elderly respondents from the focus group discussions expressed knowledge about the Zunde raMambo, they also expressed that it is no longer following the traditional ethos of the land. Some respondents emphasised that the Zunde concepts and the traditional principles have been turned into political patronage of the ruling political party. Thus, it has lost its original intention. The OVC FGDs showed that they did not know what Zunde raMambo was all about, which vindicated the notion that Zunde raMambo concept, was no longer operational in the same way it used to do. One of the key informants said:

Whilst Zunde raMambo can still be relevant today because the traditional structures are still there in our communities, its essence has been distorted with modernity. It was working long ago because communities were united and living as family and the King was regarded with due respect as the father of the community. This is now a different scenario where the Kings are being embroiled in corruption and greediness of the land.

The statement could indicate the gap between the modern and the old generation in understanding the concept of the Zunde raMambo. While the elderly generation confirmed their understanding of the Zunde raMambo concept, they have corroborated the young generation's assertion that operationally the Zunde is now history of the day. The OVC indicated that they only know the churches, social welfare and NGOs who erratically provide them with some food, clothes, schools fees and psychosocial support. Whilst they recognize the existence of Chiefs, headmen and village heads and even knowing them, they indicated that nothing comes from them in the name of Zunde raMambo except NGOs, Social Welfare and government. A general meaning of the foregoing data is that the Zunde raMambo concept is no longer practiced as it used to be, and the traditional leaders have been swayed from their original positions. Thus, the traditional leaders have been absorbed into the mainstream political and governance systems of the day.

Key informants

The findings indicated that the interrelatedness of the traditional and the contemporary coping strategies follows the co-ordinated approach stipulated by the government in its policies. One of the respondents explained that community-based OVC programmes and Zunde raMambo are interrelated both in theory and practice and the evidence of this is the existence of the child protection committees and community-based selection committees established in representation of each of the villages around every school. In this regard one of the key informants said:

On daily basis we see the government coming to our communities to advice and instruct us what to do, which means that the contemporary and traditional in some instance work together. As such, there is possibility of enhancing the working ethic between the traditional and the contemporary approaches.

In support of this view, the other respondent indicated that there were government arms or parastatals that worked with the Ministry of Health specialising in dealing with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the Gutu District. As a government arm, their programmes were informed by the government policies such as ZINASP and NAP for OVC, which advocate for the multi-sectoral approach in dealing with the pandemic. When co-ordinating the stakeholders' implementing HIV/AIDS-related programme, their department involves the grassroots through the traditional leaders. In doing so, the extended families and the Zunde raMambo are also encouraged in OVC care and support. However, this respondent highlighted that the major challenge in interrelating the traditional structures and their programmes is the lack of resources and political differences at community level. In this regard, one informant was quoted as saying:

Since our policies for OVC care and support are well articulated as they are, there is need for resources especially money to implement the policies on the ground. Now that the Zunde Ramambo is a government programme, it actually needs to be entrenched within the traditional community oriented understandings to bring out the desired outcome.

The key informants predominantly indicated that Zunde raMambo has been camouflaged as a government initiative thereby depleting its original essence of traditionalism.

DISCUSSION

This study is premised upon bridging the intellectual and theoretical paucity of the integration basic human needs and Ubuntu seemingly antagonistic coping strategies of OVC care and support in the Gutu District. Whilst the basic needs are bending towards the contemporary approaches by venerating the human rights, the Ubuntu is more inclined to traditional approaches. The main research question of this study was: why are the contemporary and traditional strategies fail to achieve sustainable livelihood of OVC in the Gutu District of Zimbabwe? Evidence from the findings have shown that some elderly OVC care-givers know the Zunde raMambo concept but expressed that the traditional leaders have been incorporated into the modern government systems to the extent that the Zunde is no longer practiced in the same manner and vigour it used to be done long ago. This finding supported the literature from Mbiti (1976); Machingura (2012); and Mararike (2003) which emphasized that the colonial administrators extricated the traditional leaders' authority in diverse ways.

In some cases, the traditional leaders were incorporated into the colonial and political structures for easy control. Some Chiefs were put in the payroll by the whites' administrators in contravention to their traditional tenets. This caused Chiefs to be very unpopular with their subjects and resulted in the depletion of their influence in executing and managing the traditional mechanisms such as the Zunde raMambo. Whilst the foregoing participants predominantly expressed their views as above, some OVCs and the very young care-givers expressed that they don't really know the Zunde concept from a traditional point of view but as a contemporary mechanism that involves various stakeholders such as government, NGOs, churches and traditional leaders. Interestingly, some OVCs vehemently expressed that they don't know at all the Zunde raMambo concept; they only know social welfare and the government erratically assisting them.

These findings resonate very well with the argument of Ayittey (2006); and Machingura (2012) who argued that modern governments have stolen the traditional leaders' Zunde concept and implemented it as a top-down approach. Thus, the functionality or existence of the Zunde raMambo concept is concealed in the contemporary strategies and is no longer the intellectual property of the local community people. The foregoing proponents predominantly complemented by the key informants of this study who have shown that the Zunde raMambo is now a modernized concept owned by the government in concession with its arms and its stakeholders such as NGOs and faith based organizations. They clearly indicated that the traditional leaders are now part of the mainstream modern government who implement government programmes at grassroots and they are being paid for that. In this regard, Machingura (2012) argued that the government in Zimbabwe further depleted the powers of Chiefs through patronage, a replay of the colonial style of governance. To conclude the analysis of the findings, the failure of the contemporary OVC coping strategies to bring sustainable livelihood is enmeshed in the government failing to culturally recognise the wealth of indigenous intellectual property and synchronise it with modernity.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that, although, there are cultural and philosophical differences between contemporary and Zunde raMambo traditional mechanism, the two can be reconciled based on common objectives and ideas. The increasing influences of globalization and modernity also narrow the gap between traditional and contemporary coping strategies. It is therefore viable to establish an integrated model for OVC care and support. In practice, this would mean, for example, strategically repositioning the Zunde raMambo alongside contemporary strategies such as support from NGOs, focus group discussions and government. In such an instance, the support from NGOs, FBOs, and government is rendered more effective and is better entrenched when it is channelled through the traditional structures on the ground. It was also concluded that the spirit behind the Zunde raMambo concept if tapped into our modern governance approaches enhances the participatory engagement of the local people.

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