

**DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

**IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN AN ELECTORAL BATTLEFIELD:  
EPWORTH, ZIMBABWE**

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**2024**



**IMPLEMENTING COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN AN ELECTORAL BATTLEFIELD:  
EPWORTH, ZIMBABWE.**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management Sciences

Specialising in

Public Administration -Peace Studies

in the

Faculty of Management Sciences

at the Durban University of Technology

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**OCTOBER 2024**

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## DECLARATION

This is to certify that the work entitled '**Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe**', submitted for the Degree of PHD in Management Sciences specialising in Public Administration-Peace Studies at Durban University of Technology is my own original work and has not earlier been submitted at any institution. All the sources have been acknowledged, accurately cited, and referred to in the bibliography list.

Signed

Date: 10 October 2024

Sheila Rumutsa

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my late father Ruben Rumutsa, my mom Estere Makota, my husband Lawrence Chimboza and our two beautiful children Amanda Chimboza and Austin Chimboza.

## Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Dr David Makwerere and my co-supervisor Dr Sylvia Kaye for your expertise, patience and encouragement; your feedback and constructive ideas are greatly appreciated. I want to offer my sincere gratitude to everyone who helped, inspired, and motivated me throughout my education. Without your assistance, this study would not have been feasible. Furthermore, I would like to thank the community of Epworth for accommodating me for the duration of my field work. My sincere appreciation to the Durban University of Technology bursary programme for funding this research.

My husband Lawrence Chimboza deserves a particular thank you for his support with each stage of my thesis. I would like to thank our Prince Austin Chimboza and our Princess Amanda Chimboza for making me infinitely happy and helping my mind to relax during the hard times of my thesis.

In order for me to finally complete the thesis, I would like to praise and thank God, the Almighty, who has given me knowledge, and innumerable blessings and opportunities. According to Ecclesiastes 3:11, "He has made everything beautiful in its time".

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of community-led social innovation and social entrepreneurship in transforming electoral violence into peacebuilding efforts in Epworth, Zimbabwe. It examines the extent to which collective entrepreneurial ventures can foster dialogue, political tolerance, and conflict transformation. It adopts a participatory action research (PAR) approach underpinned by Lederach's conflict transformation theory. Data was collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of financial records and meeting minutes. A community-driven peacebuilding intervention, the Peace Rabbits project, was implemented to explore the potential of social innovation in addressing political violence.

The findings reveal that social innovation and entrepreneurship contribute significantly to peacebuilding by fostering dialogue, cooperation, and economic empowerment. The Peace Rabbits project created a neutral platform where community members from different political affiliations worked together towards a shared economic goal. Over time, this collaboration facilitated conflict transformation, improved political tolerance, and mended fractured community relations. The study also highlights that localised, stakeholder-driven initiatives are more effective in addressing political tensions than externally imposed interventions. The study recommends the expansion of grassroots entrepreneurial peace initiatives as viable conflict resolution strategies. It advocates for policy support from government and non-governmental organizations to institutionalize community-led peacebuilding efforts. Further research is needed to assess the long-term sustainability of such interventions and their broader applicability in other conflict-prone communities.

**Keywords:** Conflict transformation, social innovation, entrepreneurship, peacebuilding, electoral violence

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AT	Action Team
ATP	Action Team Participant
BVR	Biometric Voter Registration
CAZ	Conservative Alliance of Zimbabwe
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CCC	Citizen Coalition for Change
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
DDCC	District Development Coordinator and Councillors
DUT	Durban University of Technology
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
FPZ	Forum Party of Zimbabwe
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
JOMIC	Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee
KDTC	Kuwirirana Disabled Children Centre
KI	Key Informant
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-N	Movement for Democratic Change-Ncube
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangirai
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONHRI	Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration
PF-ZAPU	Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People's Union
RF	Rhodesian Front
ZADHR	Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights
ZHDA	Zimbabwe Hospital Doctors Association
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZimPF	Zimbabwe People First
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolution Army
ZLHR	Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
ZUM	Zimbabwe Unity Movement

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# Chapter 1:

## Introduction and Background to the Study

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*“Contrary to what most politicians and interventions preach, outside experts, national leaders, and top-down approaches are not the only means to re-establishing peace. Bottom-up initiatives can also make a difference, and ordinary people have the capacity to address some of the deeper roots of their country’s problems.” Severine Autesserre (2012: 443)*

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### 1.1 Introduction

This study is concerned with how the environment for electoral politics in Zimbabwean communities can be transformed from perennial violence, toxicity, and intolerance to one that is characterised by rational disputation, tolerance, and contestation of ideas. Consequently, this study explored the use of community-led social innovation and social entrepreneurship as strategies for peace, employing rabbitry as an intervention in Epworth, Zimbabwe. The research is underpinned by the conflict transformation theory put forth by Lederach (1997; 2003), a pertinent framework for addressing community conflicts and violence. The study implemented and questioned the role and extent to which collective entrepreneurial ventures at the community level can facilitate dialogue, increase tolerance, and reduce the appetite for violence among citizens. The study was undertaken in the Epworth community of Harare in Zimbabwe. It is multi-disciplinary in that it integrated local economic development considerations, disruptive social innovations, and social entrepreneurship to engage the common citizens in community peacebuilding. To ensure successful conflict transformation, the research activities and processes were guided by the current political, social, and economic dynamics, with a specific focus on Epworth and a broader consideration of the situation in Zimbabwe.

### 1.2 Overview of the Environment

General elections involving the public in deciding on leaders and policy are the hallmark of representative democracy (Ojieh 2021). Elections have become a crucial component of citizen

participation in the governing process since the new wave of democratisation in Africa in the early 1990s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2006). However, elections have recently become one of the primary sources of conflict throughout Africa as some of the historical reasons for war are steadily declining (Von Borzyskowski and Kuhn 2020; Laakso 2019). The competitive nature of the electoral process leads to conflict and tensions that, if not productively handled, can weaken the foundation of states and communities. Elections also spark ethnic and regional divisions, violence, and conflicts that occasionally endanger social order, economic growth, and efforts to further regional integration.

Zimbabwe's election campaigns and post-election politics have been closely associated with violence and murder since the country's first elections in 1980 (Makonye, Ehiane, and Otu 2020). The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party has been accused of using violence, fanning hate speech, and painting their political opponents as being nothing more than white people's puppets and reactionary adversaries of the state (Kriger (2005: 31). Their methods for retaining power in the 1990, 1995 and 2000 elections included systemic use of organised coercion, the notable involvement of youth in violence, threats to restart the Chimurenga War, assertions that it was an innocent victim rather than a perpetrator of violence, and a post-election call for peace (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2006).

The history of violence in Zimbabwe predates the present government – and by extension all political players. Zimbabwe's journey to political independence was shaped by a series of armed conflicts and resistance movements against colonial rule. The indigenous people of Zimbabwe resisted the British encroachment on their land and the imposition of colonial rule during the First Chimurenga and the Second Chimurenga that took place from 1894 to 1897 and 1963 to 1979, respectively. The Second Chimurenga, notably led by the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) nationalist movements, was against the white-minority government of Rhodesia, which had declared independence from Britain in 1965 under the leadership of Ian Smith (Sibanda 2005: 1). Immediately after attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe had to deal with a fratricidal conflict called Gukurahundi (Vambe 2012). Though Gukurahundi ended with the Unity Accord signed in 1987 between Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU, the underlying tensions between Shona and Ndebele people exist to the present time (Dzinesa and Dzinesa 2017).

### **1.2.1 Current political crisis:**

The current crisis which has led to break down of communities has a recent genesis. The onset of Zimbabwe's most recent inter-party electoral conflicts can be traced back to the year

2000, coinciding with the participation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the general elections. ZANU-PF was focused on establishing a one-party state in the 1980s, abandoning the idea for a multiparty system in 1990 (Kriger 2005). It was not until the general elections of 2000 and presidential elections of 2002 that there emerged an opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), strong enough to challenge the position of the ruling party (Laakso 2003). The MDC was founded in 1999 by civil society organisations, the church, labour activists, and politicians who sought to provide an alternative to the ruling ZANU-PF party (Raftopoulos 2000). At that time, ZANU-PF was facing criticism for its dictatorship, human rights abuses, rampant corruption and abuse of state institutions and resources under the leadership of President Robert Mugabe (Cornwell 2003).

The formation of the MDC marked a significant development in Zimbabwean politics, as it provided a platform for opposition voices and offered a vision of democratic change and reform. The newly formed MDC challenged the longstanding dominance of ZANU-PF, resulting in a surge in political violence in Zimbabwe (Chikwanda 2014). From 2000 onwards, brutal physical violence became synonymous with electoral politics in Zimbabwe. LeBas (2016) notes that during the general elections in 2000, 2005, 2008, and 2013, there were 28,938 reported occurrences of political violence, more than 20,000 evictions, 10,000 serious injuries, and more than 186 fatalities caused by the two major political parties.

Zimbabwe's elections at the turn of the millennium ran parallel to the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), an initiative to redistribute land from white-owned farms and estates, as well as state lands, to more than 150,000 of the landless poor and to new black commercial farmers who had the skills and resources to farm profitably (Mkodzongi and Lawrence 2019: 1). The FTLRP was characterised by distressing levels of brutality, including instances of torture, intimidation, forced displacements, abductions, and even fatalities (Cliffe et al. 2014). During this period Zimbabweans suffered physical torture, including burning, vicious beatings, beatings on the soles of the feet, electric shocks, and simulated drowning, among other forms of brutality (Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003; Mutanda 2013). Psychological torture was also practised, such as being forced to attend protracted political indoctrination rallies where suspected MDC supporters were abused and given warnings of terrible consequences for anyone found by the "war veterans" to be backing opposition parties (Mutanda 2013). People witnessed assaults on family members and destruction of their property and residences. Fear and unease were spread over the nation because of the violence.

Most Zimbabweans experienced constant worry about their futures and those of their families, their friends, and the nation. By 2008, Zimbabwe had descended into an economic mess, with wanton political violence, and institutional decay (Chitando and Togarasei 2010; Bratton

2014). There was, however, a brief reprieve that came as a result of a power-sharing deal between ZANU-PF and the MDC, which ushered in economic stability and some level of social peace to the long-suffering citizens of Zimbabwe (Mukuhlani 2014). The levels of trust between the state and society rebounded briefly during this period (Muchemwa and Patel 2022). The government managed to stabilise hyper-inflation from a high of two hundred and thirty-one million percent to single digits of below five percent in 2013 (Mukuhlani 2014: 173). However, in 2013, at the end of the power sharing deal, ZANU-PF appeared to have little to offer other than an unchecked return to economic folly, elite corruption, and the bitter politics of exclusion (Bratton 2014: 2).

### **1.2.2 Change in leadership**

Zimbabwe's present political trajectory took a defining shift on 17 November 2017, when the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) launched a coup which they code named "Operation Restore Legacy" (Tendi 2020). The coup forced the unceremonious resignation of the country's long-serving President Robert Mugabe. At that time, Mugabe was positioning his wife, Grace Mugabe, to assume the reins of power in Zimbabwe (Mamvura 2021). However, their plans were scuttled by the military during Operation Restore Legacy. On resignation, Mugabe paved way for his long-time ally, Emmerson Mnangagwa, to take over. Mungwari (2019: 20) posits that:

"Emmerson Mnangagwa who took over the Presidency from Mugabe, was Mugabe's henchman and has been accused by some sections of the media as the mastermind of most of the atrocities that happened under the Mugabe regime".

Mnangagwa had the backing of the army (Ruhanya and Gumbo 2023), just as President Mugabe's long undemocratic hold on power was guaranteed by the military, whose leadership often publicly declared their respect for and political loyalty to ZANU-PF (Tendi 2013: 835).

Zimbabweans marched in support of the army in 2017 to remove the long-reigning despot Robert Mugabe from office (Mutanda 2023). To emphasise its nonviolent nature, the November 2017 march was dubbed a "coup that was not a coup" (Gopaldas 2018). The relative calm was short-lived, though, as Zimbabwe was once more rocked by post-election violence following the 2018 general elections (Macheka 2022). Matara and Nyamande (2018: 35), in the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) Report, state that "violent protests broke out in Epworth on 1 August 2018, following largely calm general elections on 30 July 2018". Widespread outrage was expressed at the deadly shootings of at least six demonstrators following the voting (Magaisa 2019). Between 1 August and 9 August 2018, opposition supporters and party polling agents were forced from their homes after

receiving threats of torture or death – or both (Dzirutwe 2018: 2). During this time, 199 offences were recorded in total (Matara & Nyamande 2018: 10). Zimbabwe's politics is still shaped by Mugabe's competitive authoritarian regime and the state's current militarisation, notwithstanding his resignation and death (Magaisa 2019).

### **1.2.3 Elitism and disenfranchisement**

However, a much deeper characterisation of the crisis, which this thesis attempts to deal with, is the cohesion of the elite and the systematic disenfranchisement of everyday citizens which threatens the lives and livelihoods of everyday citizens (Makone and Lambrechts 2021). Zimbabweans have continued to be sharply divided along political lines. Many still harbour feelings of fear, revenge, anger, and mistrust toward their fellow community members, mostly as a result of the recurrence of the cycle of violence and the deeply established legacy of fear (Mutero 2017). The number of Zimbabweans who are uninterested in national politics is significant and ever-growing (Karekwaivanane 2019; Musarurwa 2019).

The disinterest in politics emanates from a plethora of factors that affect ordinary citizens' participation, including the practice of gerontocracy, patriarchy, and patronage by seniors at both community and national level (Muyambwa 2018: 76). The ZANU-PF government is an authoritarian regime regularly accused of subverting the people's will through conducting unlawful and disputed elections (Lewanika 2019). Although the MDC wins parliamentary seats, these do not give them the power to transform governance (Karekwaivenani 2019). It also seems that both parties systematically shun citizens, especially youth, routinely calling them "leash dogs", or decoys of popular support, as evidenced by events from the recent past (Musarurwa 2018). Both ZANU PF and MDC are "power creatures" intent on colouring a clear picture of popular citizen support.

The MDC has a youth militia group called "the Vanguard" which works in the same manner as ZANU-PF's Chipangano group to silence dissent within and outside the party (Moyo 2020; Manyeruke 2018). There are many cases where leaders have been thoroughly beaten by party supporters for exercising their voice (Manyeruke 2018; Moyo 2020). On the other hand, ZANU PF is accused of busing supporters to rallies to give the impression that they are popular. The effect is that the numbers will validate their win. Again, as this power play happens, citizens are mere pawns to be discarded and reused as and when the few in the corridors of power deem necessary. It is not much of an overstatement to claim to that the ordinary citizens who thronged the streets and clogged social media timelines clamouring for Mugabe's removal were just objects in the hands of a few elites.

The relegation of citizens has also been extended to national peace and reconciliation efforts. The Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration (ONHRI), which was established as part of national conflict resolution efforts, has come under fire for its top-down methodology (Machakanja 2010). The National Peace and Reconciliation Report (2019: 1) claims that, due to the exogenous nature of the adopted approaches, which are not mated to the realities of the local communities, some conflict resolution efforts by the state have failed to bridge the racial, tribal, geographical, and intra- and inter-party-political conflicts. A wave of intra- and inter-party violence occurs in Zimbabwe just before or right after elections. Political violence is the most obvious sign that democracy is dying (Animashaun 2019). Despite the fact that the current constitution calls for national healing and acknowledgement that Zimbabwe really needs such a process and experience, the country has not yet undergone a thorough national healing process. “Zimbabwe has never had substantial and comprehensive programmes to give justice in the various challenges that cascade from war and violence in the nation”, note Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera (2015: 183). Armistices, rather than systems for transitional justice, have been agreed.

#### **1.2.4 National healing and human rights**

In order to address historical, systemic breaches of human rights and create a society that values tolerance and nonviolence, national healing is essential (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Benyera 2015). Additionally, it is essential for preventing violations of human rights. An organisation in Zimbabwe's civil society, the Church and Civil Society Forum (2012: 8), asserts that “healing is a process which begins when people confront the past; in the absence of [a] collective response to violence victims are left with too much memory or too much forgetting and failure to deal with the past can lead to intergenerational transmission of trauma”. In particular, national reconciliation is essential to address the repeated violations of human rights that have happened in Zimbabwe, such as during “Operation Restore Order” and the violence during the 2008 election (Machakanja 2010).

ZANU-PF, instead of coming up with sustainable solutions to prevent a relapse into electoral violence in the 2023 elections, has just continued to sponsor the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which has proved to be working towards maintaining the existing hegemony rather than promoting free and fair elections. The capture of the electoral field speaks to the militarisation of the ZEC, which compromises and negates its independence and credibility (Mapuva 2010b). The involvement of the military has led to blatant human rights and electoral violence, as was the case on 1 August 2018 with post-election violence against the opposition.

Outside the virtual space, there is a lack of citizen participation on key national issues. Intolerance of opposition political parties, inclination towards a one-party state, lack of freedom of speech, abuse of state institutions, political violence, and corruption are some of the negative characteristics of contemporary Zimbabwean politics. It is desirable that the current state of affairs in Zimbabwe changes to include effective citizen participation in governance and national development. However, it appears there is no political will to champion national healing processes. The National Peace and Reconciliation Report (2019: 1) claims that, due to the exogenous nature of the adopted approaches, which are not mated to the realities of the local communities, conflict resolution efforts by the state have failed to bridge the racial, tribal, geographical, and intra- and inter-party-political conflicts.

### **1.3 Context of Research and the Problem Statement**

Epworth, Zimbabwe, faces a multifaceted crisis marked by deep-rooted political violence, economic hardship, and a severe lack of infrastructure and basic services. These challenges, compounded by the ruling party's top-down political strategies, have contributed to a community fragmented by poverty, fear of displacement, and social division. While community-based organizations (CBOs) could play a critical role in addressing issues of land rights, poverty alleviation, and peacebuilding, they remain either absent or ineffective in Epworth due to political interference and resource constraints. The sitting government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa treats civil society organizations as regime change agents thus contributing to depoliticization of the public sphere and inactivity of local non-governmental organisations (Hlatywayo and Mangongera 2020). The result is a cycle of neglect, sporadic election-related violence, and unmet community needs, with local residents left to navigate these issues largely unaided.

The people of Epworth, Zimbabwe, have been abandoned amidst a national crisis marked by violence, polarisation, and economic decay. Development in Epworth has stagnated due to food poverty, lack of basic amenities, and deliberate impoverishment by the ruling party, ZANU-PF. The party has used promises of land and title deeds as an election tactic, reinforcing its grip on power through infrastructure development in the area. The dire situation in Epworth underscores the urgent need for community-led peace-building efforts to break the cycle of violence and polarisation, and encourage a sense of unity and collaboration among its residents. This study therefore sought to engage selected members of the Epworth community in activities that foster the creation of “micropublics”, where people living in close

proximity are tolerant of diverging views, and dialogue and work together for positive social change (Amin 2002).

The violence, polarity, and social and economic decay in Zimbabwe constitute a national crisis, yet there appears to be no coordinated effort to address these issues centrally. Instead, it seems that communities are left to fend for themselves in dealing with these problems. This lack of localised efforts to bring about and maintain peace has led to an ongoing cycle of violence in places like Epworth, a densely populated township with a long history of election-related violence.

Epworth is located about twelve kilometres from the Harare city centre. It is a high-density dormitory town administered by the Epworth local board. The neighbourhood was originally the site of two subsistence farming villages, but the land was donated to the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Trust during British colonial rule (Watson 2018: 16). The neighbourhood grew slowly at first, with households that were associated with the mission station (Butcher 1986). In recent years, Epworth has been known for the informality of its infrastructure. People who settled in Epworth, and those who provided land for settlement there, focused mainly on providing shelter, forgetting other social and psychological needs that are important to the well-being of individuals and the community (Mujinga 2020).

Epworth has been severely affected by election-related violence since 2000, directly and indirectly impacting its residents. The area has become a political battleground due to its deep-seated polarity, a result of past election-related violence. Many people have been forced to abandon their homes and belongings, either relocating to other local areas or fleeing across Zimbabwe's borders to neighbouring countries. Epworth was an MDC stronghold despite ZANU-PF's patronage (Mwonzora 2020). The Epworth community has increasingly become polarised due to the opposition's popularity and ZANU-PF's presence (Chatiza 2020). The opposition parties are currently making some advances in the area in terms of their support base (Chavunduka 2018b). As a result, political confrontations frequently arise as the nation approaches elections, pitting supporters of the opposition parties and the ruling party against one another.

With a diverse population holding differing political views, election times in Epworth have often been marred by violence. The Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission reports that Epworth had incidents of physical intra-party violence during the primary elections held in the run up to the general elections in 2018 (Commission 2018). Machamire (2018) states that "[a] number of civilians were hospitalised ... as the MDC Alliance and ZANU-PF turned Epworth into a hotbed of violence during their disputed primary elections". In 2018, Zimbabwe experienced

17 extra-judicial killings when the state responded to protests against disputed elections in various places, including Epworth (Moyo 2020: 82).

This political polarisation and division have eroded the sense of community in the area (Mhlanga 2019: 1). Consequently, many Epworth residents, and, by extension, Zimbabweans in general, now appear to be self-centred and reluctant to collaborate as communities. However bad, political violence is but one of the many barriers to peace in the Epworth community. Epworth's residents experience acute food poverty (Moyo 2020; Mujinga 2020). Most of the people in the area live in informal settlements, with little or no access to water, electricity, sanitation, or serviced roads. The ruling party, ZANU-PF, deliberately impoverishes residents of Epworth in order to create dependence and to control the community. Chatiza (2020) notes that ZANUPF's generative patronage in solidly opposition-supporting areas such as Epworth is hinged on controlling land and new settlements and opportunities for vending.

Prior to the 2018 harmonised elections, ZANU-PF promised residential stands to residents of Epworth, and this was an attempt to lure votes from this constituency. The same *modus operandi* was applied ahead of the 26 March 2022 by-elections, when President Mnangagwa and ZANU-PF chose to hold a by election "star rally" in Epworth on 12 February 2022 and promised the residents title deeds. The use of peri-urban land for purposes of election promises by the ZANU-PF party falls under the auspices of infrastructure for extraction of resources, and it is aimed at consolidating President Mnangagwa's grip on power. Holding the ZANU-PF star rally in Epworth was not a random decision, but a strategic one, given that Epworth has thousands of people affiliated to ZANU-PF who, in every election period, are promised land and title deeds in return for voting for the party. As noted by Seeberg (2014), the authoritarian regimes that build "high levels of infrastructure capacity" have better chances of winning elections and retaining power, while those with weaker infrastructures face the possibility of electoral defeat and transition.

The problem, thus, is that the above-noted problems have divided the community and caused conflicts,

## **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The overall aim of the research was to improve community relations after post-2018 election violence in Epworth, a peri-urban community in Zimbabwe. The objectives that guided the study in fulfilling the aim are as follows:

1. To analyse the causes, extent, and the consequences of post-election violence in Epworth.

2. To identify and examine ways of nurturing political tolerance in Epworth.
3. To design and implement a community peacebuilding intervention for reducing pre- and post-electoral violence in Epworth.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of community peacebuilding interventions proposed by the Epworth community.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The key research questions that were raised to help achieve and address the study aim and fulfil its objectives are as follows:

1. What are the causes and consequences of post-election violence in Epworth?
2. What strategies can be adopted to improve political tolerance in Epworth?
3. How can a community-led peacebuilding intervention be designed and implemented to address electoral violence in Epworth?
4. What is the impact of community-led peacebuilding interventions in reducing electoral violence in Epworth.

## **1.6 Theoretical Lenses Guiding the Study**

Peacebuilding, in this study, refers to the development of constructive group and political relationships across boundaries, aiming to resolve injustices in nonviolent ways and to transform the structural conditions that generate deadly conflict. In this research, peacebuilding means reconstructing broken relationships after violent elections, especially the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe, with a special focus on the Epworth community. Peacebuilding is defined as a multidimensional range of measures to reduce the risk of a lapse or relapse into conflict by addressing both the causes and consequences of conflict and strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management in order to lay foundations for sustainable peace and development.

This research focuses on healing wounds created by post-election violence in Epworth, Zimbabwe and makes use of the conflict transformation theory and restorative justice theory to undergird it. Lederach's conflict transformation theory offers an important theoretical foundation for the study. The underlying assumption of the conflict transformation theory is to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structure, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach 2014: 15).

The aim of the current study was to improve community relations that have been disrupted since the 2018 election violence in Epworth, and hence this theory will be crucial in responding to the real-life problem of trauma in the community.

In support, Parlevliet (2010) postulates that conflict transformation contains both an academic rigour and practical relevance. Therefore, reconciliation of individuals and communities contribute to the process of conflict transformation. To complement the conflict transformation theory, the concept of peace infrastructures was incorporated into this study. Peace infrastructures are societal structures and platforms that allow ordinary people to construct new relationships based on civility, dialogue, and peace (Ojielo 2007). The peace infrastructures theory guided the study into working with local and grassroots actors in addressing the roots of conflicts in Epworth, as expounded by Davis (2016). It also helped in framing an inclusive platform for constructive relationship-building among conflicting residents in the Epworth community. The significance of local players cannot be over emphasised. Richmond (2012: 22) observes that “peace infrastructures bear significant potential as long as they are internally and not externally shaped”. This study relied on local people to understand context and to build relationships that became the base on which the intervention was built; this potential can catapult the Peace Rabbits project into the future. At the centre of this study was working with people from different and conflicting backgrounds to build relationships of trust, cordiality, and comradeship in the Epworth community.

## **1.7 Research Design**

This study was designed as an exploratory action research design guided by three components, namely the exploration, the action research and the evaluation (Calzada, Pérez-Battle & Battle-Montserrat 2021; Shani & Eberhardt 1987; Smith 2015). The exploratory phase of the study was a gradual process to understand the key contextual characteristics and challenges faced in the Epworth community from the perspective of residents and literature before embarking on action-oriented engagements (Smith 2015). I relied on grey literature, published journal articles and in-depth interviews with community members so as to have a good grasp of the issues faced in Epworth.

The second phase involved co-creation of intervention strategies with the participants (the Action Research Team, hereafter AT), and implementing the planned intervention. I worked with the AT to formulate and implement an intervention to mitigate the challenges faced in the Epworth community. Specifically, we opted for a cuniculture project, which I will describe in more detail below, as an intervention strategy.

The third phase of the project was the evaluation. While it appears that the evaluation was done at the end of the project, in reality this was ongoing and running parallel to the implementation of the intervention. We would meet at regular intervals with the AT, reviewing progress and adjusting our course of action as required by the circumstances. The process evaluation was far much important than the endline evaluation, as it ensured that we did not reach the end of the project to find it had been a futile exercise.

## **1.8 Peace Rabbits: A Social Innovation**

In light of the challenges faced by the Epworth community this study followed a participatory action research approach to engage community members in conflict transformation. A select group of community members agreed on pursuing cuniculture as a social innovation grounded in entrepreneurship. A social innovation is an intervention useful for addressing community societal challenges. It is an effective, efficient, and sustainable novel solution to existing social challenge (Mason et al. 2015). As a social innovation, cuniculture provided an opportunity to solve social challenges using a model that is aligned with business innovation, thus allowing for a rounded implementation of solutions that can cater for all aspects of the problem faced.

This study called the cuniculture project “Peace Rabbits” primarily due to the fact that the wording is easy for the researched community, and it also expresses the goal of the project with ease. The concept was largely inspired by the Peace Garden project, which served as a model in orienting participants about action research and peacebuilding (Rukuni 2018). In discussing how peace can be cultivated through mindful, resourceful activities, I frequently referenced the Peace Garden as a guiding example. When I casually suggested creating our own ‘Peace Rabbits’, the participants enthusiastically embraced the idea, transforming it from a concept into a meaningful project title. Rukuni introduced the Peace garden idea which fundamentally is a home-grown intervention strategy that uses readily available resources in promoting youth empowerment and durable peace (Rukuni 2022).

The Peace Rabbits project allowed people from across the political divide to raise rabbits together, not only for family consumption and to sustain their livelihoods, but mainly for transforming their relationships which have suffered due to past election-related violence. Peace rabbits are used in this study as an intervention strategy where people of diverse political orientation carry out rabbitry together in order to transform their negative attitudes towards one another into positive ones. There is evidence that when people work together, differences will be settled (Rukuni 2022). Although rabbitry has been a common project used for other purposes, such as meat, using them as peacebuilding and conflict transformation agents in broken communities has remained an unexplored and unresearched area.

The choice to embark on the rabbits project as a way of establishing a mechanism for preventing violence during election periods was also symbolic. The researched community imagined that the peaceful nature of rabbits would always remind the people in the community to maintain peace. Symbolism plays a huge part in the Zimbabwean politics of peaceful resistance. Recently, the #ThisFlag movement was applauded for effectively channelling the Zimbabwean flag to prompt the politically-isolated to partake in governance issues (Mawere 2020: 185). Elsewhere, the dove and olive branch were used symbolically by early Christians and then eventually became a secular peace symbol, popularised by a dove lithograph by Pablo Picasso after World War II. Rabbits are social creatures with gentle natures and individual personalities. Their gentle nature acted as a reminder to the people of the community that violence was not the last resort, and this is why the community chose the rabbit project to act as their symbol of peace.

Farming projects have been used in post-conflict situations (and indeed in areas of continuing conflict) as a means of bringing people together, providing sanctuary and fulfilling a basic need for food: a form of psychosocial peacebuilding, inclusive of age, gender and ability, both physical and intellectual. Likewise, the rabbit project is very useful in bringing reconciliation in post-conflict situations. For example, the Peace Rabbit project brought people from different political backgrounds together as well as people with different political dissatisfactions. Through the project they were able to give each other duties such as cleaning the hutches. It was through those duties that indeed people learnt to set aside political differences and focus more on the production of their project. The results were positive in showing that people with political differences can work together over something.

## **1.9 Methodology**

The research made use of an advocacy participation worldview type of inquiry and qualitative research design, combined with exploratory research design, action research and evaluation components. As qualitative research, the methods of collecting primary data for the research included focus group discussions (FDGs), in-depth interviews and participant observations. According to Mohajan (2018: 24), qualitative data collection makes use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations and immersions, and open-ended questionnaires to obtain, analyse, and interpret the data content analysis of visual and textual materials and oral history. Throughout the discussions and interview sessions I jotted field notes and also recorded the data using a recorder. The qualitative research data collected in audio recorded form, or written form (by the researcher, as an interview, or by participants, as in an easy or extended open-ended question) is easiest to analyse if it is transcribed and printed out. In support,

Whitehead and Whitehead (2016) posit that qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest, but lets it unfold naturally. I will emphasise the details supplied by participants, and their implications.

### **1.9.1 Population and sample**

The study engaged 30 participants who included political leaders from the major political parties (ZANU-PF, MDC/Citizens Coalition for Change) (n=2), church leaders (n=1), NGO representatives (n= 4), councillors (n=2), District Development Councillors (n=1), and political party supporters (community members) (n=20). The 30 study participants made up the interview participants in the exploratory phase. Morgan (2002) suggests that data saturation should be used to determine the sample size. This sample was generated from both adults and youths who are political supporters and Zimbabwean nationals living in Epworth. Children and other apolitical Zimbabweans who lived in the area were excluded from the research processes.

### **1.9.2 Sampling procedure**

A sample is a representative selected for a study whose characteristics exemplify the larger group from which it was selected (Yin 2014). Non-probability sampling was used to select participants for both interviews and FGDs, since it works well in the exploratory design. Druckman (2005) explains that non-probability sampling is ideal for exploratory research because there is always a need for in-depth information from a small number of participants. This worked well in this research, which was politically sensitive in nature.

Sampling is done to gather data about the population in order to make an inference that can be generalised to the population. The sample for this study was made up of active political members, selected from two major political parties in Zimbabwe – ZANU-PF and the MDC, now called the Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) – Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and District Development Coordinators and Councillors (DDCC).

This study employed the non-probability sampling technique based on the subjective judgement of the researcher. Researchers use this method in studies where it is impossible to draw random probability sampling due to time or cost considerations. Getting responses using non-probability sampling is more cost-effective than probability sampling because the sample is known to the researcher. Such respondents respond quickly as compared to people randomly selected, as they have a higher motivation to participate. The researcher used purposive sampling to choose all participants.

In purposive sampling, the researcher chooses respondents who represent the topic of interest, on the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population, and a judgement is made as to which participants should be selected (Patton 2012). The researcher made use of purposive sampling because there was a need to include specialist knowledge of the subject under study, and because of the capacity and willingness of the respondents to participate in the research. The researcher also had to take a decision about the individual participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth, with regards to the political and moral debates that surround the electoral violence.

### **1.9.3 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis, a method for categorising qualitative data, was used to assess the data. Data analysis includes breaking a complex whole down into its constituent components, frequently scaling it down to manageable size, and then extracting themes and patterns from the data (Hofisi, Hofisi & Mago 2001). When anything new is developed, according to De Vos *et al* (2011: 450), it should be evaluated; in this case, Peace Rabbits had been established. In order to ascertain whether there had been any beneficial change in the community's strained ties, the Peace Rabbits outcomes were evaluated using a series of perceptive questions.

## **1.10 Significance of the Study**

Zimbabwe has encountered violence at different periods, particularly during elections – for instance in 2000, 2005 and 2008. In all these electoral periods, violent clashes between the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) were experienced, resulting in the beatings, human trafficking, abductions, murder, illegal disappearances, and torture, as well as destruction and looting of properties. This study looked at the dynamics of pre- and post-election violence in Zimbabwe and attempts to provide a significant insight into the possibility of building grassroots reconciliation in a violence-stricken Epworth community.

Epworth, a densely populated township in Zimbabwe, has been grappling with a complex web of conflicts, ranging from political polarisation and violence to economic hardships and social decay. These challenges have left the community fractured and struggling to find solutions. In such a context, conducting Participatory Action Research (PAR) emerged as a crucial approach to comprehensively address these issues. Epworth residents often feel abandoned and marginalised, and engaging them in the research process empowered them to take ownership of their challenges.

Through active involvement in problem identification, data collection, and analysis, community members gained a sense of agency and ownership over the research process. This empowerment was vital for fostering a community-driven approach to conflict resolution and development. By involving community members, the study tapped into their local knowledge and experiences, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the conflict's underlying causes. This localised insight was invaluable in crafting effective and context-specific interventions. Furthermore, the study contributes towards policymaking regarding the electoral process in Zimbabwe so as to have peaceful communities. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to have studies and research into the lasting effects associated with post-election violence and probe how reconciliation can be attained, particularly at grassroots level.

### **1.11 Delimitations**

This study was carried out with Epworth residents who had reached 18 years of age as these are people who are able to vote. The participants were drawn from across the gender divide. The findings are applicable in Epworth and do not represent the whole of Zimbabwe. The area has been of interest to the researcher because since 2008 some parts of the Epworth community have been badly hit by violence related to elections. This study was conducted in Epworth and focused on purposively-selected participants coming from different ethnic, religious, educational, and political backgrounds.

### **1.12 Limitation**

The study was conducted during a time when the world was facing the common challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. This had an impact on the availability of the respondents to be interviewed. The sensitivity of the study is also a concern. The study was conducted in an environment where the people who had experienced the violence and whose relationships were disturbed were still alive. This might risk the researcher becoming emotionally attached to the study, thus undermining their judgement. To solve this limitation, the researcher adhered strictly to the research guidelines and observed the ethical considerations.

### **1.13 Outline of Thesis Chapters**

This study, that sought to transform post-conflict relationships in Epworth, Zimbabwe via Peace Rabbits, comprises five parts. The first part contains a single chapter detailing the general background to the study as well as a general overview of the entire thesis. The second part comprises three chapters, which together constitute the literature review section and the appraisal of literature related to this study. The third part of this study consists of two chapters

that discuss the research design, methodology and data collection methods employed in this study, and the intervention strategy. Part four of the study contains three chapters which encompass the data presentation and analysis, the emerging themes, and the preliminary evaluation chapters. Part five of the study comprises a single chapter which provides a summary, a conclusion, and recommendations drawn from the entire study. The ten chapters are outlined below:

#### Chapter 1: Introduction and Background of Study

This chapter consists of an introduction, and states the problem, objectives, context and rationale of the study. It also contains the operationalisation and conceptualisation of key terms.

#### Chapter 2: Causes, Extent and Consequences of Political Violence in Zimbabwe

This provides a detailed background to the political violence in Zimbabwe and identifies causes, extents and consequences of this violence.

Chapter 3: This chapter discusses the historical context and present-day realities of Epworth. It examines the intricate dynamics of power and patronage wielded by politicians, which they often use to subdue local residents.

#### Chapter 4: Community Peacebuilding Theories and Political Tolerance

The chapter discusses key theories of conflict, violence and conflict transformation utilised in the study. It unpacks key conceptual issues relating to the study.

#### Chapter 5: Peace Infrastructures and Peacebuilding

This chapter discusses the peace infrastructures guiding the study. It reflects on the understanding of peacebuilding lenses adopted to outline the factors that shape intervention strategies in building peace.

#### Chapter 6: Research Methodology

This chapter gives a detailed explanation of study design and methodology.

#### Chapter 7: Constituting the Action Research Team

The chapter outlines in detail the methodological steps of the action research process that were undertaken.

## Chapter 8: Drivers of Political Violence in Epworth

This chapter focuses on assessing the effectiveness of community peacebuilding in Epworth, Zimbabwe.

## Chapter 9: Peacebuilding through Peace Rabbitry

This chapter focuses on interventions with the action team and their outcome.

## Chapter 10: Discussion and Analysis of the Action Intervention

The chapter presents a thematic discussion of the intervention process.

## Chapter 11: Evaluation of the Action Research Intervention

The chapter discusses the detailed evaluation techniques and steps that were utilised in the intervention processes. It outlines the feedback and its impact in understanding peacebuilding projects such as peace rabbits.

## Chapter 12: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

The chapter provides a detailed summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.

### **1.14 Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the study, its setting, the research context, the challenges that the people of Epworth face, and data gathering techniques, as well as the theories that drive the research. The chapter also emphasised the motivating elements that led me to carry out this research and provided the dissertation structure. The following chapter examines the literature that is relevant to this research.

# Chapter 2: Causes, Extent and Consequences of Political Violence in Zimbabwe

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the first objective of the research, which is to determine the causes, extent, and consequences of post-election violence in Epworth. Zimbabwe has a difficult past woven in threads of resilience, struggle, and – unfortunately – periods of politically motivated violence. The country's violent past, dating as far back as the thirteenth century to the era of the Munhumutapa empire; however, this study will trace the history of violence from the year 2000. The decision to retrace the violence from 2000 is not an oversight, but a deliberate choice made in light of the pressing significance of recent events.

There is a wealth of scholarship giving an excellent account of Zimbabwe's history, starting from the precolonial era, marked by the rise and fall of indigenous kingdoms, trade routes, and cultural exchanges (Martin, Johnson, and Mugabe 1981; Mazarire 2009). These centuries are replete with stories of leadership, diplomacy, and, at times, conflict (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a; Charumbira 2020; Raftopoulos and Mlambo 2009). Research has shown that the violence experienced in Zimbabwe is in part a legacy of its colonial past (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ruhanya 2020). Zimbabwe's former President, the late Robert Mugabe, pursued a politics characterised by "authoritarianism marked by an antipathy towards norms of liberal governance and disdain for human rights and democracy" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009b: 1139). The nationalists resorted to the detention, torture and killings used by the colonial regime by using violence and intimidation in mobilising and competing for supporters (Kwashirai 2023a). This tainted past had the effect of making Zimbabwe's political culture synonymous with violence from independence onwards.

The birth of an independent Zimbabwe did not usher in a peaceful nation (Ngwenya 2017). The 1980 government of national unity, which included the late Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo and several ministers belonging to the Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front (PF ZAPU), crumbled in 1982 (Mutero 2017: 18). As early as 1981, the new state of Zimbabwe was already embroiled in a messy fratricidal conflict, code named Gukurahundi, which was a feud between the Ndebele and the Shona, ending in 1987 (Sachikonye 2004a: 5). The fratricidal Gukurahundi is probably the biggest contributor to the frosty relations between the Shona and Ndebele today (Ngwenya 2017). Gukurahundi was hatched as a genocide meant to exterminate political opposition by Zimbabwe's former President Robert Mugabe. However, the popular narrative shaped by Mugabe's government positions Gukurahundi as an internal

war caused by tribalistic dissidents (Rwafa 2012). As a result, Zimbabwe continues to be polarised along ethnic and other lines which include (but are not limited to) politics and religion. The tribal differences manifest not just in politics but in social games such as soccer (Ncube 2014). The aforementioned scholars, among many, give a detailed treatment of Zimbabwe's history. However, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a contemporary lens through which to understand Zimbabwe's history of violence and its far-reaching consequences in the present day.

The year 2000 serves as an important marker of the current crisis in Zimbabwe, as it was the beginning of a decade of crisis, with unprecedented intra-political party violence between ZANU-PF and MDC supporters, and it also signalled the beginning of Zimbabwe's economic downturn. Conversely, the year 2018 is important in that it signalled a period of great hope and anticipation for many Zimbabweans who yearned for positive change and looked towards a future free from authoritarianism (Asuelime 2018; Moore 2018). The political events of 2018, following the 2017 coup, which was marked by the forced resignation of long-standing President Robert Mugabe and wild street celebrations, raised expectations for a brighter, more democratic Zimbabwe (Hlongwana 2018).

But as history often reminds us, transitions are rarely seamless. In the wake of these monumental changes, Zimbabwe confronted a unique set of challenges. Zimbabwe faces economic struggles and political uncertainty that threatens the quality of life and relationships in the society. Moreover, the persistence of violence, though transformed in its manifestation, remains an ever-present concern. By starting my analysis with the events of 2000, I aim to scrutinise these recent developments and their implications, providing insights into the evolving nature of violence in Zimbabwe. This chapter will, therefore, delve into the complexities of political power, economic disparities, and social tensions that have contributed to this modern-day narrative of violence experienced in the Epworth community.

After its formation in 1999, the MDC attracted thousands of supporters, including the business community and white commercial farmers, and ZANU-PF began to lose its grip as a dominant political party (Lodge 2005). The ZANU-PF regime resorted to drastic measures to rescue itself from certain defeat in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Public data on political violence for the period 1998 to 2018 indicate that Zimbabwe was the most violent country in the SADC region. Most of the violence was aimed at civilians by political militia, and a very significant amount of the violence (46%) occurring during the election period (Research & Advocacy Unit 2018:2).

## **2.2 A decade of crisis: electoral violence, 2000-2008**

The years 2000 to 2008 had the most electoral violence compared to the previous decades and this was largely due to the formation of the MDC (Mlambo and Raftopoulos 2010). There was a constant increase in political violence from 2001 to 2008 in both public and private spaces (Moyo 2008). In 2005 violence increased due to Operation Murambatsvina which directly and indirectly affected more than 700 000 people (Potts 2007). Besides the violence, the years between 2000 and 2008 were also a period of economic decline in Zimbabwe (Gumbe and Kaseke 2011). Many citizens resorted to illegal economic activities such as gold and diamond panning, and money laundering (Chagonda 2010). The illegal economic activities were coupled with alcohol and substance abuse that in turn resulted in a high incidence of casual sex and a high rate of HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe. Most of the new HIV infections at that time were associated with the poor, leading Lopman et al. (2007) to question whether HIV was becoming a disease of the poor in Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans were living undignified lives, with many faced with harsh living conditions.

The 2005 parliamentary elections, although flawed, were more peaceful in the run-up (Vollan 2005). However, in the immediate aftermath, the government embarked on Operation Murambatsvina ("Clear of Filth"), an eviction campaign that left more than 700 000 individuals homeless (Nicolai 2005: 816). The evictions and the demolitions of so-called illegal structures were carried out in the high-density urban areas throughout the country. In its justification, the state claimed the operation was to remove criminal elements and clean the cities. However, human rights groups and political analysts stated that the main aim was to punish those in the targeted high-density areas who had voted for the MDC during the 2005 elections (Bratton & Masunungure 2007).

The major political violence crisis in Zimbabwe began in March 2007, when the MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai and MDC civil society activists were arrested and brutally assaulted and tortured by the state security agencies (Human Rights Watch 2007). The above account shows that Zimbabwe's elections were problematic from 2000, when ZANU-PF was challenged by the MDC and the ZANU-PF government responded with a campaign of violence, intimidation and repression. According to Munoriyarwa and Chambwera (2020), the media played a very influential role in Zimbabwe's political violence. There was polarisation in the media's accounts of the incitement of electoral violence. The state-owned press and media blamed the MDC for the electoral violence, while the private media houses blamed ZANU-PF for inciting violence. Musingi (2008) posits that throughout the 2008 elections, ZANU-PF controlled the media and the dissemination of information in education systems and political

boards. The MDC was not given space in the public media which was used by the majority of voters.

From the beginning to the end of the 2008 election year, Zimbabwe's political environment was darkened by violent preparations for the March elections and the bloodier June presidential run-off elections. The extreme 2008 electoral violence was interpreted by the opposition as an "almost inexplicable moment of rupture" (Alexander & Chitofiri 2010: 673). According to Chari (2010: 10), the first round of the presidential elections in March 2008 did not produce a conclusive winner, and this necessitated a second round of voting between ZANU-PF's Mugabe and the MDC's Tsvangirai, thus intensifying the political uncertainty. The results of the March 2008 election revealed that Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC had secured 47.9% of the vote while Mugabe through ZANU-PF had polled 43.2 % (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). This enabled ZANU-PF to launch Operation *Makavhotera papi* ("where did you put your vote?"), and the brutality of the aggression and violence in the run-up to the June presidential election forced the MDC leader to withdraw from the elections (Welz & Junk 2009: 186). The Mugabe-led government had resorted to violence yet again in a desperate attempt to frustrate voters who were favouring the MDC in the much-disputed March poll and the run-off presidential elections of June 2008 (Nyere 2016).

The government regularly deployed the riot police to break up demonstrations, meetings, and opposition rallies, despite the law that regulates freedom of assembly. During the weeks following the presidential results announcement, reports of violence increased drastically (Fielding 2018). The violence was government-orchestrated to punish opposition supporters and ensure a ZANU-PF victory in the run-off. According to the media reports, security forces and youth manned roadblocks and detention centres throughout the country. Violence against opposition candidates and supporters in the 2008 run-off elections was very intense and it left many dead, injured and displaced to neighbouring countries, and instilled a fear of elections in the citizens because of the violence they brought (Muchacha 2016).

Despite Mugabe winning by a landslide in the highly violent presidential run-off, which saw MDC's Tsvangirai pulling out of the race, the international community declined to legitimise the elections and the parties to the elections managed to secure a Global Political Agreement (15 September 2008) which enabled them to share the power to run the nation (Moyo 2012: 70). This Government of National Unity (GNU) operated from February 2009 to March 2013. Mugabe remained as the President with executive powers, Tsvangirai was given the Prime Minister's position (which had some limited executive powers, at least on paper) and Mutambara of the smaller MDC faction was made Deputy Prime Minister. This enabled the ZANU-PF leader Mugabe to gain much-needed legitimacy from the international community

and also allowed peace to prevail in the country (Mukuhlanani 2014). The GNU gave a reprieve to Zimbabweans, but the decade of crisis left a huge hole in the social fabric of Zimbabwean communities. I present below a focused discussion of some of the events alluded to in the foregoing paragraphs.

### **2.2.1 The political and constitutional background: Vote No!**

The year 2000 heralded a new course in Zimbabwe's politics. For the first time, Mugabe – and by extension ZANU-PF – lost in competitive elections. Zimbabwe had a constitutional referendum in February 2000, in which the majority of citizens voted against adopting a constitution that was favoured by ZANU-PF (Hammar 2008). The processes prior to the constitutional referendum catalysed the shift in rhetorical and coercive politics in Zimbabwe (Dorman 2003). The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) led a process which exposed the inadequacies of the Lancaster House Constitution that Zimbabwe had been using since 1980. Sachikonye (2004c: 143) posits that

Zimbabwe's independence constitution was negotiated and crafted at Lancaster House in 1979. It bore a resemblance to most independence constitutions that were the outcome of an agreement between a colonial power and representatives of the colonised peoples. There was no broad participation in this model of constitution making.

Inevitably, the Lancaster House Constitution needed to be changed to speak to the aspirations of ordinary Zimbabweans.

The Lancaster House Constitution had had many amendments that entrenched ZANU-PF's hold on power and suppressed democracy in Zimbabwe. As a result, the ruling party was not happy with the NCA-led process and they formed a parallel structure called the Constitutional Commission (CC). However, what they did not anticipate was the damage and political awakening that the CC exposed. According to (Dorman 2003: 853)

The CC hearings provided a forum in which ordinary Zimbabwean citizens were able to criticise explicitly the government's policies. The contributions to the hearings revealed a thorough understanding of the political manipulation that had occurred in elections and day-to-day politics.

The political error that the Mugabe administration made was to allow an open process when they intended to have a flawed result. As a result, when the time came for the referendum in February, the general public was fully aware of ZANU-PF's machinations and the flaws in the CC draft constitution. The referendum held in February 2000 had the NCA and CC campaigning for "No" and "Yes" votes respectively. The "No" vote carried the day. The constitutional debate provided a forum for more open political debate to take place than at any

previous time in Zimbabwe's history – but it was also one of the first triggers of the violence that Zimbabwe's state security inflicts on its people. ZANU-PF did not take the no vote lightly. The NCA had led a campaign which represented the voice of the majority. It was a political loss which ZANU-PF dealt with heavy-handedly.

The continued political violence since 2000 has forced many Zimbabweans to seek refuge in neighbouring South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia, among other countries. According to Ward (2015: 2), this provides special challenges for those countries as they are trying to deal with their own pressing economic and social needs. This is evidenced by the increase in xenophobic attacks in South Africa.

### **2.2.2 Exclusion and violence after voting No!**

The 2000 constitutional debate sparked dialogue on many important issues that were not being explored in Zimbabwe. Both the NCA and CC held consultative meetings that allowed public participation in the constitution-making process. However, the outcome of the referendum heightened the politics of exclusion in Zimbabwe. Dorman (2003: 856) reports that “the treatment ... which had hitherto been restricted to political opponents such as the ZAPU ‘dissidents’ of the 1980s, began to be extended to all non-ZANU(PF) members, nuns and priests, teachers, whites, farm workers (judged to be foreigners) and urban residents”. ZANU-PF intended to send an unequivocal message to Zimbabweans that it did not tolerate dissent. The imminent parliamentary elections, originally slated for March but later postponed until June 2000, heightened a sense of urgency within the ruling ZANU-PF regime. ZANU-PF had not anticipated defeat, and the former President Robert Mugabe took it as a personal rejection and a political triumph for the nascent opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change.

The victory of the MDC in 2000 led to unprecedented nationwide political violence (Kwashirai 2023b). The 2000 parliamentary elections were the first violent elections that the majority of current voters had witnessed. It was the first time that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a party formed in 1999, had taken part in elections. ZANU-PF unleashed a reign of terror on citizens, although the terror campaign in the urban areas was on a much smaller scale compared to the rural areas. Perpetrators of political violence were not prosecuted and senior government officials made declarations that they would respect the rulings of the judiciary (Mbeki, Mills, and Phaswana 2001: 6).

ZANU-PF leaders fuelled violence through their campaign statements which labelled the MDC as a white party representing British interests in Zimbabwe. The MDC polled 57 parliamentary

seats out of 120 contested seats in its first election since its formation, while ZANU-PF got 62 seats (Kriger 2005: 26). As a result, ZANU-PF did not have an outright two thirds majority in parliament, thus preventing them from making constitutional amendments. This was a first since independence, and what made it worse was that the MDC had triumphed despite the use of violence by ZANU-PF (Alexander 2000).

The ZANU-PF government willingly created an environment of violence and lawlessness in Zimbabwe, all in a bid to retain power. The former Minister of Defence was quoted as saying, “We will move door to door killing ... I am the minister responsible for defence, therefore I am capable of killing” (Forum 2001: 39). On another occasion, in 2006 during the Heroes’ Day holiday, President Mugabe publicly warned that his security forces would pull the trigger against protesters. A month later, police conducted a violent crackdown against the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) leaders who had organised a protest against rising inflation and economic meltdown (Ploch 2010: 11).

However, it is important to highlight that it was not only ZANU-PF which used violence in the 2000 parliamentary elections: the MDC, too, incited violence, although on a smaller scale. For example, when addressing a workers rally in Harare in 2000, the then-MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai stated: “What we would like to tell Mugabe today is that please go peacefully. If you do not want to go peacefully, we will remove you violently” (Truscott 2000: 1). This statement was hugely condemned by analysts, and soon afterwards Tsvangirai was arrested by the government on trumped-up charges of attempting to overthrow a constitutionally elected government.

Besides the physical violence, ZANU-PF also resorted to excluding suspected and known opposition supporters from government-funded development projects (Commission 2016; Howard-Hassmann 2010). This was not an entirely new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. It seemed like a strategy perfected from the Gukurahundi era, when people living in the Matebeleland provinces were marginalized. To date, Shona and Ndebele people have relations that are in part strained by the unequal distribution of wealth and services (Mhlanga and Mpofu 2017). The preferential treatment of certain groups of citizens while others are left marginalised leads to polarisation in communities. ZANU-PF members were given preferential treatment and at times some groups such as the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) were a law unto themselves. Over time the marginalisation has also led to both protest votes and voter apathy (Dupuy and Prakash 2022).

### 2.2.3 Violent liberators: *Jambanja* land reform

The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA), an organisation established by former liberation war fighters from the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), caused havoc in the country after the elections of 2000. Led by Polish-trained medical doctor Chenjerayi Hunzvi, the ZNLWVA was essentially a para-military wing of ZANU-PF (Kagwanja 2005). Hunzvi, a ruthless man whose moniker was "Hitler", served at the behest of Robert Mugabe, who was the patron of the ZNLWVA. Mlambo and Chitando (2015: 20) posit that "war veterans [were] deployed by the patron, Mugabe, to mobilise veterans in his quest to reconfigure physical space and political order in Zimbabwe". What this means is that the violence on ordinary citizens by the ZNLWVA was known and sanctioned by Mugabe.

Prior to the 2000 elections, Mugabe and the Zimbabwean government had strained relations with the war veterans which emanated from the war (Moore 1988). With the advent of an independent Zimbabwe, the Mugabe administration had neglected both the liberation war ideals and the welfare of veterans (Musemwa 2011: 124). However, due to fear of facing a united and organised veterans' movement, Mugabe's government decided to pay gratuities of Z\$50,000 (US\$4,500) and subsequent monthly pensions of Z\$2,000 to the veterans (ibid). The payout made war veterans more susceptible to Mugabe's impulses. War veterans were instrumental to ZANU-PF in suppressing opposition both within ZANU-PF and outside through the use of harassment, intimidation, and violence. The relationship between ZANU-PF and the war veterans is also noted by Muzondidya (2009: 197) who avers that:

From the mid-1990s, the Mugabe-led government also turned to the war veterans to deal with growing opposition from inside and outside the party. Since the 1970s war of liberation, the party-military nexus had always been strong in both PF-ZAPU and ZANU(PF), and the military had always had a significant say in party politics.

The collusion between ZANU-PF and war veterans persists to date. They have built a reputation for manipulation and using force to deal with dissent, and also punish perceived enemies, especially the urban electorate. However, prior to descending on the urban voters, war veterans established legitimacy for using violence during the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTRLRP) of 2000.

Having failed to achieve much from 1980 to 2000, Zimbabwe embarked on the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) in 2000, in a tense and often violent political climate as well as a worsening socio-economic crisis and waning support for the ruling party, which was facing enormous challenges from an emerging and vibrant opposition and civil society (Hammer et al. 2003). According to Hammar (2008: 28), the Fast Track Land Reform

Programme (FTLRP) was launched in 2000, after ZANU-PF's defeat in the constitutional referendum, and violently and forcefully displaced thousands of commercial farmers and farmworkers as a punishment for supporting the opposition in the referendum and the elections held soon afterwards. Fast Track Land Reform resulted in a radical and widespread restructuring of the agrarian economy in Zimbabwe, and this was accompanied by the emergence of new social dynamics and relations.

The issue of land as the main grievance that led to the liberation struggle was used as a campaign tool by ZANU-PF to gain crucial support for the elections. As a desperate measure to save the sinking ZANU-PF boat, Mugabe organised and mobilised war veterans, youth, and landless individuals to invade and forcefully acquire land from white commercial farmers throughout the country. In the process, as Onslow (2011: 9) highlights, over 1,000 commercial farmers and farm workers were killed and more than 5,000 people were displaced, brutally tortured or injured. Since Zimbabwe gained its independence, the youth have been continuously used as tools for politically motivated violence during election periods. The power-hungry political leaders have turned youths into political thugs to further their selfish political agendas.

At first, the land redistribution exercise was essentially a widespread invasion of farms mobilised at the local level and popularly known as *jambanja* (violence). The literal meaning of the exercise, *jambanja*, is telling. Scoones and Wolmer (2003: 7) note that "it has been used in subtly different contexts and to refer to different people and places, including: the ex-combatant farm invaders themselves, the farm invasions, and more broadly to politically instigated violence". Just the name speaks to the combative mood that was in Zimbabwe during the *jambanja* era. It is against this backdrop that most peri-urban communities in Harare, including Hopely Farm and Epworth and some parts of Waterfalls were built.

The FTLRP has received immense recognition from academics detailing its necessity (Kinsey 2004) and the haphazard nature of the process (Sachikonye 2004b). Authors such as Madhuku (2004) have written on the legal and political implications of the FTLRP, while Mgugu and Chimonyo (2004) focused on gender. The violent nature of the process has also been a subject in numerous studies (Willems 2004; Hellum and Derman 2004; Chaumba, Scoones, and Wolmer 2003). This study will not labour to retell the gory history of the FLTRP but acknowledges its effect on the present social and political relations in Zimbabwean communities. *Jambanja* is now a constant part of Zimbabwe's political landscape.

#### **2.2.4 Decade of crisis: violence on whites**

The inter-racial violence experienced in Zimbabwe had its genesis under the settler regime. The way that white settlers colonised Zimbabwe was in itself violent. Blacks realised that the only way to deal with the institutionalised violence that they suffered at the hands of whites was through direct confrontation with the regime (Rwodzi 2018). They started organising themselves to resist white hegemony. Nationalists went on the rampage, attacking some farms belonging to whites, and cutting down tobacco and green mealies during the night (Mukonori 2012: 30). The culture of violence was therefore embedded into society during the liberation war and this culture still manifests itself in today's society. It is one of the objectives of this study to deal with this culture of violence.

From 2000, there was a surge in violence against Zimbabwe's dwindling white community, particularly white farmers (Chitiyo 2000). Mugabe's government would change policies in 2000 and encourage violence against white Zimbabweans, with many fleeing the country by 2005 (Howard-Hassmann 2010). Violence against white farmers mounted on the twentieth anniversary of Zimbabwe's independence, with one farmer killed by a mob that overran his farm. In May 2000, killing and attacks fanned racial tension in Zimbabwe (Hove 2016). In August 2001, looters burned and destroyed white-owned farms, with five consecutive days of such racial violence in a farming area in the northern part of the country (Hove 2016). President Robert Mugabe permitted violent land seizures from white farmers, beginning in 2000, that prompted the international community to impose sanctions on Zimbabwe.

The violence towards white Zimbabweans from 2000 had a negative impact on the country's economy, on social, political, and economic stability, and on peacefulness (Ncube 2013). Many white Zimbabweans left the country during and after the violence, leading to a significant white Zimbabwean diaspora. This migration affected the demographic makeup of the country and contributed to a loss of expertise and skills. White farmers were violently dislodged from their farms, leading to a decline in agricultural production (Rutherford 2008). The violence knocked Zimbabwe's economy, contributing to hyperinflation. The land reform programme, which was intended to alter the ethnic balance of land ownership, led to the displacement of 200,000 farmworkers, leaving them homeless and without jobs (Museveni and Chibvamushure 2021). The violence and land reforms polarised the country along racial and political lines. Zimbabwe's actions and the violence against white people also strained relations with Western countries and led to sanctions and diplomatic isolation, which had economic and political consequences. The legacy of this political instability continues to influence Zimbabwean politics and governance. Opposition political parties are still treated as appendages of white colonial interest by ZANU-PF leaders and supporters.

### **2.2.5 Legislating violence: Operation Murambatsvina**

The Zimbabwean government has a track record of passing laws that suppress citizens' rights, not respecting the rule of law, and legislating for being brazenly violent.

The post-independence Zimbabwean government negligently failed to investigate and prosecute serious politically related crimes. Zimbabwe's criminal justice system promoted impunity by failing to provide justice for serious human rights violence linked to politics. Mudadigwa (2016: 1) states that the impunity given to the perpetrators of political violence has resulted in the continuous violation of some citizens by others in Zimbabwe. According to a Human Rights Watch report (2011: 1), the lack of accountability and justice for past political violence crimes and abuses promoted the spectre of further violence in Zimbabwe. Redress (2004: 6) further stresses that impunities have the effect of haunting the victims, and society at large, and are a huge contributing factor to the recurrence of serious human rights violations.

Many perpetrators of political violence were reported to the responsible authorities and no action was taken against them, especially those who were state agents and security forces. The state has failed to bring to justice those who have committed human rights violations since the 2000 parliamentary election, the 2002 presidential elections and the 2008 elections. Hove (2013: 82) acknowledges that the police intentionally ignored the politically related cases brought to them – or witnessed them, but instead carried out selective politically motivated arrests.

The worst, however, came when, in 2005, more than 700,000 people were “legally” displaced by Operation Murambatsvina. Many houses were demolished by state security agents, and some citizens were forced to destroy their own buildings (UN 2006: 3). As a consequence, most people had to relocate to rural areas or other areas. The main mission was to destroy urban opposition strongholds (Benhura & Naidu 2019: 736). This internal displacement did not only lead to the loss of homes for the victims, but also the loss of their inborn dignity, and made them “invisible”. In 2008, a huge number of people was displaced by the electoral campaign cleansing that was conducted against the opposition. The period that followed the 2008 harmonised elections and the largely questioned June 2008 run-off projected a fractious country and magnified the image of the types of politically motivated violence and displacements that underpinned life for a large number of Zimbabweans (Hammar 2008: 31).

### **2.3 2011–2018 Political Violence**

Zimbabweans received a brief reprieve from the economic chaos in 2009, when the MDC and ZANU-PF signed the “global political agreement” that led to the formation of the Government of National Unity (Mapuva 2010a). The GNU changed the political landscape in Zimbabwe for a short while. There was calmness, economic recovery, and peace when the two major political parties were running the nation together (Nyamunda and Mukwambo 2012).

A resumption of violence began to be reported as the parties started to prepare for the 2013 general elections which would end the government of national unity. In 2011, violence erupted in many areas in Zimbabwe such as Gutu, Chitungwiza, Kadoma and Epworth (HRW 2008: 10). In Epworth wards 4, 6, and 7, MDC supporters were attacked at a constitution-making rally by ZANU-PF militia. The victims were physically assaulted, houses were burnt, and property destroyed. However, according to Vollan (2014: 22), political violence was considerably lower in the 2013 general elections compared to the previous elections. Zhangazha (2013: 10) concurs that the 2013 elections were more peaceful and had very few cases of gross human rights abuses compared to previous elections.

Most mission observers also concurred that the campaigns and elections were conducted in a more peaceful environment (Essa 2013: 10). The reduction of violence was in part due to the contributions of the Joint Monitoring and Implementation Committee (JOMIC)(Jacob and Tobias 2017). JOMIC was formed in 2008 and contained members from all electoral parties, with the main aim of delivering the message of non-violence during campaigns, before elections, during elections and after elections. ZANU-PF won the elections with a clean, huge margin. It garnered 160 House of Assembly seats as opposed to the 49 that the MDC received (Veritas 2013: 62). However, there was a dispute over the voters roll and electoral fraud between ZANU-PF and the MDC. The MDC rejected the results and the legitimacy of the election (Ncube 2014).

In November 2017, there was a shift in Zimbabwe’s politics when the military removed Mugabe and took over the government. The high court of Zimbabwe ruled that the military takeover was constitutional, and the new president Mnangagwa changed the cabinet by appointing the military cadres who had helped him to seize power from Mugabe and who were loyal to him (Muita & Yitbarek 2018). In preparation for the 2018 harmonised elections, President Mnangagwa invited 46 countries and more than 10 regional bodies to monitor the elections (Veritas 2018). This was the first time Zimbabwe had invited Western observers since Zimbabwe had been slapped with economic sanctions in 2001 and 2002 by the United States of America and the European Union respectively (Alexander 2020: 8).

The 2018 election was historic for Zimbabwe as it was the first election without Robert Mugabe since independence in 1980. The ousting of Mugabe changed the political arena in Zimbabwe. The election preparation, campaigns and voting were more peaceful than any previous election in Zimbabwe. However, there was post-election violence which killed six people and injured many in the capital and surrounding cities (Chuttel 2018: 1). The delay in the announcement of the presidential results led to opposition supporters claim the hold-up was a sign of rigging and the opposition party MDC-Alliance claimed victory before the counting was concluded. The situation become fatal when the army opened fire with live ammunition on the protestors who were against the delay in the announcement of the results and claimed that there were irregularities in the results (Dzirutwe 2018: 2). Opposition activists, supporters and party polling agents were displaced from their homes from 1–9 August 2018 after being threatened with torture or death, or both (Dzirutwe 2018: 2). The human rights watch groups recorded a total of 199 cases of human rights violations due to post-2018 election violence (Matara & Nyamande 2018).

### **2.3.1 2019–2020 political violence**

In the past two years, the MDC-Alliance has been weakened by leadership tensions and political wrangles, which have divided the opposition. A number of prominent (former) party leaders, including Thokozane Khupe and Douglas Mwonozora, contested the leadership of Nelson Chamisa through a series of legal battles. This led to a Supreme Court judgement which gave Khupe the right to use the party's old name (MDC-T), which in turn resulted in new legal battles over the opposition's resources, and Chamisa went on to form Citizens Coalition for Change (Chimedza 2022).

Thus, Zimbabwe's political landscape continues to be extremely polarised. Although the need for national dialogue to resolve Zimbabwe's economic crisis is generally acknowledged, increased polarisation has led to a continual political impasse, which has also halted initiatives to develop multiparty processes (Ncube 2019). Zimbabwe's party system is further weakened by the very personalised nature of Zimbabwean politics, centred around party leaders. Civil society activists in Zimbabwe face state-sponsored intimidation and repression from government security forces (Mwatwara 2022).

Political tensions and civil unrest persisted after the end of Robert Mugabe's rule in November 2017 (Mpofu 2022). Disagreements between and within political parties occasionally result in violence targeting political party members. In 2020 and 2021, the government arrested and detained journalists, several leaders of opposition parties, and trade union activists for organising demonstrations against corruption and for allegedly violating bail conditions

(Kufakurinani 2021). Zimbabwean police arrested four people, including a member of the opposition MDC Alliance (now the Citizens Coalition for Change [CCC] party), for purportedly violating lockdown measures during protests against corruption and food shortages (Mavengano & Marevesa 2021). They were subsequently abducted from police custody and tortured by alleged security agents.

Political tensions also prevailed during campaigns for the March 2022 by-elections. In February 2022, ZANU-PF-affiliated youths allegedly killed CCC attendee Mboneli Ncube and injured 22 others after they stormed a CCC rally in Kwekwe (Masvaure 2022). The CCC also reported attacks targeted at its activists and supporters across the country. Political uncertainty remains high. Zimbabwe's human rights situation continued to decline in 2020 under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, with more than 70 critics of the government abducted and tortured. Security forces also continued to commit arbitrary arrests, violent assaults, abductions, torture and other abuses against opposition politicians, dissidents and activists. In July 2020, police arrested prominent journalist Hopewell Chin'ono and Transform Zimbabwe Party leader Jacob Ngarivhume after they called for nationwide anti-corruption protests (Nyoka & Tembo 2022). The police violently dispersed protests in July 2022, when 16 protesters were injured and a further 60 were arrested.

On September 18 2020, Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU) leader Takudzwa Ngadziore was attacked, assaulted, and abducted by unidentified men while addressing a press conference to protest the torture of Tawanda Muchehiwa a trainee journalist, whose captors accused him of planning anti-government protests (Cotterill 2020). He was later arrested by police on charges of inciting public violence. In May 2020, three Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) Alliance activists, Cecilia Chambery, Netsai Marova, and Member of Parliament Joanna Mamombe, were abducted from police custody by suspected state agents after taking part in a peaceful protest in Harare. The protest was over the government's failure to support vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown. They were assaulted and sexually abused by their abductors (Mangena 2021). They were then dumped in Bindura, 80 kilometres from Harare. While receiving treatment for their injuries, the trio were arrested at the hospital and charged with making false reports about their abduction.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association visited Zimbabwe in 2020 and highlighted the concerning number of allegations related to arrests, detentions and abductions. He further concluded that the country's newly established legal framework does not address long-existing concerns and is not conducive to free and unhindered exercise of the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. One of the key changes made in the legal framework was the replacement of the notorious Public Order and

Security Act (POSA). However, many of POSA's restrictive provisions are replicated in the new Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (gazetted in 2019). For example, failure to notify the police of the intention to hold a public gathering of more than 15 people can still result in criminal prosecution.

The president declared a state of disaster on 17 March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and this was extended for an indefinite period of time, in contravention of the law. Meanwhile, the UN, Human Rights Watch, and diplomats all condemned the Zimbabwe government for using the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to clamp down on freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly and association. As an example, a number of opposition members faced charges relating to breaking lockdown regulations.

The CCC leader Nelson Chamisa has consistently argued that the crisis in Zimbabwe is the result of the unresolved electoral legitimacy of the presidency (Dube 2022). This has complicated various political processes, as the ruling ZANU-PF did not want to engage with Chamisa unless he acknowledged Mnangagwa as the legitimate president. Moreover, both opposition and civil society have continued to raise questions about the legitimacy of particular institutions, for example, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), which they believe is partisan and captured by the state (Sasa 2022). This sentiment is fuelled by the intertwinement of ZANU-PF and the state. The so-called Chapter 12 independent commissions also struggle to perform their oversight duties. Like almost every government institution, the commissions have severe resource constraints, and must negotiate with a government that is ambivalent about their independence. This was the experience of the Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission when it issued its report about post-election violence, which was dismissed by the Minister of Justice as "biased and inaccurate." This is illustrative of the attitude of ZANU-PF, particularly its military elements, with regards to being held accountable by specific institutions. As a result, the government deliberately weakens institutions by not providing them with resources.

Since it is relatively easy to register a political party in Zimbabwe, 107 political parties ran in the last elections in 2018. However, for over two decades, Zimbabwe's political landscape has been shaped by ZANU-PF, the ruling party, and the MDC Alliance, the main opposition party (the alliance was formed as an electoral bloc in 2017). This is illustrated by the composition of Zimbabwe's parliament, where ZANU-PF (179) and MDC-A (89) hold 268 of 270 seats.

## 2.4 The Impact of Violence on Collective Functioning

The long-running political polarisation in Zimbabwe has become a deadly disease that is fast tearing apart once-united communities (*The Zimbabwean* 2014). The Zimbabwean political space is largely polarised, and people are invariably lumped into either the MDC or ZANU-PF as they are the main political camps. ZANU-PF always uses state institutions to punish the MDC, and the MDC retaliates. As a nation a Zimbabwe is divided along political lines. In the pre- independence era, the citizens were educated and familiarised with the slogan “hate the enemies” (who were whites at that stage), and after 1980 the same slogan had a new reference towards the blacks who were anti- ZANU-PF and who were labelled sell-outs. The same slogan catalysed the hatred towards the MDC leaders and supporters. Mutema (2019) further elaborates that Zimbabweans are holding on to political grudges that culminate in social disorder and economic sabotage. Such deep political polarisation in the country has created a huge rift in trust, a lack of cooperation, and hatred among and between individuals and communities. Therefore, such an environment is volatile and only a spark away from violence.

Political violence in Zimbabwe has largely disrupted the collective functioning of many communities around the country. Collective functioning refers to the way a group of individuals or entities works together to achieve common goals or objectives (Sousa 2013). It involves the coordinated efforts and interactions of multiple people or components within a system or organisation to achieve desired outcomes. According to Sousa (2013: 170), collective functioning has three inter-connected areas of functioning: ability to participate in the social and political landscape; community functioning and social fabric; and governmental functioning and delivering of services to the public. Most Zimbabwean communities, such as Epworth, have poor collective functioning due to the violence and acrimony subsisting in the community. In a study conducted by Chitofiri and Nkomo (2022: 673) on the consequences of violent politics in Norton, Zimbabwe, the findings indicated that violence damaged the collective functioning through destroying social relations in a lasting way.

According to Gavin (2018), collective functioning in Zimbabwe has been largely affected by the eruption of episodes of political violence and the violence’s DNA in the country’s politics, which can be traced back to the liberation war struggle, the horrors of the Gukurahundi massacre, beatings and tortures pre- and post-elections, and forced displacements, as well as intimidation, which is used to achieve political objectives. Unga (2011) highlights the fact that political violence reduces a person’s role within their communities, destabilises the social roots of the community, ruptures the social fabric, identities, and values, and creates a collective sense of fear. Political violence erodes community functioning by damaging the

community as a collectively owned physical location of community members, culture, and identity through killings and forced relocations, changing the community climate by instilling collective fear and terror, and causing a diminishment of community organising activities (Jones & Kafetsios 2005). Nyere (2016: 94) points out that political violence in Zimbabwe is more than ordinary periodic eruptions: it is embedded in political systems that have existed in different cultural forms over the years and incorporates the known history of Zimbabwe.

Violence in Zimbabwe is state-sponsored and covers all corners of Zimbabwe, from rural to urban areas (Siziba 2017). The nature of violence in Zimbabwe is associated with the politicisation of the military and the militarisation of politics. ZANU-PF uses institutions such as the army, police and judiciary, as well as the youth, to complete its political objectives. Over the past decades, most Zimbabweans have been victims of political violence, and all citizens are longing and hoping for a new era characterised by peace and stability that will enable economic growth and development (Redress 2005). According to RAU (2018), Zimbabwe is more politically violent than any other country in the Southern African region, and this is a cause for concern. The country has nurtured a culture of politically motivated violence whose consequences can affect individuals, families, communities, and the nation at large.

Political violence in Zimbabwe has led to a surge in human rights abuse cases, such as the killing of civilians, torture, abductions, and disappearances, amongst other forms of violence exerted on ordinary citizens (Machakanja 2010). Every Zimbabwean citizen is entitled to civil and political rights, and the failure to enjoy these rights makes it difficult to access economic, social and cultural rights (Zimbabwe Peace Project 2017). The ZANU-PF government's human rights indicators and record have remained relatively low due to its continued use of the judiciary and state institutions in committing serious human rights abuses towards its political opponents and their supporters.

## **2.5 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter outlined the background and context of political violence in Zimbabwe. In addition, the chapter also discussed the causes, extent, and consequences of political violence in Zimbabwe. It is evident from the background that political violence is the catalyst and lubricant that is used by the governing party to achieve its hegemony, and the consequences of such violence have a long-term impact on the citizens of the community. One of the objectives of this study is to find ways of dealing with political violence at a local level using action research, which can then cascade to other levels of society. The operationalisation of action research in this study will be discussed in later chapters. The

following chapter will highlight the political situation in Epworth, discussing the historical and present tensions faced in the community.

## **Chapter 3: Exploiting Poverty: Politicians and Manipulation of Epworth Residents**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The Epworth community grapples with a host of challenges stemming from a deeply polarised political landscape, primarily characterised by the rivalry between MDC/CCC and ZANU-PF supporters. Politicians from across the divide take advantage of the residents' vulnerability to poverty to retain and maintain power, perpetuating a vicious cycle of poverty and political subjugation. They lure citizens with promises of resources, land, and money in exchange for unwavering political allegiance. This manipulation perpetuates division within the community, hindering solidarity and mutual support among its members who, in their pursuit of favour from politicians, forsake collective welfare.

This chapter discusses the historical context and present-day realities of Epworth. It examines the intricate dynamics of power and patronage wielded by politicians, which they often use to subdue local residents. The challenges faced in Epworth are, however, not unique to that community only. They indeed have a local character, but they are part of a national crisis. As such, this chapter will show how political conflict at the national level is expressed in the community, exacerbating socio-economic disparities and perpetuating cycles of poverty. Furthermore, it seeks to show the effects of such political manoeuvring on the daily lives of Epworth residents against a backdrop of systemic inequality and political turbulence. For the sake of comprehensiveness, I will touch upon what is arguably the root cause of internal conflict in Zimbabwe, the ethnic strife of 1983–1987.

### **3.2 Stained Politics Straining Post-Independence Relations in Zimbabwe.**

Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980, but this did not birth a peaceful nation (Ngwenya and Harris 2015b). The country's first government of national unity, which included senior members of Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic Front (PF ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), crumbled in 1982 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017). Mugabe's ZANU-PF party was already consolidating power so as to have control over every facet of society, leading to the collapse of the government of national unity and the *Gukurahundi* ethnic conflict (Sachikonye 2004a: 176). The shaky foundation of independent Zimbabwe led to many other

post-colonial fratricidal conflicts, including the 1995 and 2008 electoral violence and present-day internal strife (Muchemwa, Ngwerume, and Hove 2013: 149). *Gukurahundi* in Shona refers to the storm of the first rains that sweeps away the chaff. As a political strategy, *Gukurahundi* entailed the violent and physical elimination of enemies and opponents (i.e. Ndebele people and PF ZAPU supporters) (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012). The end game for *Gukurahundi* was to create a one-party state in Zimbabwe, as expounded by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003: 22).

While *Gukurahundi* ended in 1987, with the National Unity Accord, ZANU-PF's desire for a one-party state did not die. In 1990, President Mugabe regarded his landslide electoral victory as a mandate for establishing a one party-state (Meldrum 1990). President Mnangagwa has made utterances and acted in ways that indicate that he is intolerant of a multi-party system (Dube 2023b). For instance, ZANU-PF controversially uses the ambiguous adage "*nyika inovakwa nevene vayo*" (a country is developed by its owners/ a country is developed by its citizens) as a rallying motto for the Second Republic. Most opposition politicians who feel relegated have chosen the former meaning, which implies that ZANU-PF owns Zimbabwe. According to Mavengano (2023: 108), the *vene vayo* mantra is "part of the present-day dialectics on Zimbabwean nationalism laden with contemporary politics of (un)belonging, contested Zimbabwean citizenship as well as discourses of entitlement and status". These feelings of unbelonging, entitlement, and toxic differences show in the lives of Zimbabweans every day (Ncube 2014; Tafirei 2023).

In the most recent past, Zimbabwe has experienced a mix of economic and political developments, most notably the toppling of President Robert Mugabe through a coup in November 2017 (Raftopoulos, Kanyenze, and Sithole 2020). The military-assisted transition from the Mugabe regime to what President Emmerson Mnangagwa calls the Second Republic brought hopes for economic recovery and political reform (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ruhanya 2020). President Mnangagwa's administration has, however, squandered all the goodwill rendered by the citizens (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ruhanya 2020; Ndlovu and Ndlovu). Emmerson Mnangagwa is a creature of habit. He is perpetuating the same undemocratic rule that existed under Mugabe. Zimbabwe held its latest harmonised elections on 23 August 2023, giving Emmerson Mnangagwa a five-year term. The President has been loud in making gestures of reform, and engaging former Western foes with a view to having sanctions dropped and facilitating re-integration into the international community.

There have been concerns about the government's lack of commitment to genuine reform, with allegations of human rights abuses, crackdowns on dissent, and electoral irregularities tarnishing its reputation (Beardsworth, Cheeseman, and Tinhu 2019; Nenjerama 2023). The

government has been half-hearted at implementing the reforms, resulting in Emmerson Mnangagwa losing a lot of favour across the social divide. The 2018 elections were conducted in an uneven environment skewed in ZANU-PF's favour.

As expected, the MDC did not recognise the presidency of Emmerson Mnangagwa, thus further sinking Zimbabwe into crisis (Magaisa 2019). The current government of Zimbabwe is a competitive authoritarian regime that uses democratic processes, including elections, to legitimise their stay in power even without popular support (Hulec 2019). Zimbabwe's leading opposition party and civic organisations aver that the electoral disputes lead to a legitimacy crisis that has crippled all facets of the economy and threatens to tear society apart. The public trust in the country's electoral institutions remains low due to the failure to address the political context within which elections are conducted (Rwodzi 2019).

There is rising electoral illiteracy among ordinary Zimbabweans. Most citizens, especially "Gen X", do not fully understand why they are participating in elections. Young and old citizens alike are unable to question the electoral system in the event of electoral discrepancies. The citizen voice and agency has been missing in the discourse and decision making around the conduct of a democratic election, including implementation of constitutional, legislative and administrative reforms aimed at improving the quality of the electoral processes in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwean government has implemented various economic reforms, including reintroducing the Zimbabwean dollar, despite the public's lack of trust in the government (Little 2021: 17). According to Mazwi et al. (2019: 233), the government also introduced the Targeted Command Agriculture Programme (TCAP), a contract-farming scheme enlisting both the peasantry and new small-scale capitalist farms, with funding support from domestic capital. However, these efforts have often faced criticism for their limited effectiveness in addressing underlying structural issues such as corruption and mismanagement of state resources. One of the most publicised cases of elite cohesion and corruption involved the "Gold Mafia", a gold smuggling syndicate that was exposed by in an Al Jazeera documentary (Unit 2023). The documentary "exposes how the ZANU-PF elite created a crisis of nationalism ... causing economic meltdown and many social pathologies through smuggling of tonnes of precious minerals" (Dube 2023a). The Gold Mafia activities have deleterious effects on ordinary citizens. According to (Jaji 2023) "the allegations presented in the documentary may deter foreign investors from engaging with Zimbabwe's financial sector and could lead to reduced foreign direct investment, impacting the country's economic development and job creation opportunities".

Zimbabwe has a very high rate of unemployment – now estimated to be above 90%, despite the official rate of 10.8% (Mwenje 2021: 37). There is also rising “youth bulge” contributing to increased social tensions, and a sense of disillusionment, particularly among the youth (Tafirei 2023). The economic challenges experienced in Zimbabwe are, however, not a new phenomenon. They have over the years contributed to sprawling urban informality as people from rural areas look for opportunities, while others leave the city due to the rising cost of living (Mukonoweshuro 2014). Deprivation and hopelessness have led many ordinary Zimbabweans to depend on handouts from the rich and elites whom they call *mbinga* in Shona. The *mbinga* plague is succinctly defined by Dzikamai (2023) who shares the following:

The *mbinga* culture is the worshipping of a few filthy rich elites, usually linked to the ruling party with access to the feeding trough. This culture is usually associated with showing off what are usually the proceeds of corruption. Those with access to the feeding trough tend to insult those living in poverty, often accusing them of laziness.

Not only does the *mbinga* culture show the stark disparities in wealth distribution, but it also perpetuates social fragmentation and polarity. Inevitably, ordinary citizens who are suffering in poverty fight to get access to the *mbinga*. Zimbabwe’s low-income earners live at the mercy of the rich: they have lost their savings due to hyperinflation and the instability of the local currency (Mambiravana, Shava, and Gunhidzirai 2022). The poor are led into fighting for political positions and access to resources so that they can also become versions of *mbinga* in their local communities. The *mbinga* culture is a national problem which manifests in different ways in local communities.

### **3.2 Understanding Challenges Faced in Epworth**

Epworth is a high-density suburb situated 12 km southeast of Harare’s boundary (Marondedze and Schütt 2020). Administratively, Epworth has seven wards (see Figure 3.1) and is run by a local board, and is made up of the following nine villages: Chiremba, Chinamano Extension, Zinyengere Extension, Chizungu, Jacha, Overspill, Magada, Makomo, and Domboramwari (Ncube and Kgatla 2021: 2).

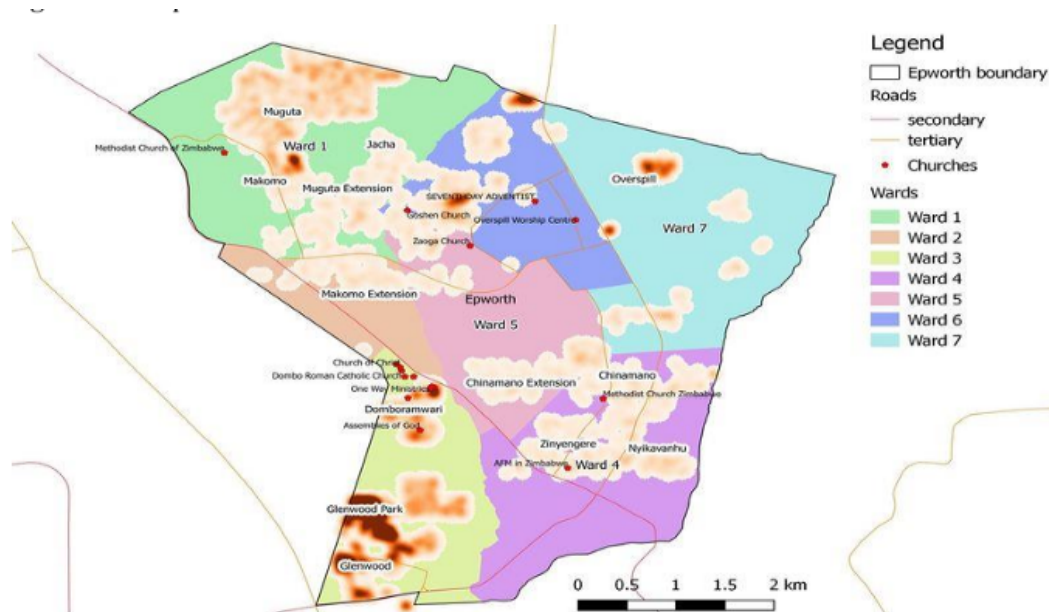


Figure 3. 1 Map of Epworth

(Source: Openstreet map<sup>1</sup>)

Epworth was founded in 1892 by Reverend Isaac Shimmin of the Wesleyan Missions after he was granted 1,064 hectares of land by the British South African Company (Nyamvura and Brown 1999). The growth of the Epworth community since 1892 has been organic. By 1950, the settlement had approximately 500 families that subscribed to the Mission values and legitimately owned land given to them by the Mission. (Butcher 1993). At inception, Epworth was intended to be a model society that lived by Christian values and standards of community, but over time it has deteriorated to be an urban menace (Msindo, Gutsa, and Choguya 2013). Epworth started facing problems of a political nature during the liberation war. Ncube and Kgatla (2021: 3) point out that:

Epworth's population grew during the war period, and people from the rural areas escaping the war found refuge in Epworth which was less regulated than the urban townships. The church allowed its tenants out of hospitality to welcome visitors fleeing the war. The influx of the people increased unabated after the war, with more people searching for a better life in the city.

At present, Epworth is a typical peri-urban community characterised by sprawling informality. The population of Epworth settlement has been growing exponentially as the economy continues to tumble, leading to informality. According to the Zimbabwe Statical Agency, the

<sup>1</sup> <https://shorturl.at/STOfD>

current population stands at 206,368 people (ZimStats 2022: 101). Bar the informality, Epworth is the fourth-largest urban settlement in Zimbabwe by population (Toriro 2020).

Most of the residents of Epworth are low-income earners living in poverty (Msindo, Gutsa, and Choguya 2013: 172). A majority of Epworth residents, in recent history, are either unemployed, unskilled, or are faced with a lack of opportunities to change their economic standing (Chirisa 2013; Hove 2020). Some of the residents live in slums and are trapped in poverty. Nhongonhema (2021) notes that extreme poverty in Epworth is attributed as a main driver of child sex work in the area. It is no surprise that adults in Epworth are easy prey for politicians who use resources to fan division and relegate citizens to obscurity. Zimbabwe has a rigid culture which frowns upon prostitution – let alone child prostitution. But the trade thrives in Epworth because citizens are left with little to no opportunities. Chirisa (2014: 13) holds that “Epworth has a population predominantly concerned with the ‘politics of the stomach’, tending to forget the issues that go beyond the individual’s plot or household”.

According to Msindo, Gutsa, and Choguya (2013), the rapid increase in population was occurring on land that did not have any water supply or sanitation facilities, as Epworth was not planned as an urban residential area. The land market in Epworth is predominantly haphazard, informal, and often abused by ZANU-PF land barons (Chirisa 2014; McGregor and Chatiza 2020). House demolitions are particularly common in Epworth, as some parts of the area are considered illegal squatter settlements by the government (Wirinai 2015). Such conditions put people at the mercy of politicians and the elite who control land. Bvochora and Kusena (2018) argue that supporting ZANU-PF is a guarantee of security in informal settlements.

### **3.3 The Politics of Patronage in Epworth**

Zimbabwe has a history of politics of patronage attributed to the long reign of President Robert Mugabe. Maringira and Gukurume (2020: 7) note that “[o]ne of the remarkable ways in which Mugabe has been able to remain in power is through his ability to transform his presidency into a source of opportunities for his political clients”. President Mugabe was accused of having a predatory leadership style that fed on patronage to consolidate power and popular support within his party (Mpondi 2015: 511). Similarly, leaders of opposition parties, especially the MDC, have institutionalised the personality cult, where survival relies on proximity to the president of the party (Barure and Manase 2020).

The use of political power and financial resources to lure and silence political supporters and opponents also happens at the community level. Politicians tend to deliberately use patronage

as a strategy for extending dominance. ZANU-PF brokers take advantage of urban poverty to build patronage networks that assist them to mobilise and coerce support as well as monitor supporters and non-supporters (Alexander and McGregor 2013; Oosterom and Gukurume 2022). The Citizens Coalition for Change electoral candidate in the most recent elections (of 2023) was reportedly involved in vote-buying (ZimEye 2023). This use of money to access political power essentially excludes the poor from key institutions of government and decision-making. The majority of residents in Epworth have given up their power and agency to politicians.

Politicians from across the political divide engage in vote buying, pretending to care about the poor during elections (Ndakaripa 2020). However, they disappear, only to come back in the next political campaign. It is common that politicians dish out gifts to the electorate, especially in rural and peri-urban areas. Zembere (2020: 63) traces the history of this manipulation of voters in Zimbabwe since 2008, stating the following:

During the 2008 campaign period, a number of populist initiatives such as Basic Commodities Supply Side Interventions (BACOSI) and provision of farming inputs and equipment as part of post-resettlement support were launched by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ). Other goodies were also distributed by the Zanu-PF leadership elite, including by the then First Lady, Grace Mugabe. At every rally addressed by the President just before the elections she donated large quantities of foodstuffs, including maize meal, sugar beans, cooking oil and salt.

Mangwaya (2023) reports that the current President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, handed over securitised title deeds to 265 Epworth residents during the election campaigns. He even promised that 11,000 households would benefit, but the promise has not been followed up after the elections. However, it is these “gifts” that turn residents against each other, as they are often given on party lines. Chavunduka and Chaonwa-Gaza (2021) assert that the MDC tried to use its majority to allocate land to its supporters. On the other hand, ZANU-PF also distributes land on partisan grounds in Epworth (Chatiza 2020).

### **3.4 Disappointing Performance from the Opposition Parties in Epworth**

Most economically active Zimbabwean citizens are now vendors with no trade union or structure (Mazhambe 2017). Attempts to unionise vendors have been hijacked by politicians, some of whom have been accused by fellow activists of duping citizens out of thousands of dollars (Munyuki 2017). In the process of plotting and fighting to take over from ZANU-PF the MDC has become violent, and now appears to be against an intra-party festival of ideas (Alexander & McGregor 2013). The MDC has also split on numerous occasions, leading

ordinary people to question whether the party has people's interests at its centre, or if is just another collection of power-hungry politicians, masking their intentions under the guise of a democratic movement (Hartwell 2018).

The intra-party violence and successive splits of opposition parties render useless the hope that politicians will bring change. The opposition parties, the MDC and later on the CCC, were given the mandate to represent residents of Epworth, both in council and in parliament. The opposition has split on numerous occasions and elected representatives have been recalled from office based on these splits. In June 2020, three councillors who had campaigned and were elected under the MDC Alliance banner abandoned the party and moved to join MDC-T, led by Thokozani Khupe. The MDC/CCC factions appear to be treating ordinary citizens in Epworth like objects, as was the case with the November 2017 coup (Mutanda 2023; Ndawana 2018). Their conduct, at times, does not inspire confidence.

MDC MPs also have a history of abusing the Constituency Development Fund and accepting huge personal loans from parliament at a time when the country is facing an economic crisis (Kriger 2012: 21). Meanwhile, residents of Epworth, like most ordinary Zimbabweans, contend with the daily economic challenges and form part of the bulk of the 87% of Zimbabweans said to be living on less than US 35 cents a day. It appears that the opposition MPs are also in politics to serve their interests, not to stand for people. Desperate citizens resort to hanging around the MDC and ZANU-PF parties as a strategy to access favours. They have no hope for a third way alternative (Gopaldas 2018). The democratisation and success of a new Zimbabwe rests on the voice of the people, the ability to vote those desired into power, equal rights, freedom of speech etc., but definitely not on glorification of individuals and creation of dynasties (Hartwell 2018).

### **3.5 Ineffective Incentivised Citizen Protesters.**

The late 1990s were a remarkable time in the history of Zimbabwe, a time associated with the citizen movement and the ushering in of a new dispensation in the politics of Zimbabwe (Mutambara 2017). Zimbabwean citizens successfully managed to mobilise themselves to advocate for a common cause during the 1998 food riots and the land redistribution of 2000 (Hove and Gwiza 2012). The movement went as far as the referendum of 2000 to show their influence and power as their "no" campaign was a success (Gwekwerere et al. 2019: 57). Unlike the protests of the 1990s, where citizens were employed and were guaranteed of an income even after the protests, currently engaging in civic action might lead to loss of income and production time. The current economic situation makes it expensive for one to participate in the citizen movement. Unemployment in Zimbabwe is estimated to be above 90%, leaving

most citizens to survive from vending (Monga, Dzvimbo, and Mashizha 2019). The conditions of food insecurity and high unemployment endured in peri-urban communities such as Epworth weaken the community's social capital, dampening their ability to proffer change collectively, as observed by Gweshengwe and Matai (2022).

In 2016, Zimbabweans took part in protests under the banner of the #ThisFlag movement. The protests started when cleric Evan Mawarire made a video bemoaning the fact that the flag of Zimbabwe had brought misery to him and his family. The video attracted millions of views across social media platforms from both Zimbabweans and non-Zimbabweans. Khombo (2017: 35) aptly captures how what started as a personal rant caught the imagination of the country:

On 19 April 2016, Evan Mawarire was in his office in Harare, wondering how he would pay for the school fees of his children. Following that, using the hash tag #ThisFlag, he decided to post an online video of himself voicing out his frustration with the Zimbabwean flag around his neck. In the video, he said that the flag, given the obtaining socio economic and political situation in Zimbabwe, was no longer his pride and inspiration. Furthermore, in his video, he claims that he was neither aligned to any political formation nor civil activist, but a mere citizen voicing his concerns against the decline of standards of living in Zimbabwe, attributable mainly to widespread corruption and poor governance and challenged government to be accountable.

The movement quickly fizzled out, killing any hopes of a citizen-led democratisation of Zimbabwe. The police responded violently to the protests, especially in areas such Epworth, Mabvuku-Tafara and other high-density suburbs of Harare. In addition, citizens who depend on their small businesses for livelihood could not risk take part in prolonged protests. Oberdorf (2017: 64) observes that #ThisFlag was nonstrategic, and its development inseparably linked its values and interests to the persona of Evan Mawarire. Differently put, the movement lacked leadership and a central organising idea to keep people together. When people went on to the streets it was purely out of disgruntlement, anger etc., but it takes more than shared disgruntlement to sustain a citizen-led protest.

However, a big challenge that hinders the progress of the citizen movement is the rise of incentivised voices. Most of these activists started off sincerely, with genuine concerns. However, the incentives and opportunities made available to them have compromised the movement as a whole. These incentives and opportunities have been used to benefit NGOs and movement leaders at the expense of the citizenry at large. Hlatywayo and Mangongera (2020: 12) point out that "Zimbabwe's civil society organisations (CSOs) had poor financial management, abused donor resources and... some organizations are run like personal entities with no accountability". The paradox, however, is that the big CSOs were more likely to get funding regardless of their participation in corrupt activities, while community-based

organisations (which are often effective) did not get funding. Funders and leading CSOs only pay lip service to the focus on the grassroots level, because operating at the grassroots requires long-term investment and is less glamorous (Hlatywayo and Mangongera 2020: 14)

The glamour that comes with working for positive change within big organisations is indeed visible. Most of the national leaders of protest movements have managed to secure adequate resources to cater for them in times of need. Evan Mawarire managed to get his whole family to the United States of America and boasted about it when ordinary citizens raised concerns. While it is acknowledged that he is a family man who has to protect his family, his actions might have discouraged ordinary citizens who do not have safety nets from being actively involved in protests. Leader of the #ThisFlower movement Stern Zvorwadza has accused his fellow activists of using monies meant for the movement for personal issues. The rise of such opportunists gives a false sense of an even playing ground and freedom of expression. This does not benefit the citizen movement and is just part of the online activism which never yields much. Nhongonhema (2021) observes from an online campaign focused on Epworth that using online platforms is questionable as it effectively excludes the Epworth audience.

### **3.6 Silenced Voices in Epworth**

The challenges faced in Epworth are made worse by the lack of local platforms where residents can air their views or dialogue. Epworth has a population big enough to deserve a community radio or television station, but they have none. At the moment they rely on the national broadcaster and other Harare metropolitan stations. The danger with these national stations is that they follow the national character, where the media space is hugely polarised and biased, making it difficult for ordinary people, especially women and young people, to have a voice and to be heard (Mare 2022). The media space is set against the background of a patriarchal culture that invalidates the aspirations and expressions of youth, women, and sexual minorities (Mashingaidze and Buchanan-Clarke 2021). The state media uses silence as a potent form of propaganda. Hence, denying Epworth a community radio station might be a deliberate move to silence ordinary citizens' voices or underrepresent dissenting voices and as a result creating a culture of silence, suspicion, and indifference by turning citizens into spies against each other.

The public trust in the country's state media institutions remains low due to the failure to implement media reforms. The state has a complete monopoly over terrestrial electronic media. Access to media and quality of information services delivery in Zimbabwe is generally poor (Mano 2016: 2). The government-controlled media agencies are often abused to further tribal and political polarity, creating pseudo-animosities that grow a fatal logic of permanent

enmity (Pasirayi 2016). It not surprising that Epworth does not have a community radio station, seeing that the present administration also uses an onslaught on journalists to conceal issues of mal-governance and corruption. Media plurality, and by extension creating local platforms for dialogue, has the potential to reduce some of the conflicts that emerge because of disinformation and misinformation.

There is little to no coverage of everyday people's experiences, desires, or aspirations in mainstream media outlets. However, it is not all gloomy: opportunities to expand coverage and amplify common people's voices (especially women and young people's voice)s are found on social media. The reach of the internet has continued to expand in Zimbabwe. There were 4.81 million internet users in Zimbabwe in January 2020 (Nyathi and Mathwasa 2022: 213). The number of internet users in Zimbabwe increased by 413,000 (+9.4%) between 2019 and 2020. Internet penetration in Zimbabwe stood at 33% in January 2020 (Nyathi and Mathwasa 2022: 213). While the government has in the past blocked internet use during protests, it still provides a platform for alternative media. There is, however, a need to be mindful of the fact that false and manipulated information proliferates online due to the polarised nature of the country's politics. Epworth will need localised platforms for dialogue to stimulate ideas around establishing community media platforms and to augment the community radios – if ever they are approved.

### **3.7 Land, Unemployment, and Prostitution in Epworth**

Women in rural and urban areas are marginalised from the mainstream economy. In agrarian economies such as Zimbabwe, access to land is the starting point for livelihoods and dignity. But it is also the basis of many social struggles, especially for most women in rural and peri-urban areas such as Epworth. Small scale entrepreneurs in Epworth bemoan the lack of space to operate from for their small-scale agricultural projects (Dambudzo and Juru 2015: 35). The Epworth local board has been accused of not being gender sensitive when selecting beneficiaries of land (Dambudzo and Juru 2015). The unequal allocation of land has an effect on urban agriculture and livelihoods, especially among women and youth. Epworth is already faced with high unemployment and many have to practise some form of subsistence agriculture, but that is only possible if one has access to resources. Without resources, including land, many young people are migrating to neighbouring countries such as South Africa. The mass migration of people who are still in their prime is causing a major human capital loss to Epworth and, indeed, Zimbabwe. In part, this leads to a decline in productivity, poor service delivery and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

### 3.7.1 The rise of commercial sex work in Epworth

However, women find ways to negotiate the hardships faced in Epworth regardless of the systemic challenges. Binala (2016: 64) observes that “Epworth women are looking after the families with proceeds from the garden sales with husbands being figureheads only as they have no meaningful input into the family upkeep”. The survival strategies are however not always decent. Epworth is also known as a hub for commercial sex work. A location in Epworth, Booster, is famous for sex work involving women of all ages working throughout the day (Mujinga 2022: 2). Women in Epworth put themselves in danger of diseases and forgo their dignity, at times risking being arrested by the police for engaging in sex work. In fact, in the case of Zimbabwe, it is not considered “work”: it is prostitution and it is criminal. Female sex workers are derogatorily referred to as *hure* or *pfambi* in Zimbabwe. Chitando (2011: 93) aptly describes how these two terms dehumanise women:

Both *pfambi* and *hure* are derogatory terms given that they imply immorality and deviant behaviour. The words also describe a prostitute as an aberrant woman not worth respecting and one who exists in opposition to celebrated patriarchal womanhood, best defined by the Shona proverb ‘*musha mukadzi*’, literally ‘home is a woman’.

While the labelling of sex workers as *mahure* or prostitutes is distasteful, residents of Epworth face even worse challenges. Some of the sex workers in Epworth are children, and they are led into this work by poverty. Former Epworth legislator Zalerah Makari also acknowledged that “[t]he increasing trend of child ‘prostitutes’ in my constituency is worrying, and poverty is the major driver” (H. Metro 2016: 5). Mujinga (2022: 2) observes that “young girls in Epworth are subjected to abuse by their supposed fathers as clients for sexual satisfaction”.

It has almost become acceptable that children as young as eight years old can engage in sex work in Epworth. Victims of the sordid acts of rape are infamously labelled “victims by choice” (Mushohwe 2018). Children turn to sex work as a means of survival. The community and the government seem to have become resigned to the fact that children will live by their own means. But by their resignation, their actions and inactions aid in breaking the law. Zimbabwe has a comprehensive legal framework to curb child sex work, but the will to implement the law is not there (Nyakurerwa 2006). As result, young girls continue to be sexually abused. This disregard of the law and turning a blind eye as children suffer destroys the core of the community: care and respect for one another.

Epworth also has also witnessed a spike in child marriages. According to Muchawaya, Tanga, and Ekobi (2023: 997), young girls are forced into child marriage by poverty and unemployment. The prevalence of child marriages is also both a show of community decay

and weak government that fails to protect children. In the Shona culture a child belongs to the community. But clearly that is not the case with Epworth. The community is broken, and some of the biggest fissures can be tracked to poverty and political intolerance.

The challenges faced by girls, women and young people in Epworth are indicative of negative peace and the deep-seated issues plaguing the community. The concept of “my brother/sister’s keeper” seems lost in the Epworth community and the drivers of this loss appear to be politically induced poverty and polarity. Social injustices and problematic social practices go unchecked. No one cares about what the next person is doing. In essence, Epworth’s sense of community is in a coma. Politicians and the rich elite deliberately fan the desperation and hate among residents for their profit. This breakdown, fuelled by poverty and exacerbated by political intolerance, demands that the Epworth community finds ways to self-heal, addressing not only the symptoms, but also the root causes of societal decay, violence, and inequality.

### **3.7.2 Current community empowerment in Epworth.**

Despite the many adversities that are faced in Epworth, there are some decent efforts at addressing the challenges. Although these efforts are overshadowed by the prevailing struggles, they reflect the determination of individuals and organisations within the community to effect positive change. Residents are engaged in projects that use locally available resources to improve their livelihoods. Nyandoro (2023) reported that community members embarked on a European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations-funded plastic recycling project, in which they collect and buy plastic and metal cans for sale. While this specific project does not necessarily bring people into working as a collective, it works to cushion people from poverty.

Women in Epworth are also involved in economic activities that include vending, dishwasher and Vaseline production, perfume and jam making, the craft industry, and cash cooperatives. A Safe Market was established at the Overspill Centre in Epworth as a means of empowering women and curbing gender-based violence. The centre consists of a fruit and vegetable section and a flea market. Women are engaged in the production of *Masawu* jam, the drying of vegetables, and the drying of fruits like bananas and apples to sell as powders. Women are also engaged in selling homemade dishes such as *sadza*, rice, and fresh chips, among other dishes. Some women are engaged in craft activities such as knitting, mat-making and pottery.

The Zimbabwe Open University, working together with the Angel of Hope Foundation, led by Zimbabwe’s first lady, implemented a project to reduce prostitution and drug abuse in Epworth

(Rupapa 31 May 2022). They implemented a project that offered residents an opportunity to study agriculture, counselling, communication and technology, early childhood development, and sign language, among other courses, for free. The project was implemented on non-partisan grounds, showing that there is potential to bring the people of Epworth together even if they have political differences.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

Epworth is facing a myriad of challenges that stem from bad politics and Zimbabwe's crumbling economy. These challenges do not strictly present themselves in the community as physical political violence. Residents have lost a sense of community, and they struggle with dialoguing; they fail to make ends meet and are often taken advantage of by the elite and politicians. However, there are success stories in the community that already show that it is possible to run viable entrepreneurial ventures in Epworth. This study is therefore modelled around the successes to create an intervention that brings together entrepreneurship and dialogue in Epworth.

## Chapter 4

# Community Peacebuilding Theories and Political Tolerance

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*“We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but on the positive affirmation of peace.” Martin Luther King Jr, (1962)*

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### 4.1 Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable part of the human condition which happens when there is a collision of opposing interests (Cooper 2003: 85). Often political conflict happens in communities because people are made to believe that their aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously, or perceive a divergence in their values, and resort to purposefully employing their power in an effort to eliminate the other (Anstey 2006: 6). Conflict is not always unhealthy; it can also lead to positive outcomes. But it depends on the strategies that are used to end the conflict and the issues being contested (Ling, Seok, and Maakip 2019). This chapter seeks to outline the community peacebuilding theories used in various settings, including personal relationships, workplaces, and international diplomacy, to address and resolve conflicts effectively. Most importantly, the chapter discusses the theory underlying this study and the political tolerance necessary to address the problem of political violence that has become embedded in the Zimbabwean political culture.

Zimbabwe is marred by a complex web of conflicts spanning decades. From political strife to economic instability, the country has faced a multitude of challenges that have profoundly impacted its people and its society. This chapter embarks on a journey to examine the theories of conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation in the context of Zimbabwe's intricate and multifaceted conflicts. The purpose for delving into these theories is to shed light on the potential pathways to community peacebuilding and stability.

### 4.2 Conflict Management

Conflict management is the oldest approach in the discourse of peacebuilding, which seeks to end violent conflicts through various political negotiations or initiatives (Paffenholz 2014). Conflict management has been defined differently by different authors. The primary goal of conflict management is to control or contain the conflict to prevent it from escalating further. It

focuses on maintaining a manageable level of conflict without necessarily resolving the underlying issues (Thakore 2013). It appears that the aim of conflict management is to manage conflict without necessarily ending it (Miall (2007). The current situation in Zimbabwe demands a more robust approach than just managing conflicts. In the more than 40 years since independence the country has continued to experience different phases of extreme physical conflict that subside when managed.

The tribal hatred between Shona and Ndebele people persists, 36 years after the signing of the Peace Accord in 1987, and the polarity between ZANU-PF and MDC or CCC still affects communities regardless of the efforts made during the GNU. This is in part because efforts at addressing the conflict were led by outsiders (Thabo Mbeki was the chief facilitator of the GNU). Peacebuilders, according to the conflict management paradigm identified by Paffenholz (2009), are external personnel and experts from bilateral and multilateral organisations who identify and bring the leaders of the conflicting parties to the negotiating table, where the main focus is the short-term regulation of armed conflict. The conflict experienced in the everyday lives of Zimbabweans demands that they become experts in their own issues, as opposed to looking to powerful politicians.

Conflict management centres on those in power because there is a commonly held view that these are the initiators of violence and have the ability to bring it to an end when they are engaged through a negotiated settlement. In the history of political violence in Zimbabwe, people in the localities where violence occurs have not been involved in resolving political violence; rather, the elite have negotiated among themselves without the involvement of those that are affected by the violence. For example, in 2008, there was a great deal of political violence in Zimbabwe (including in the area of this study, Epworth), but only the elite negotiated among themselves to end the violence. Such an approach is not sustainable as it does not get to the root of the problem – hence the recurrence of political violence.

Conflict management does not seek to address the underlying causes of conflict, whereas conflict resolution does (Hoffman 1995). Conflict practitioners argue that conflict management is not sustainable as compared to conflict resolution. Its major weakness has been its concentration on top leadership diplomacy, while neglecting low-level facilitation (Lederach 1997). The Zimbabwean crisis has been going on for too long and requires more than short-term regulatory measures. There is a need for a long-term approach that deals with the underlying structural conflicts.

### 4.3 Conflict Resolution

It difficult to define conflict resolution, because it not a definitive thing with a process cast in stone. Rather, conflict resolution refers to “a range of processes aimed at alleviating or eliminating sources of conflict” (Al-Awadhi 2017: 35) or “managing conflict proactively to generate positive change” (Hirsch and Moore (2023: 216). For Burton (1988), conflict resolution means terminating conflict by methods that are analytical and that get to the root of the problem. The goal of conflict resolution is to find a mutually acceptable solution to the issues at hand, reduce tension and hostility, and promote cooperation and understanding among the involved parties. Ramsbotham, Miall, and Woodhouse (2011) assert that conflict resolution addresses the underlying issues or incompatibilities between or among the parties, in which the parties accept each other’s existence.

While conflict resolution is not the best option for Epworth at the moment, it is not a bad option in comparison to conflict management. Zartman (2000) argues that both conflict management and conflict resolution belong to the same line of the peacebuilding continuum. While the former aims at managing or limiting the conflict so that it does not result in violence or escalation of violence, the latter aims at resolving the long-term underlying structural issues through win-win solutions. The two concepts might differ, but they are closely inter-related, dealing with similar conflict at different stages and levels. Mitchell (2002) notes that conflict resolution involves the discovery of mutually acceptable and sustainable solutions by the parties in conflict with the help of third parties or mediators. Conflict resolution focuses on the content and substance of the problem. In short, conflict resolution is content-centred.

Effective conflict resolution process should have stakeholders (including traditional leaders, community elders, or local organisations) that have the trust of the community. In the case of Epworth, this would include the Epworth local board, councillors, and the local MPs. This group of leaders, among others, has the advantage of fully understanding the situation in Epworth; also, they respect some of the cultural norms, values, and traditions of the community. However, the very same people are politically inclined, and, in most cases, they provoke polarity. The material realities in Zimbabwe at present appear not to allow political leaders to work together. But ordinary citizens seem to have leeway for interacting peacefully for the common good. Lund (1997: 3–4) argues that conflict resolution focuses on efforts to increase co-operation among the parties to a conflict and deepen their relationship by addressing the conditions that led to the dispute, fostering positive attitudes, allaying distrust through reconciliation initiatives, and building and strengthening the institutions and processes through which parties interact.

Lund's ideas are very instructive. Zimbabwe needs strong institutions which can hold duty bearers to account. However, and most importantly, social institutions such as neighbourliness are collapsing, and communities have weak social capital (Mutero 2017). Seeing that political leaders seem to be uninterested in sustainable peacebuilding, everyday people should be engaged in activities that re-engineer the toxic social relationships to create forms of cooperation that facilitate sustainable peace. Zimbabwean communities need conflict transformation, a much higher level of working for peace. The section below provides some definitions of conflict transformation and how it is different from the terms discussed above.

#### **4.4 Conflict Transformation**

The normative meaning of conflict transformation is to develop positive and peaceful solutions to violent conflicts or threats. The transformational approach recognises that conflict is a normal and continuous dynamic process in human relationships and that conflict has the potential to bring positive change (Botes 2003: 15). The import of Botes's assertion is that all hope is not lost for Zimbabwe, despite having lost years in conflict. Possibly, there are lessons learnt during the years of conflict that Zimbabwe can build on. However, manipulating the conflict into positives demands intentional actions from conflicting parties where they view social conflicts as opportunities for fostering positive change processes that decrease violence, enhance fairness in direct engagements with societal systems, and address practical issues in human relationships. According to Lederach (2014: 15), conflict transformation is to "envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction with social structures, [and] respond to real-life problems in human relationships".

Wani (2013: 35) states that conflict transformation enables individuals to understand how to reduce the levels and structures of conflicts and create new avenues of cooperation and compatibility. Implied here is that as a process, conflict transformation recognises and empowers individuals to use their agency in tackling the underlying patterns of conflicts. Conflict transformation also encourages everyday citizens to establish fresh channels for collaboration and harmony. In essence, it is about finding ways to not only to mitigate conflicts, but also to foster cooperation and compatibility among parties involved. Building peace using a conflict transformation lens has the potential to result in long-term harmonious living. The Berghof Research Centre (2006: 10) defines conflict transformation as "outcomes, processes and structures oriented towards long term peace building efforts, which aim to truly overcome revealed forms of direct, cultural and structural violence".

The definitions of conflict transformation highlighted above insinuate that conflict is natural in human relationships and long-term solutions should be sought to transform conflict and build healthy relationships. Zimbabwe, like any other society, faces a range of conflicts stemming from diverse factors such as political differences, economic disparities, and land issues, as discussed in the previous chapters. The social and political rot in Zimbabwe is mainly a result of dead relationships. It seems as if Zimbabweans are not giving themselves a chance to canvass for change and convert the conflict into positives even in the midst of strife. Conflict itself is a catalyst for positive change, as suggested by Lederach (2017: 1), who states that conflict is a motor of change, and that transformation focuses on building positive and good relationships and societies at all levels. The expected change can however not come through quick fixes. Zimbabwe has to seek long-term solutions to conflicts that do away with stop-gap measures which always lead to recurring disputes. Equally important, recognising that conflict is a natural occurrence in human relationships is the first step in promoting a healthier approach to addressing these issues. It is not as easy approach, as suggested by Bramsen and Poder (2018), who describe conflict transformation as a complex process of positively changing relationships, attitudes, behaviours, interests, and discourses in violence-prone scenarios. This characterisation of conflict transformation as complex underscores the multifaceted nature of addressing conflicts in Zimbabwe. Conflicts in the country often have deep historical roots and involve various stakeholders, making a comprehensive approach necessary. There is a need to tread carefully around individuals, relationships, interests – and even ideologies.

Miall (2004: 4) defined conflict transformation as a “process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict”. This study has the ambition to engage Epworth community members in a project that transforms how they relate. Conflict transformation is a comprehensive activity which encompasses changing relationships and structures that perpetuate violent conflict. The conflict in Zimbabwe requires conflict transformation as opposed to reframing of positions and the identification of win-win outcomes, which conflict management and conflict resolution advocate (Miall 2004: 4). Political violence in Epworth has continued to recur because the structures that promote the violence and relationships among the conflicting parties have not been transformed. There is a need for a new approach to dealing with political violence; hence the conflict transformation approach. The study, therefore, is informed by conflict transformation theory. The following section discusses the origins and evolution of Lederach’s transformation theory, as well as its relevance to this study.

#### **4.4.1 Origins and evolution of Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory**

Several long-term violent conflicts in places like Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, and Cambodia were settled through the conflict management approach after the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s. This approach only managed to reduce the intensity of violence, but did not address the underlying causes of the violent conflicts. Soon these conflicts recurred. The reoccurrence of wars in Angola, and the Rwandan genocide, highlighted the limits of conflict management (Azar and Moon 1986: 20). The history of conflict transformation can be better documented with the involvement of the term "peacebuilding". Peacebuilding is a term that was introduced in the 1970s by Johan Galtung and which was mainly embedded into the conflict management paradigm. The term peacebuilding gained international momentum in 1992 when Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined it as post-conflict actions that are undertaken to avoid relapse into violent conflict (Boutros-Ghali 1992: 5).

Post-conflict peacebuilding was introduced as one of the tools the UN could use in attaining peace, alongside preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peacekeeping. For peace-making and peacekeeping to be successful, they must include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which tend to consolidate peace. These may include carrying out disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, restoration of order, security sector reform (SSR), returning displaced people, or improving and capacitating governance. Peacebuilding has evolved to include pre-violent conflict peacebuilding (which is commonly known as preventive diplomacy and seeks to prevent violence) and post-violent conflict peacebuilding (which prevents a recurrence of violence) (UN 1992).

Conflict transformation, as discussed by Miall (2004: 4) is built upon a foundation of various theoretical perspectives and ideas. These concepts and theories are drawn from scholars and thinkers such as Galtung (1996), Senghaas (1973) and Krippendorff (1973), among others. Suggested here is that conflict transformation is not a single, isolated theory, but rather an approach that integrates insights from multiple sources to address conflicts effectively. Galtung (1996) contribution is of special significance in that he helped to frame how conflicts occur in societies, due to otherwise simple contradictions, attitudes, and behaviours of the parties involved. This suggests that conflicts often stem from underlying structural, social, or cultural factors that create tension and disagreement among individuals or groups. Understanding these root causes is crucial for effective conflict transformation, and in the case of Zimbabwe this points to why top-down approaches have failed.

The development and evolution of conflict transformation can also be credited to Curle (1971), who developed Galtung's body of work and traced how unequal relationships can be

transformed from unbalanced to balanced relationships. This transformation involves a series of processes, including conscientisation (raising awareness), confrontation (addressing the issues), negotiation (finding common ground), and development (working toward positive change). Using this lens, this study implemented an innovative cuniculture project that allowed members of the Epworth community to extend their daily interactions into dialogues on peace, but also provided a platform for the community members to question their privileges or lack thereof. Curle's insights laid the foundation for understanding how power imbalances and inequalities can be addressed and transformed within conflicts.

Conflict transformation theory also drew a great deal from Azar's (1990) concept of protracted social conflicts. In the Zimbabwean context, historical issues such as the *jambanja* land reform, disputed elections, and poverty have been central to conflicts. Azar's protracted social conflicts offered some insights into the causes of such conflicts and how they could be transformed. For example, Azar argues that protracted conflicts are caused by denial of basic needs of access, identity, and security, and the role played by states and the military in politics. The denial of these basic needs has contributed to long-standing tensions and disputes. Effective conflict transformation in Zimbabwe should address these root causes by promoting equitable access to resources, addressing issues related to identity and citizenship, and ensuring the security of marginalised populations (Mutero 2017; Ngwenya 2017; Muchemwa 2016).

National efforts at conflict transformation in Zimbabwe will be successful when politics is not too militarised, basic needs are fulfilled, and communities choose accommodation and political forms of confrontation. Currently, as discussed in previous chapters, the politics in Zimbabwe is heavily militarised, which encourages the use of violence. The situation can be addressed by demilitarising politics, as advocated by Azar. Väyrynen (2023) also weighs in and advocates for a conflict theory based on transformation rather than settlement. Väyrynen suggests four types of intervention that peacebuilders should consider in transforming conflicts.

These interventions are actor transformation, issue transformation, rule transformation and structural transformation. Actor transformation involves internal changes in parties. My view is that in the context of Zimbabwe, actor transformation refers to internal changes within ZANU-PF and the MDC or the CCC, the country's major political parties. It is important that leaders of both ZANU-PF and the CCC desist from confrontational and adversarial approaches toward more collaborative and inclusive methods of conflict transformation. Seeing that leaders seem uninterested in ending conflict, the same insights can work for everyday people in the community. Secondly, issue transformation entails changing the nature

and framing of the issues that lead to conflict. In Zimbabwe, the issues that lead to conflict have a national character – for example electoral disputes between the CCC and ZANU-PF. This study begins with engaging the community to frame issues as they experience them at a local level, without necessarily taking a political party stance; for example, just agreeing that party politics is toxic can be a good beginning. Rule transformations are alterations to the rules that govern a conflict; and structural transformations are changing the structure or the relationships or power distribution among the parties to a conflict. Changing the structure or relationships is central to Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory, which is the main theory used in this study.

This study also borrows from Rupesinghe (1995)'s ideas that conflict transformation initiatives should be all-embracing, starting from the grassroots. His ideas support initiatives that start with and from local communities and across different political factions within civil society, where applicable. Miall (2004: 5) supports Rupesinghe, advocating for “also creating peace alliances with any groups able to bring about change, such as business groups, the media and the military”. Zimbabwe currently needs broad-based alliances that take heed of and respect every citizen's aspirations. While this is desirable, if the process is led by politicians the outcome might not recognise citizens. Zimbabwean politicians have a penchant for “using” citizens, who in turn have also abdicated their responsibility to make duty bearers accountable. This study is therefore an opportunity for citizens at a grassroots level to learn to put their needs first.

This study is framed using the Conflict Transformation Theory due to its emphasis not only on ending the violence, but in fostering positive peace and the end of structural and cultural violence (Psaltis, Carretero, and Čehajić-Clancy 2017: 2). The conflict in Zimbabwe requires more than piecemeal reforms. The experience of the GNU has shown that conflict management does not work in Zimbabwe, as the country has reverted to conditions worse than those that existed in 2008 when the GNU was mooted. Conflict transformation eyes changes in the systems, structures, and relationships that give rise to violence and injustice. The Mnangagwa government is accused of capturing the judiciary (Ruhanya 2020). The Conflict Transformation Theory focuses on the transformation of deep-rooted conflicts into peaceful relationships using different approaches; hence, the conflict transformation school decided to replace the term “conflict resolution” with “conflict transformation”. This understanding is also shared by Paffenholz (2009: 5), who acknowledges the differences between short-term conflict management, long-term relationship-building, and the resolution of the underlying causes of conflict with the transformation approach, which goes beyond the previous two by transforming the conflict structure and relationships.

#### 4.4.2 The key assumptions of Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory

The four levels of conflict transformation as propounded by Lederach, as shown by Figure 4.1, are:

- i) The personal level
- ii) The relational level
- iii) The structural level
- iv) The cultural level

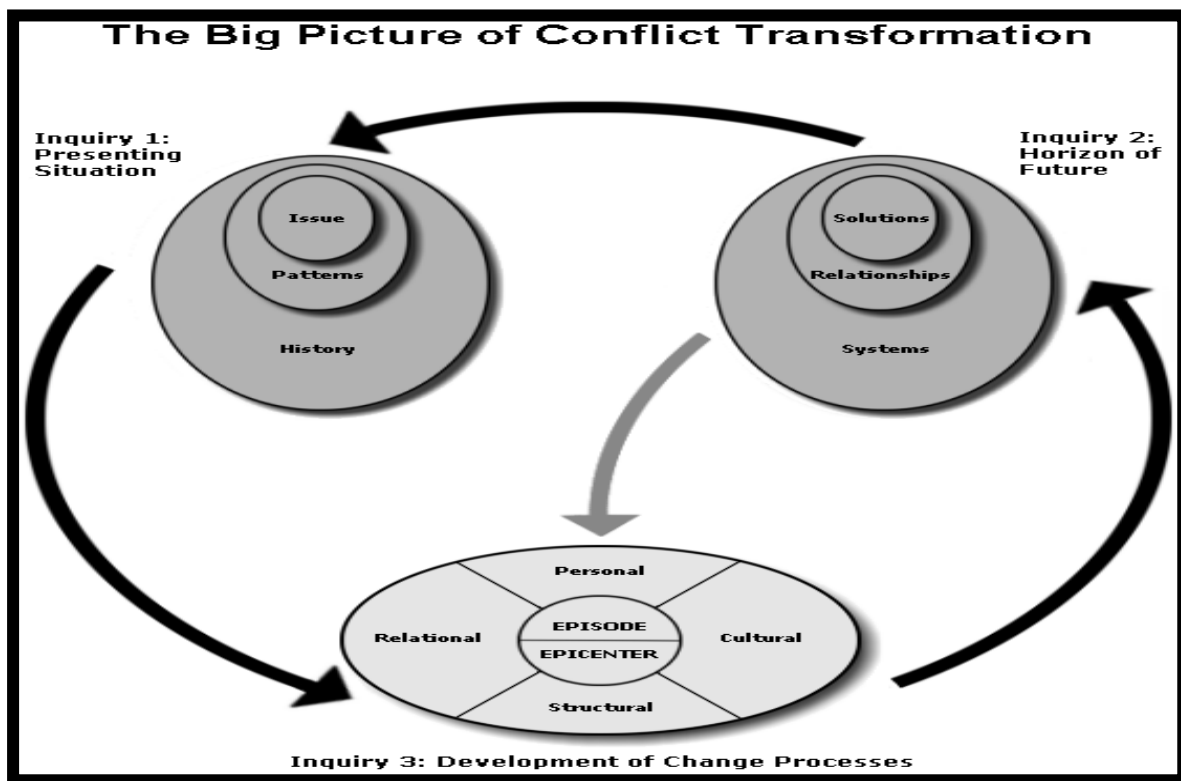


Figure 4. 1: Levels of Conflict Transformation (source Lederach, 2014)

Lederach (2015) argues that peacebuilding is a long-term transformation of a war system into a peace system anchored by the quest for peace, justice, truth and mercy. This process is also marked by changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of the conflict, which occur over time at different levels and at different times. At the personal level, transformation is required because individuals are affected by conflict – positively or negatively. Conflict affects an individual's physical and psychological wellbeing, their emotional ability and their self-esteem. Negative effects of conflicts need to be addressed or

transformed to minimise their impact at the personal level if sustainable peace is to be achieved.

The structural dimension shows how social structures and institutions are built, sustained and changed by conflict. For Lederach, there should be interaction and complementarity among these structures for a comprehensive peace process. Transformation at this level means that social conditions that give rise to conflict are addressed. Some of the ways in which these structures can be changed include increasing people's involvement in decisions that affect them, which Lederach advocated. In the Zimbabwean scenario, most analysts believe that there cannot be sustained peace as long as there are no structural changes in the governance systems in the country.

Opposition parties have lamented the partiality which the institutions of state display towards the ruling party (ZANU-PF) and have called for political reforms, without which elections will always be contested as not free and fair and not reflecting the will of the people. Again, due to the structure of the political system in Zimbabwe, violence has been allowed to flourish and has been used as a means to an end, and the perpetrators of violence have acted with impunity, which has allowed a culture of violence to be embedded into the society.

The cultural dimension entails changes that result from conflict in the cultural patterns or ways of living for a group of people in society. Transformation of this dimension means that there is an understanding of the impact of conflict on these cultural patterns, and making changes to minimise the impact of conflict on them. Women have been subjected to all kinds of violence in Zimbabwe due to a culture of masculinity in the country's political system. Therefore, changes are needed in order for sustainable peace to be enjoyed.

Lederach (2015) also emphasises the importance of relationships in conflicts. Poor relationships between groups usually trigger conflict and are an obstacle to efforts to build peace after violence has ended. Therefore, Lederach provides a prescriptive account of conflict, where changing relationships is an important component in building sustainable peace. Lederach (1997) also emphasises the importance of structural changes in dealing with conflicts. The subject of structural changes has been discussed above.

Lederach places greater emphasis on conflict transformation than conflict resolution when it comes to peacebuilding. The conflict transformation approach embraces the fact that conflict is typical in human relationships, and it focuses on the transformation of the violent behaviour to peaceful behaviour (Graf, Kramer, and Nicolescou 2006: 55). Lederach (1997: 75) further highlights that conflict is inevitable, and conflict transformation is all about transforming it into

a spiral of peace and development rather than a spiral of violence and destruction. The theory of conflict transformation integrates various actors and involves many activities with short-, medium- and long-term objectives.

Lederach also notes that peace is embedded in justice, building right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights and nonviolence. He further highlights that conflict transformation is more desirable than resolution because it seeks to bring constructive change, which goes beyond the mere resolution of particular problems. For Lederach, transforming conflict is a unique way of seeing and provides a set of lenses through which people make sense of the social conflict.

Lederach (2012: 12) emphasises that at the core of Conflict Transformation Theory is dialogue. Yannakaki (2014: 1) explains that dialogue is the ultimate and most beneficial tool for resolving conflicts and transforming them into an opportunity for a long-lasting development. Expressing the same sentiments, the UNDP (2009: 2) notes that dialogue is an inclusive process that entails learning by the actors, recognising one's humanity, avoiding violent conflict, and having a focus on the long-term perspectives. According to Maiese and Lederach (2003: 3), the key dimensions of this theory are the changes in the personal, structural, relational and cultural aspects of conflict experienced over different time periods and affecting different levels. Rukuni (2018: 74) acknowledges that at the centre of conflict transformation is the change that creates good from bad, thereby improving relationships. As highlighted in its definition, Conflict Transformation Theory seeks to utilise the conflict to create constructive change to minimise violent conflict, maximise justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real life problems in human relationships (Lederach 1997:75).

Table 4.1 below gives a brief description of the four main dimensions of Conflict Transformation Theory as highlighted by Lederach. In the case of Zimbabwe's pre- and post-electoral violent conflicts, Lederach's key dimensions are very applicable to bringing the much-desired constructive social change. Constructive social change means changing relationships from moving towards destruction to that which builds (Lederach 2005: 42).

Table 4. 1: Key Dimensions of Conflict Transformation

Dimension	Description of change
Personal	Minimise destructive effects of social conflict and maximise the potential for personal growth at physical, emotional and spiritual levels.
Relational	Minimise poorly functioning communication and maximise understanding.
Structural	Understand and address root causes of violent conflict; promote nonviolent mechanisms; minimise violence; foster structures that meet basic human needs and maximise public participation.
Cultural	Identify and understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict; identify cultural resources for constructively handling conflict.

**Source:** Lederach and Maiese (2003: 4).

Central to the theory is reconciliation and remoulding broken relationships in communities, with the main aim being strengthening peacebuilding initiatives Relationships are the blood and veins of peacebuilding, and hence peace should build relationships and reconciliation so that they are at the centre of the peacebuilding process (Sunliden 2009: 10). Lederach puts a great deal of emphasis on local peacebuilding, by shifting from international to local actors as making the largest contribution to conflict transformation (Lederach 1997: 14) . This shift enables parties that are directly involved in the conflict to be part of the solution to peace in their society. As noted in the background, the political parties in Zimbabwe, state institutions such as the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and ordinary citizens should be more involved in the resolution of conflicts and building better, positive, long-lasting peaceful relationships. The Conflict Transformation Theory empowers the local stakeholders to be actively involved in dealing with their conflicts and supports the necessary political and social change towards a peaceful and just community (Wils et al. 2006: 14) .

The strength of Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory is on considering conflict transformation in a broader view, drawing peacebuilding resources from the wider society (Wani, Suwirta, and Fayeye 2013: 37). Miall (2007: 7) postulates that the role of external actors in conflict transformation is limited to supporting the internal actors, coordinating external

peace efforts, engaging in a context-sensitive way, respecting local culture, and applying a long-term approach.

#### 4.4.3 Applying Lederach’s Pyramid Model

It is important to grasp the challenges that affect the achievement of sustainable peace in any society. This is especially important as a way of breaking the cycle of violence which recurs during election periods in Zimbabwe, particularly in Epworth, which is the focus of this study. It is key for coordinated attempts to be made at all levels of society to build peace if the country is to attain sustainable peace in its socio-economic and political environment.

The strength of Lederach’s pyramid model is how it draws peacebuilding resources from the wider society (Wani *et al.* 2013). In his approach, Lederach used the “middle-out” approach to divide the community into three categories of actors, as indicated by Figure 3 below. Lederach (2005: 79) posits that the middle level consists of the most crucial actors in the web of relationships. Therefore, the approach is called “middle-out”, not “top-down” or “bottom-up”. Lederach noted that there are three different levels of leadership that are involved in every conflict, and at each level peacebuilding initiatives suitable for that level are used (Lederach 1997: 60) .

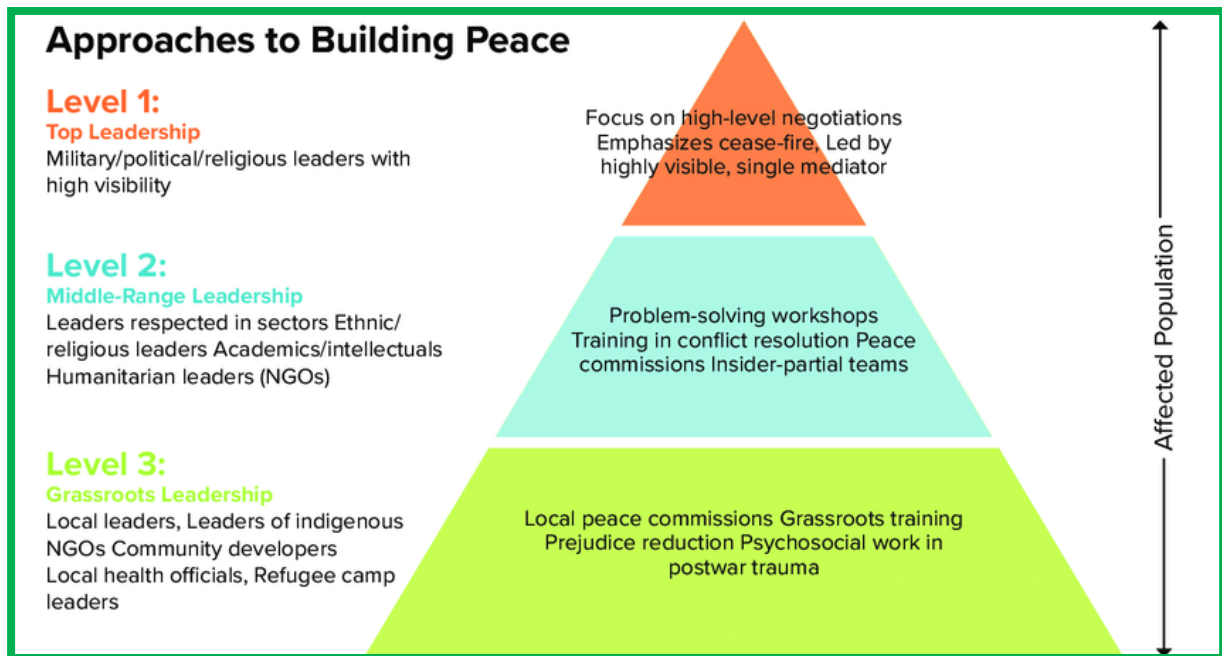


Figure 4. 2: Lederach’s Peacebuilding Pyramid

Source: Paffenholz (2014: 9) Adapted

Lederach’s Pyramid Model is inclusive, meaning that all levels of the community and cultural differences should be included in peacebuilding initiatives. Figure 4.2 highlights the top

leadership, which comprises political, military and religious leaders who have high visibility and focus on high-level negotiations, ceasefires and peace agreements. As indicated in Figure 4.2 above, the middle leadership connects the top and grassroots levels of the community, hence connecting the opposing sides of the conflict. The middle level comprises religious leaders, academics, and civil society leaders. The middle level management is vital, as their strength lies in relationships rather than in political or military power (Oxfam Novib 2012:14). At the bottom, there are people who are working with local citizens on a daily basis to deal with conflicts using workshops and interactive problem-solving, among other low-level peace initiatives. This level comprises local traditional leaders, local NGO leaders, community leaders, and local health officials, among others.

What is important about the pyramid for this study is that peacebuilding mechanisms are constructed at all levels of society. While the traditional approaches to peacebuilding emphasised the role of top-level leadership, Lederach stressed the important role that middle-level leadership plays in linking the top-level leadership with grassroots-level leadership in providing avenues for peacebuilding. This is, however, not to discredit the role of top leadership in peacebuilding, but to acknowledge the role of other levels as well. One can argue that there has been a recurrence of political violence in Zimbabwe in general, and in Epworth in particular, because peacebuilding efforts have been carried out among top-level leadership while neglecting the other levels of leadership. This is connected to Lederach's conflict transformation theory, which advocates for relational, structural, cultural and personal changes at middle and grassroots levels as well. This study seeks to work with all levels of leadership in establishing peace in Epworth.

Overall, Lederach's Pyramid Model underscores the fact that constructive transformation of conflicts requires coordinated efforts at all levels and sustained peacebuilding efforts. This is however a long-term process, not an event. Lederach emphasises the role of local actors rather than external actors. The pyramid model empowers local actors, while limiting the role of external actors. This encourages a sense of ownership, which is essential in putting local actors' differences aside for the good of society.

#### **4.4.4 Application of Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory**

According to Lederach and Maiese (2003: 5), the transformation from the undesirable present to the desirable future is not a straight journey, but rather a set of activities that put change processes in motion and develop a prolonged platform to pursue long term change. The practical application of Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory is through the use of conflict transformation flow, as pointed out by Lederach (2007: 17).

#### **4.4.4.1 Presenting situation**

As shown in Figure 4.2 above, the initial enquiry is the presenting situation. According to Lederach, Culbertson, and Neufeldt (2007: 17), this is usually an incident of conflict that presents an opportunity for parties in the conflict to investigate the nature of the conflict, the history of the dispute, and the pattern of relationship through which the dispute is expressed. This phase focuses on solving the immediate destructive conflicts and puts an emphasis on addressing current issues with a long-term view. Besides focusing on the immediate problem, this inquiry also seeks to change the socio-economic and political context in which the problem occurs, to address its destructive patterns. In addition, the presenting situation goes beyond solving current problems to also connecting the current crisis with the past in which the conflict is rooted.

The whole aim is to acknowledge, understand and redress what has transpired and develop new structures and ways of interacting in the future. The presenting situation would be an ideal start for the community of Epworth in Zimbabwe to identify the source of politically motivated violence. The nature of the conflict in Epworth is political violence caused by many factors, such as poverty, intolerance, and a culture of violence embedded in Epworth community members. There is also a need to analyse the socio-economic and political environment and its contribution to political violence in Epworth, with a view to transforming it to promote sustainable peace. Epworth society is also heavily polarised between two major political parties, the ruling ZANU-PF, and the opposition CCC.

#### **4.4.4.2 Horizon of the future**

The second enquiry in Lederach's transformation jigsaw is the horizon of the future. This represents an imagining of the society that people wish to establish for Epworth and the nation at large. Everyone envisages a violence-free society. This is an ideal and desirable society which people cherish and dream of. It is, however, important to realise that the movement from enquiry into the present situation to envisioned desired future is not always a linear process. The process is both circular and linear. There are challenges along the way. Likewise, the desired future in Epworth, which is free of all forms of violence, is not going to be a linear process. Efforts to transform this situation will be resisted by some who have benefitted from such political violence. Therefore, in this study's efforts to facilitate the movement from the present situation, which is characterised by violence, into the horizon of the future, there are many challenges which should be expected – but this cannot prevent this study from making efforts to create a desired future which is violence-free.

#### **4.4.4.3 Development of change processes**

This is the phase at which the actual change processes towards the desired future should take place. Lederach (2008) states that the peacebuilding approaches and initiatives at this phase must not only be short-term, but should aim to encourage long-term durable peace and change. As indicated in the transformation flow, this phase is the episode centre where the actors need to develop very effective change machinery approaches. Table 1 above clearly outlined the main required change in the four dimensions (structural, personal, relational and cultural) of the conflict transformation theory. Miall (2006: 17) postulates the aim of conflict transformation at this phase is to create capacity and sustain structural change, and engage with conflicts at both pre-violence and post-violence stages, and with the causes and consequences of violence, which go beyond the physically violent. In this study, such processes involve designing interventions with the participants who are affected by the violence, and carrying out peacebuilding activities that are meant to promote sustainable peace in Epworth and in the nation at large.

#### **4.4.5 Limitations of Lederach`s Conflict Transformation Theory**

According to Paffenholz (2014), Lederach`s Conflict Transformation Theory is one of the leading theories in the peacebuilding field as it combines other conceptual works. However, despite being one of the main theories, it has its critics and limitations. Botes (2003: 25) points out that the link between Conflict Transformation Theory and its practical application still appears to be weak. In addition, Paffenholz (2014) notes that the limited role of the external actors in the peacebuilding process is problematic. Moreover, Miall (2007) adds that the Conflict Transformation Theory gives little attention to the political systems of violence-affected societies, nations and regions. However, Lederach`s Conflict Transformation Theory has more to offer than conflict resolution and conflict management do.

The reviewed literature highlights the importance of community-driven peacebuilding in conflict transformation. Lund`s conflict resolution framework (1996) outlines the role of local actors in mitigating conflict through sustainable, multi-level interventions, while Lederach`s conflict transformation theory (1997) emphasises the need for long-term relationship-building to break cycles of violence. Both theories provide a foundation for understanding how social entrepreneurship and participatory peace initiatives can serve as practical conflict resolution mechanisms.

This study builds upon these insights by examining how a grassroots entrepreneurial project, the Peace Rabbits initiative, functioned as a bottom-up peacebuilding intervention in Epworth. The next chapters explore the empirical findings of the study, demonstrating the extent to which economic cooperation and dialogue within the Peace Rabbits project contributed to conflict transformation in a politically polarised community.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter discusses a variety of concepts that are key to this study. The chapter considered conflict management, which refers to managing a crisis without addressing the underlying issues. Conflict resolution was defined as addressing the immediate underlying issues, whereas conflict transformation involves changing the relationships and structure of the conflict. Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory was introduced as the main theory in this study, which seeks to change the personal, relational, structural, and cultural aspects of political violence in Epworth through engaging local actors who have been overlooked before. Lederach's Pyramid Model was also discussed, and its relevance to this study was established in that it seeks to promote the role of local actors in peacebuilding initiatives. The following chapter discusses the role of peace infrastructures in peacebuilding, providing examples from across the world.

# Chapter 5: Peace Infrastructures and Peacebuilding

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*“Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures.” John F. Kennedy (1956)*

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## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the origins and relevance of peace infrastructures in peacebuilding as a complementary approach to Lederach’s Conflict Transformation Theory. It explores diverse instances of peace infrastructures – not confined to Africa, but extending across the global landscape. Additionally, the chapter examines how peace infrastructures contribute to the advancement of political tolerance. The chapter concludes by illuminating the overarching challenges faced by peace infrastructures, offering a contextualised perspective on these challenges in the context of Zimbabwe.

This study uses the peace infrastructure concept to complement Lederach’s Conflict Transformation Theory. I use the Conflict Transformation Theory to frame an investigation into how local actors can make necessary changes to ensure peace and long-standing good relationships, and peace infrastructures provides the necessary relational, structural and cultural change required for peace to prevail. Therefore, this section explores the peace infrastructure concept. Van Tongeren (2011: 45) asserts that most states do not have the capacity or structures to handle the current and potential violent conflicts well. In Africa, peace infrastructures have been used successfully at national and community level to deal with violent conflicts. In the early 1990s, Kenya, through the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, managed to solve a long-standing violent conflict, and in 2007 it formed a District Peace Council when electoral violence broke out. In 1994, South Africa used Local Peace Committees as peace infrastructures to resolve its long-standing apartheid conflict, and Ghana formed a National Peace Council in 2005 (Ozonnia 2010: 43). Therefore, it is evident that the peace infrastructures work to reduce conflict in communities and in the nation at large.

According to Kumar and De la Haye (2012: 14), representatives from 14 African countries agreed on a definition for peace infrastructure as a “dynamic network of interdependent

structures, mechanisms, resources, values and skills which through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in a society". Most nations have mechanisms and structures that are failing to handle and cope with violent conflict. Conflict is dynamic and is directly linked to changes in macro factors (e.g. political, environmental, technological, social, and legal issues) (Van Tongeren 2011: 45). In Zimbabwe, it is evident that the current structures are failing to control the politically motivated violence, as it recurs at each and every election the nation conducts. Hopp-Nishanka (2012: 2) states that peace infrastructures are made up of "diverse domestic, interconnected forms of engagement between conflict parties and other stakeholders at all stages of peace and dialogue processes, at all levels of society and with varying degrees of inclusion".

## **5.2 Key Concept of Peace Infrastructure: Meaning and Evolution**

Peace infrastructure is a broad concept with many modalities, ranging from those with a national mandate to informal local peace committees that are independent of the government (Kanza 2019: 13). According to Van Tongeren (2012: 192), peace infrastructure refers to building standing capabilities or infrastructures for peacebuilding and prevention within countries, communities and regions, involving the stakeholders. Van Tongeren further notes that most countries do not have capacities or structures to deal adequately with ongoing or potentially violent conflict – hence the need to create such infrastructures.

The lack of capabilities and infrastructures explains the prevalence of violent and protracted conflicts in Africa. The world is also becoming less and less peaceful and, according to the World Bank (2011), many people are caught in a violence trap. Elections have triggered violent conflicts, and past atrocities remain unresolved in the majority of countries, which become bases for violence. Zimbabwe has suffered from this scourge of recurrent violence since colonial times; hence the essence of this study: to create infrastructures of peace to prevent recurrent electoral and all forms of violence. The recurrent violence has not been helped by the fact that peacebuilding has been driven by external actors who have the resources, while internal actors have been sidelined.

The concept of infrastructures for peace was introduced by Lederach when he noted that building peace in today's conflicts calls for long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of society, an infrastructure that empowers the resources of reconciliation from within that society and maximises the contribution from outside (Lederach 2003: 43). Lederach further notes that an infrastructure for peace is not a rigid structure, but a flexible, longer-term commitment, interaction and collaboration involving main stakeholders. A meeting in Kenya in 2010 which involved a variety of actors defined infrastructures for peace

(I4P) as a dynamic network of interdependent structures, resources, mechanisms, values and skills which, through dialogue and consultation, contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding in society (Van Tongeren 2012).

Of importance in this definition is the use of dialogue and consultation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Another important element in this definition is the interdependence of the components that contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. What this means is that there is no one mechanism which can contribute to peace, but a combination of dynamic structures working together. In this study, this definition is instrumental in highlighting the importance of working together with victims and perpetrators of political violence as well as other peripheral actors in preventing future political violence.

The African continent, through Ghana and Kenya, pioneered the peace infrastructure concept, and has over the past two decades successfully developed peace infrastructures through local peace committees. However, it is a long process, and it took twenty years in Kenya and eight years in Ghana for these infrastructures to become fully operational. According to Van Tongeren, in Kenya these infrastructures started as informal structures until the government approved them. Through the experience of these nations, the main components and pillars of peace infrastructures are drawn from their pioneering findings and experience (Van Tongeren 2011: 97) . Ryan (2012) states that there are some essential elements that should be included in peace infrastructures to be effective in attaining their objectives.

Van Tongeren (2011: 49) suggests that peace infrastructures should include the national, district and local district councils. Richmond (2013: 278) postulates that these committees should include highly respected individuals who are experienced in dealing with conflict and can cut across political divides. This supports Lederach's ideas of encouraging local actors to play a pivotal role in dealing with their conflict and to have very little external influence. Van Tongeren (2011: 6) argues that the model for peace commissions which were established in Nicaragua was that of an insider partial mediation effort which involved intermediaries from within the conflict who as individuals enjoyed the trust and confidence of all sides, which helped to resolve a plethora of conflicts which could have easily turned violent. Local peace committees can be formal or informal. They encourage local actors to use peacebuilding resources to deal with conflict, and basic peacebuilding techniques to enhance conflict transformation (Felix & Ayodele 2017: 27). The following are other components and pillars of peace infrastructures as highlighted by Van Tongeren (2011: 49):

- Renewing and using traditional methods and perspectives in handling and defusing conflict.

- Promoting a shared vision for society and for a culture of peace.
- A state bureau, department, or ministry of peacebuilding.
- Legislative measures to develop peace infrastructures, with a budget.
- A national peace platform for consultation, collaboration, and coordination of peace issues by relevant actors and stakeholders.
- Expanding the capabilities of national peacebuilding institutions, related government departments, peace councils and relevant groups of civil society organisations.

The idea of infrastructures for peace was also supported by Kofi Annan his 2006 Review Report on Conflict Prevention, when he said that, “essentially, the aim should be the creation of sustainable national infrastructure for peace” (UN 2009). Although national infrastructures for peace are essential, as argued by Annan, the majority of peace committees start as informal groups and cascade up to the national level through buy-in from governments. Examples in Africa include Ghana and Kenya.

### **5.3 Peace Infrastructures’ Contribution towards Peaceful Societies**

There is lot of evidence to support the idea that peace infrastructures contributed positively and significantly to preventing and reducing violent conflict in South Africa, Ghana and Kenya. Peace infrastructures contribute to peaceful societies and communities through conflict management and de-escalation, conflict settlement and dialogue, and engaging in conflict transformation (Hopp-Nishanka 2012: 9). Van Tongeren (2011: 18)) argues that in Sudan, in 57% of peace committee interventions, where communities previously fought alongside one of the parties, they now have chosen not to, and communities in which peace committees are based have been able to resist fighting.

### **5.4 Managing Conflict and De-escalating Conflict**

Peace infrastructures involve initiatives and structures to provide early warning systems, and monitor and put ceasefires into practice, thereby assisting in the management of conflicts and de-escalating violence. Using Lederach’s peacebuilding triangle, grassroots level actors can provide early warnings about the conflict, and also deal with early conflict before it erupts into a violent crisis. In addition, grassroots actors are very close to civilians and can easily have information about grievances and solutions required from the local population. They can use that knowledge to solve the conflicts using local formal and informal peace committees. Ropers (2002) advocates building structures which assist in preventing violent escalation of conflicting interests and tension in communities, hence assisting in the management of conflict and de-escalating violence. Peace infrastructures or committees are examples of such

structures, as has been noted in countries where these structures have been created. Local conflicts have been managed and de-escalated in northern Uganda through peace committees. Van Tongeren (2011) notes that in Uganda cattle raids have reduced, road ambushes have ceased, and a level of peace is returning to Karamoja. This study was conceived with an understanding that Epworth (and by extension, Zimbabwe) is ready for building peace infrastructures at community level. However, the success of macro peace infrastructures in Zimbabwe is dependent on participation of all sections of the population affected by conflict (Chivasa 2022).

#### **5.4.1 Conflict settlement and dialogue**

According to Kumar and De la Haye (2012), peace infrastructures encourage local actors to own the peacebuilding process and use local resources and structures for conflict settlement. Mutero (2017: 124) notes that “the efficacy and sustainability of conflict transformation initiatives rests on the meaningful involvement of the community at every step of the process”. Suffice it to say, ordinary members of the Epworth community should be at the forefront of peacebuilding in their neighbourhood, instead of waiting for facilitation from outsiders. Peace infrastructures are more relevant in scenarios where there is no adequate internal political accord for external mediation, or where violence is too dispersed to be dealt with through centralised external mediation (Ulrite *et al.* 2013: 9).

Peace infrastructures work through “dialogue, promotion of mutual understanding and trust-building as well as inclusive, constructive problem-solving and joint action to prevent violence” (Odendaal 2010: 3). In simple terms, peace infrastructures facilitate reconciliation and provide a platform for negotiations, assist in the communication between conflicting parties to address potentially destructive information, mediate current and fresh disputes to solve problems, and facilitate reconciliation and prevent violence through joint monitoring (Felix & Ayodele 2017: 29). An example is The Collaborative, which was formed in 2008 and is a network of local peace activists from South Sudan and Sudan who coordinated efforts to establish peace committees which were trained to analyse conflicts and find local solutions to conflicts that erupted (Van Tongeren 2011).

### **5.5 Engaging in Conflict Transformation**

Peace infrastructures complement the conflict transformation theory underpinning this study. There is a substantive relationship between conflict transformation and peace infrastructures in dealing with conflicts. Lederach (2005: 42) states that reconciliation and personal, structural, relational and social changes are at the heart of the transformation approach. The peace

infrastructure concept seeks a positive change towards a peaceful society with the involvement of all actors at all levels. Both the conflict transformation theory and peace infrastructures put an emphasis on the use of local means to achieve peace and reduce violence. Vernon (2019: 3) echoes the same sentiment, that peace building involves local small grassroots initiatives and activities at a wider scale. The Peace Rabbit project that was implemented in this study is in part a realisation that community peacebuilding can only be achieved when ideas are put into action, no matter how small the idea. The use of peace infrastructures and grassroots initiatives such as village peace and development committees bring together conflicting parties through representatives to solve problems by focusing on dialogue, promotion of mutual understanding, building trust, and ensuring that people in the community have positive relationships which are peaceful (Connolly and Powers 2018: 14). Furthermore, Giessmann (2016: 41) posits that peace infrastructures focus on the structures and changes needed to transform conflict to reduce violence and sustain peace, unlike traditional approaches to peacebuilding that concentrate on one-off activities and interventions. Van Tongeren (2011: 19) also asserts that the success of peace committees is connected to the degree of involvement by all the community's various groups and sectors. This is in line with Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory, which advocates for peacebuilding mechanisms at all levels of society.

## **5.6 Challenges Associated with Peace Infrastructures**

Peace infrastructures and their various peacebuilding initiatives, such as peace councils and local peace committees at different levels, have filled a void in solving violent conflict in South Africa, Kenya and Ghana where there was lack of strong leadership in spearheading peacebuilding initiatives (Van Tongeren 2013). However, despite being very successful in Africa and other parts of the world, peace infrastructures have their challenges, as outlined below.

### **5.6.1 The government's political will**

Van Tongeren (2011) states that peace infrastructures work well when the government is open to consultation and in cooperation with the civil society. Peace infrastructures are powerful when they form parts of the government's structures and are led by national government. However, in most cases, particularly with authoritarian governments such as in Zimbabwe, governments have shown a lack of political will for consultation and buy-in by stakeholders, especially when the government leaders are benefiting from aspects of the conflicts. Elections are very divisive in states with deep social cleavages and fragile institutions, such as is the case in Zimbabwe, where electoral institutions are captured by the ruling party. Opposition

parties in Zimbabwe have lobbied for political reforms and the creation of independent electoral institutions, a move which has been resisted by the ruling party. In 2008, the government used the security institutions that are meant to protect citizens to torture them and force them to vote for the ruling party. Government can be very partisan, and institutions become part of the problem rather than the solution. Under such circumstances, it is debatable whether peace infrastructures which have become institutionalised by the government can deliver peace.

### **5.6.2 lack of inclusiveness and legitimacy**

Peace infrastructures can be effective when all the relevant stakeholders see them as legitimate, and all the stakeholders are included in all the processes, initiatives and activities of the peace infrastructures. According to Unger et al. (2013: 12), inclusiveness is crucial, although sometimes it is very difficult to attain. In addition, the lack of involvement of relevant marginalised stakeholders such as ethnic minorities, poor and low caste societies, women and children, and victims of human rights abuses renders peace infrastructures ineffective. One of the notable criticisms of peace infrastructure, as noted by Tobias (2016: 4), is that peace infrastructures are projects of social organisation that suit the needs and interests of the political elites and international community before the conflict-stricken society. In authoritarian governments, inclusivity and legitimacy have become challenges where those in government have failed to include members of the civil society organisations in their peace infrastructures. In Zimbabwe, the Peace and Reconciliation Commission has been criticised by many observers as an elitist institution which does not include relevant stakeholders. For instance, the commissioners were appointed by the President of the country, which makes the institution elitist. There is little, if any, involvement of civil society organisations, or the victims of the crimes that the commission seeks to address.

Felix and Ayodele (2017) postulate that it is crucial for state and non-state stakeholders to work together towards the creation of peace infrastructures. In addition, Odendaal (2010) states that peace infrastructures which are recognised and steered by the state are more likely to be faced with the problems of bureaucracy and too much political interference, which can hinder the infrastructures from attaining their objectives and goals, as indicated above by the Zimbabwean example. Despite the fact that peace infrastructures seem to offer great potential, they have a high risk of being manipulated and face substantial limitations when transformative processes are blocked by those who monopolise power (Unger et al. 2013: 15).

## 5.7 The Concept of Political Tolerance

Booth and Seligson (2009) are of the view that political tolerance is the willingness of an individual to support the civic and political rights of fellow citizens with whom he/she disagrees. In simple terms, political tolerance is acceptance of different political ideas and parties and permitting the criticism of the current political leaders by any individual. Most communities, including Epworth in Zimbabwe, are engulfed in political intolerance which has led to massive loss of life, destruction of property and displacements, which has been the case from independence to date. Political tolerance is the central tenet of liberal democracy (Akindele, Olaopa, and Salaam 2009: 368). Political tolerance is very important, as it is considered to be one of the key virtues of the modern democratic era (Riano 2002: 2). Political tolerance provides modern moral principles that reconcile the competing moral claims of an individual and society. In addition, political tolerance holds responsibilities which, if attained by individuals and communities, will result in a peaceful and eventually a more democratic society (Adman and Strömblad 2018: 1). On the other hand, political intolerance is created by the willingness to restrict the rights of the disliked person or group based on their differing views (Election Watch 2014: 1).

According to the World Public Opinion Report (2009: 5), there is tremendous support for political tolerance. However, in practice there is extensive observation of a decided lack of political tolerance in most countries. Hiskey, Moseley, and Rodriguez (2013: 1) postulate that although certain levels of political intolerance exist even in the most well-established democracies, a basic acceptance of a person's right to vote, regardless of his/her political views, is widely considered to be a critical component of a democratic political culture. According to Rufyikiri (2017), political intolerance is a great problem and of concern everywhere. Lack of political tolerance usually manifests when political leaders do not give space to opposition parties and politics, and when political parties do not accept dissent from their membership and reject any differing views. Election Watch (2014: 2) elaborate that political intolerance discriminates against – and might even silence – some parts of the population. Political tolerance in Zimbabwe has been seriously undermined in the sphere of party-political contestation between the ever-ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition MDC. Therefore, political intolerance is a threat to democracy and political tolerance principles. This lack of political tolerance has been witnessed during election periods and campaigns for political office, when members of both the ruling ZANU-PF and the opposition denounce each other as “sell-outs” or “murderers”.

Hazama (2010: 5) states that “political tolerance is influenced by psychological security, education, culture, freedom of expression and the media”. In other words, the degree to which Epworth residents are willing to accept and respect differing political views is influenced by their feelings of security, the quality of their education, the prevailing cultural norms, the extent to which they can freely express their opinions, and how information is disseminated through the media. Neither political tolerance nor intolerance is static. Both can be influenced to change. Eisenstein and Clark (2014: 291) posit that “[p]sychological security is one of the major determinants of political tolerance. Psychological security is made up of dogmatism, self-esteem and trust, and individuals who are psychologically insecure are less tolerant than those who are secure”. Individuals become intolerant when they feel that their interests, such as the power, benefits, and rights that they enjoy, are being threatened.

Dollard (1939) notes that when a person is frustrated, s/he will react aggressively or find a substitute for aggressive reaction. They further note that human beings are goal-oriented organisms who become aggressive when they are prevented from getting what they want. Political intolerance is also linked with this narrative, where people become intolerant to others whom they perceive to be impediments to achieving their goals – hence political violence. (Riano 2002: 12) postulates that culture shapes the behaviour of a society, and in a culture where violence is not condoned, community members tend to be more tolerant than where violence is encouraged and seen as a means of solving conflicts.

Akindele, Olaopa, and Salaam (2009: 375) state that to enhance political tolerance during elections, there is a need to design and develop an appropriate code of conduct by political parties and candidates. Such a code of conduct has to be legitimised and allocated adequate resources to enhance the attainment of its objectives of reducing violent conflict. According to Rufyikiri (2017), it is of paramount importance for a community, society, and the nation at large to create a culture of political tolerance through education, freedom of expression, and the media. Political tolerance may be fostered through participation in various institutional and social settings, such as schools, workplaces and civil society organisations (Widmalm and Oskarsson 2013: 533).

In order to attain this, civic education should be instituted to enlighten citizens about their rights and obligations in a democracy, and promote political tolerance. The government can assist in education on principles of democracy and political tolerance in the school curriculums at all levels, and community education on political tolerance is also crucial (Akindele *et al.* 2009: 375). Hazama (2011: 3) posits that education plays a pivotal role in political tolerance, as the majority of studies confirm that more educated persons are more tolerant. As part of its action

research, this study conducted peace education among the participants and one of the important messages that this peace education emphasised was political tolerance.

According to Election Watch (2014: 1), when freedom of expression is absent in the community it disturbs political tolerance. Freedom of expression permits open dialogue and a diversity of political opinion, which in turn reinforces political tolerance. The culture of political tolerance can also be developed by the media (that is, community radio, social media, local newspapers, and bulletins). The government has a responsibility to permit neutral media to increase and present different and essential views with regards to politics (Oskarsson & Widmalm 2014: 15). The media should support a wide collection of ideas among citizens and institutions to build an impartial and non-discriminatory environment that enhances political life. Among the recommendations that this study makes is that the media in Zimbabwe should play a leading role in supporting freedom of expression, so as to promote a culture of tolerance, since freedom of expression and a culture of tolerance go hand in hand. The promotion of freedom of speech by the media (especially state media, which dominates in Zimbabwe) would help the people of Epworth to develop a culture of tolerance, which would also help reduce incidents of political violence which have become a common feature in this society.

## **5.8 Summary**

This chapter outlined peace infrastructures and political tolerance as some of the major components of the conflict transformation puzzle. All the concepts pointed towards acceptance of conflict as an inevitable part of society, which should however be dealt with from a long-term perspective through building positive relationships.

# Chapter 6: Research Methodology

## 6.1 Introduction

At the most basic level, a research methodology chapter provides a road map for readers to understand how a study was conducted, assess the validity and reliability of the findings, and determine whether the research methods were appropriate for addressing the research questions or objectives. This chapter will essentially present the research methodology that I used in gathering the relevant data for the thesis. The methods used in this study were cognisant of the potential influence of political sensitivity on participant responses as such, to mitigate this, a combination of triangulation, assurance of confidentiality, reflexivity, and member checking was used to validate responses. Participants were interviewed in a neutral and non-threatening environment, and their anonymity was strictly maintained. The use of multiple qualitative methods, including focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and participant observation, further strengthened the validity of the findings by cross-verifying data from different source.

I should hasten to say that this study used a participatory action research (PAR) design, which I will focus on in the following chapter. To that end, here I will just make a cursory allusion to PAR. My discussion of the research methodology will be guided by the study's research objectives, which I will restate here. I will constantly refer to these objectives later in the chapter to explain how each component of the methodology was intended to achieve each objective.

### Research objectives

1. To analyse the causes, extent, and the consequences of post-election violence in Epworth.
2. To identify and examine ways of nurturing political tolerance in Epworth.
3. To design and implement a community peacebuilding intervention for reducing pre- and post-electoral violence in Epworth.
4. To evaluate the effectiveness of community peacebuilding interventions proposed by the Epworth community.

## 6.2 Research Paradigm: Constructivist Worldview

All research is guided by a world view or a set of beliefs which informs action. According to Creswell and Clark (2017a), a worldview is the philosophical conventions that academic

invigilators hold about reality, how information is procured, and the techniques for obtaining data. It is important that I share the paradigm that informed this study so that when I explain the methodology everything will be read in the context of my worldview.

The study had an action agenda for transformation and reform which was based on the constructivist worldview. Its aim was to address significant and timely concerns including political openness, democratic community engagement in election processes, and community sustainability. A constructivist worldview was ideal for carrying out a learning phenomenon that would enable people “to discover new knowledge or ‘truth’” (Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah 2016: 2). In that sense, the participants were actively involved in the investigation as active collaborators/investigators. In this action research study, I utilised a constructivist philosophy with an interest in triggering critical thinking and fostering a learning process that would result in constructive change processes that reduce the occurrence of violence (Murphy 1997). Constructivist philosophy seeks to advance a human way of thinking through providing learning experiences that help people to construct their own understanding and discover new knowledge that can be critical in changing certain behaviours or practices. I chose the constructivist paradigm because this study was meant to challenge the idea of fixed, objective reality. The lack of agency in the face of politically motivated turmoil among some Zimbabweans is largely because they are fixated on the idea that there is nothing they can do. This PAR instead focuses on the active, dynamic process by which individuals create new realities that serve their best interests.

A constructivist worldview is an approach that seeks to develop practical solutions (in this case, for addressing political exploitation and deprivation among the local population in Epworth), as noted by Creswell and Clark (2017a). To ensure the effectiveness and acceptability of these solutions, it was crucial to embrace and incorporate the individual perspectives and experiences of conflict within the Epworth community. This process involved facilitating interactions between myself (as the researcher) and the co-researchers or participants through various initiatives and programmes.

Adopting a constructivist worldview was also based on the idea that it assisted marginalised communities to a unique learning process and allowed them to escape the confines of the political arena, the media, and power dynamics, and gain access to available resources and experiential knowledge (Murphy 1997; Kim 2005; Adom, Yeboah, and Ankrah 2016). The constructivist worldview has also been referred to as emancipatory, since it has the power to help people learn new skills that can help shift them from old, deep-seated experiences, hence creating room for them to escape oppression and unequal power structures that impede self-determination and personal growth (Creswell and Poth 2016; Adom, Yeboah, and Ankrah

2016)). Furthermore, a constructivist worldview naturally seeks to advance discussions about creating change by including local communities as partners in the enquiry, a goal achieved through the Peace Rabbits project with my Action Team (AT).

### 6.3 Research Approach

In simple terms, a research approach is the strategy or plan one uses to conduct research. It is the way you decide to go about finding answers to your research questions or solving a problem. Research is often conducted using the dominant qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches. In understanding research approaches, I think of my research project as a journey to a destination, and the research approach as the mode of transportation I would choose. Where I want to go, the resources available, and the purpose of the trip all play a part in determining the transportation that I will use. A research approach determines how you will collect and analyse data, the depth of your exploration, and the time it will take to reach your research destination. Just as in transportation, the choice of approach should align with your research goals and the type of information you need to get there effectively. Using this analogy, I will try to explain how I chose a research approach for this study and how other options were deemed inadequate.

#### 6.3.1 Types of research approach

Table 6. 1: Research Approach

Car	I equate choosing a car to taking a quantitative research approach. The quantitative research approach allows one to gather a lot of data and focus on numbers and statistics – for instance, measuring distances and speed. It is a fast and efficient way to get to your destination if you have a clear route and specific numbers to reach.
Bicycle	Opting for a bicycle is akin to using a qualitative research approach. Travelling on bicycle gives one the opportunity to explore the details along the way, like observing the scenery and talking to people. This method is good for understanding the local culture and nuances of your research, but it might take longer: it is slow, at least compared to a car.
Hitchhiking	Similarly to a mixed methods research approach, hitchhiking gives one the freedom to change a mode of transport. You can collect both quantitative and qualitative data, allowing you to appreciate both the big

	picture and the details. It is a versatile approach, but it can be time-consuming.
Public Transportation	Taking public transportation is analogous to relying on secondary data, like books, articles, or existing research. You will not do the primary exploration yourself but use information that others have gathered. This is a practical choice if you want to save time and resources.

This study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is a broad research paradigm which focuses on generating textual information through exploring and investigating issues and understanding different kinds of knowledge (usefulness, possibilities/issues the knowledge presents, and how the knowledge can be applied) found in everyday contexts via interviews, observations or focus groups (Leeming 2018).

### 6.3.2 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research is an approach that seeks to comprehend issues and challenges thoroughly from a variety of viewpoints (Sekaran and Bougie 2016) . This study’s departure point is that peacebuilding in Zimbabwe lacks context, focusing only on an elite pact where political leaders sideline ordinary citizens whose lives are most affected by conflict. It was important that I followed an approach that is accessible and allowed common citizens to share their views, however varied. Qualitative research is particularly useful if one is seeking to conduct a study that elicits meaningful responses from individuals or groups in a sample set (Zulu 2017). Qualitative data is gathered by textual and non-numerical descriptive methods, such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, case studies, and observations (Jovancic 2019). My goal in conducting this research was to learn about the phenomenon, not only to describe and explain it. Conflict is a very personal and emotional experience which cannot be reduced to statistics.

I used a qualitative research approach because it engages inductive reasoning to explore and identify different challenges and issues surrounding the study problem (Yin 2011). The inductive technique employs a “bottom-up” methodology, whereby the procedures or activities produced from qualitative research drive the production of broader conceptions, rather than the other way around (Yin 2011). In other words, the issues presented in this study came from research participants – not from me or any other higher power. However, I should say that this approach also allowed me to create propositions using inductive reasoning based on a variety of secondary reviews, field observations and data.

Creswell and Poth (2016) explain that researchers that are interested in the “why” and “how” of issues occurring in society use a qualitative research inquiry to address these questions and find answers. This study is essentially looking at why there is unending violence in the Epworth community and goes further: to find how the violence can be transformed to build relations that are profitable to humanity. Humans are typically the focus of these kinds of research inquiries or investigations. Rajasekar, Philominaathan and Chinnathambi (2013) provide the following characteristics of qualitative research:

- Utilises words instead of numbers.
- Focuses on understanding and making connections on key issues within the study context.
- Using graphs is irrelevant.
- Its findings serve as a basis for subsequent quantitative research; hence it is considered a “foundational” study.
- Examines the thought processes involved in making decisions and raises questions about them.

Numerous advantages and disadvantages are linked to using a qualitative approach. It is difficult to generalise the findings of qualitative research to the entire population, to apply statistical analysis, and to establish relationships between variables. However, a generalised approach is precisely why violence does not end in communities. While the violence has a national character, each community has its own nuances that are either a barrier to, or a way to achieving, peace. This is not to say that Zimbabwe does not need a national approach to ending the internecine conflict. It does. But each community needs a context-specific approach, while the national leaders provide resources and, perhaps, coordination. In this regard the advantages of the qualitative technique outweigh its disadvantages, and hence I used this approach for this study. Billups (2020) observes that the methods of data collection used in qualitative research provide the most useful insight into the minds and actions of study participants.

Additionally, qualitative data can be easily used to conduct in-depth exploration of the phenomenon and generate forecasts and predictions on related issues (Saunders and Townsend 2018). The attributes of qualitative research were beneficial to me as a researcher to thoroughly comprehend the foundational interests of the study. The qualitative method promotes openness and free expression of thoughts, which makes participants feel safe to provide responses that are detailed and truthful (Billups 2020). As a result, I was able to successfully collect useful and detailed information from the participants as they were able to share relevant life experiences. Qualitative research steps guided the review of existing

studies on the subject matter and a detailed exploration of participants' views on causes and consequences of election-related violence in the community.

According to Davis, Nsengiyumva, and Hyslop (2019), the fundamental advantage of a qualitative study is its emphasis on settings and a sense of social lives and experiences for the purpose of theory and inductively driven research to develop theoretical ideas. Therefore, the use of a qualitative research approach was crucial and insightful in guiding me to conduct a thorough baseline study to determine the causes, extent, and the consequences of post-election violence in Epworth.

## **6.4 Research Design**

According to Creswell (2014:3), a research design is defined as “the plan and the methodology for an investigation that traverses the choice from broad presumptions to detailed techniques for information accumulating and analysis”. It forms the blueprint of how the study is conducted and the data is solicited, and the framework of how it is analysed. Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell (2005) highlight that a research design is concerned with arrangement, collection, and exploration of data aimed at attaching significance to the exploration study. There are different types of research design, which are phenomenological/exploratory, historical or narrative, ethnographic, case study, grounded theory, and action research. This study was carried out involving a combination of both exploratory and action research design, commonly referred to across literature as exploratory action research (exploratory AR) (Shani and Eberhardt 1987; Smith 2015; Calzada, Pérez-Batlle, and Batlle-Montserrat 2021).

### **6.4.1 Exploratory action research design**

The exploratory AR for this study was guided by three components, namely the exploratory, the AR, and the evaluation components. Shani and Eberhardt (1987) note that exploratory AR differs from other traditional research designs because the nature of its approach seeks to forgo narratives and discussions of how to improve certain issues, but instead seeks to devise and implement ways that can be effective in improving challenging situations. Exploratory AR often takes a gradualist approach, which first involves an exploratory induction process to understand the key contextual characteristics and challenges before embarking on action-oriented engagements (Smith 2015). To engage in the process of *Transforming post-conflict-relationships via Peace Rabbits in Epworth, Zimbabwe*, I had to adopt a gradualist approach whereby I had first to provide an in-depth exploration of the causes, extent and consequences of violence through a qualitative exploration of existing literature and conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups. The second phase involved co-creation of intervention strategies

with the participants (the Action Research Team, hereafter AT), and implementing the planned intervention.

The first two study objectives are answered in part by the exploratory research component, whilst the third and fourth study objectives are addressed in part by the AR and evaluation components, respectively. Due to the nature of my research, I created an exploratory qualitative research project. The AR plan was suited for this study because it provides an in-depth comprehension of the component being studied, and promotes a holistic grasp of the social phenomenon of a certain community. As suggested by Yin (2009), a case study in AR is clearly defined as a practical investigation that examines a current occurrence in depth in its real-world environment or context. As a result, focus was put on developing an intervention method for the research issue, which attempts to change post-conflict relationships between political enemies using Peace Rabbits. The intervention technique of using Peace Rabbits caters to and addresses the action element of this research.

The adoption of exploratory AR was inspired by the Peacebuilding Programme at the Durban University of Technology (DUT), whose focus is on peace graduates contributing to peacebuilding activities and resolving conflicts, in their local communities and beyond, through engaging practical research solutions. Hence, exploratory AR is promoted as a key strategy in implementing and producing such results. The use of exploratory AR design provided me and the participants (AT) with the opportunity to design an intervention plan that would achieve a flexible, process-oriented design for learning and developing fresh ideas and gaining new knowledge on political tolerance and harmony. Even though the journey was somewhat chaotic, it was still a great experience, as it assisted me to advance my interviewing and observational skills, as well as giving me the opportunity to observe the efficiency of AR in producing results.

Due to the nature of the research approach that I utilised for this study, it proved challenging to anticipate the potential intervention methods in the design stage until after the exploratory research was conducted. The action team's opinions were essential to the creation of such intervention plans. The following potential intervention tactics were considered and selected:

- (i) the establishment of Peace Rabbits where rival political supporters were working together;
- (ii) participant observations, focus group discussions and interviews were used to generate data for this study; and
- (iii) the evaluation of the intervention strategy preliminary outcomes was done together with the AT.

The main purpose of the AR design was to confirm that the evidence attained allowed me to answer the research questions as distinctly as possible.

#### **6.4.2 Justification for research design used**

As highlighted, the design which I employed in this study is exploratory AR using a qualitative research approach. The qualitative components of the research provided a suitable and systematic way of gathering data that makes use of techniques including document reviews, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic observations (Creswell 2014). Exploratory AR was suitable for this study as it involved studying shared patterns of behaviour and actions of people in the Epworth area in their natural setting. It explored the understanding and meaning that persons or groups credited to their communal or human difficulties.

Exploratory AR utilises investigative strategies to gain more understanding of engaging people-centred solutions or approaches (Calzada, Pérez-Batlle, and Batlle-Montserrat 2021). An investigative study aims to establish the facts and obtain fresh information to assess whether it contains any intriguing patterns (Mouton and Marais 1996). Through a thorough investigation of participants' daily experiences, the qualitative exploratory AR design aids in the generation of concrete data and tends to reveal the underlying motivations of the local population with relation to their ideas, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours. The study employed three data collection methods, namely interviews, observations, and focus group discussions (FGDs), which helped in enhancing the research's validity and trustworthiness. Since this study deals with the post-conflict scenario in a high-density location, the qualitative methodology helped people to share their emotional stories and express their opinions and feelings in FGDs and during in-depth interviews.

### **6.5 Study Population and Sample**

#### **6.5.1 Population**

A research population includes an entire set of cases or group members that are the subject of the research enquiry and from which a sample will be taken (Saunders & Townsend 2016). Greenstein and Davies (2012) refer to the population in the study as the category of people from which the sample is selected. Greenstein and Davies (2012) describe it as the entire and inclusive collection of all theoretically defined elements. A further definition of the population is a collection of people or things from which a sample is drawn for measurement (Mugo 2002). Additionally, population is defined by Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie (2017) as a group of factors on which decisions must be made, with particular emphasis on how precisely the marked people should be defined. The Zimbabwe population census for 2022 revealed that

there are 206,365 people who reside in Epworth (ZimStats 2022). The relevant sample for the study had to be drawn from this target population to ensure the authentic outcome of the results.

According to Asiamah *et al.* (2017), a sample population is utilised to speak as representatives of the population being studied. Epworth is divided into seven wards, and the study sampled politically active participants from each of the seven wards to form the sample frame. The study population involved people from different political parties, municipal councillors, young people, political party supporters, NGO representatives and church leaders from Epworth, who were the population sample for interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Thirty participants made up the overall study population that was sampled in gathering the relevant study data.

### **6.5.2 Sampling and sample frame**

All research has to be conducted within a specific timeframe. Therefore, Alvi (2016) asserts that it is crucial to select only a few participants from the entire population as a sample to be involved in the study. According to Mugo (2002), sampling is a method, demonstration, or technique for selecting a representative sample of the population in order to identify its key characteristics. Mugo goes on to say that sampling is done to infer information about the population from the sample. In essence, a sample is a limited portion of the population whose features are chosen in order to learn more about the overall population (Mugo 2002). In addition, a group of respondents picked from a larger population for the survey's aim serves as an example for managing persons similar to those in this case study.

Sampling is the process of selecting a sufficient number of elements to represent the entire research population in order to learn enough about those elements to extrapolate their characteristics to the larger population (Sekaran & Bougie 2013). The sampling process suggested by Rowley (2014) entails the following steps: (i) identifying and defining the population of interest; (ii) establishing the sample structure; (iii) selecting a sample through the use of an appropriate applicable sampling technique; (iv) calculating the necessary sample size in relation to the population; and (v) carrying out the selection process.

Using samples has the major benefit of providing information more rapidly, especially when the population is big or challenging to access (Asiamah *et al.* 2017). Asiamah *et al.* also stress the fact that data from the sample can be used to characterise population attributes. Another benefit of sampling is that it lowers research costs and increases the accuracy, speed, and efficiency of research as well as providing flexibility (Mugo 2002).

Sampling is a crucial part of the research process; thus, there is emphasis on understanding the relevance of sampling methods in every study (Alvi 2016). There are two broad types of sampling, which are probability and non-probability sampling methods. These methods have different types of sampling techniques that fall under them. Probability sampling is also referred to as random or representative sampling, where every member of the population has a known (non-zero) probability of being selected for the sample in a study. Non-probability sampling is referred to as judgement or non-random sampling where “every unit of population does not get an equal chance of participation in the investigation” (Alvi 2016: 13). An overview of the various techniques of sampling is provided by Rowley (2014) and is adapted in Table 6.2 below.

*Table 6. 2 Sampling Types*

Sample type	Description
Probability sampling	Every member of the population has a known (non-zero) probability of being selected for the sample in a study
Random	There are no preferences; the elements are picked at random.
Stratified	A representative sample is chosen from each group within the targeted study population based on factors that are relevant to the research objectives (e.g., employment level, years of experience).
Cluster	The study population is randomly selected based on specific separated segments such as province or district.
Non-probability sampling	“Every unit of population does not get an equal chance of participation in the investigation”
Systematic	Elements to serve as representatives are selected in a systematic or sequential manner (5,10,15).

Quota	Elements of representatives are selected based on predetermined criteria to ensure coverage of the specified or targeted elements.
Purposive	The sample is specifically chosen for the research. Used when the researcher has some background information and picks participants who are likely to be knowledgeable and privy to the relevant information.
Convenience	The populations that make up the representative element are those that can be reached, such as people who are present and available in a work environment on the day of gathering research data.
Snowball	A few specific participants are chosen and are asked to name any other people who might be relevant for the study.

### 6.5.3 Sampling technique

Considering that the study was in two phases, (i) a baseline exploratory phase where interviews and focus group discussions were conducted, and (ii) an action research process where the planning and intervention was carried out, I had to carefully sample participants who would be involved in both phases of the study. Hence, in carrying out this study, I utilised non-probability sampling, since the study was guided by specific interests to address politically related conflict challenges within the community of Epworth. Non-probability sampling is effective in the exploratory design; hence, it was utilised to recruit participants for both interviews and FGDs. According to Druckman (2005), non-probability sampling is best for exploratory research because in-depth data from a limited number of participants is required. This was successful in this politically charged study project. The community representatives were referred to me by the provincial leaderships of the MDC, CCC and ZANU-PF, who then assisted in the identification and provision of the supporters list. The local Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Madanhashe Charity Organisation, Kuwirirana Disabled Children Centre, and Jairos Jiri offered members of various political affiliations to help in the purposive sampling approach for the study, and the district development coordinator assisted me in locating the councillors.

Thus, a purposive sampling technique was adopted to select participants that I considered to be relevant in ensuring the desired data outcomes as per the stipulated objectives. For instance, I carefully selected church leaders and NGO representatives as they are considered to be apolitical and are actively involved in communities, promoting social justice and human dignity and protecting basic human rights (Strauss 2015; Alvi 2016). I also selected leaders of the local political parties, municipal councillors, young people, and political party supporters in Epworth – mainly because they understand the historical political conflicts and, at one point or another, some of them have been involved in and experienced the challenges of political conflict following the 2008, 2013 and 2018 elections.

FGDs were undertaken with the relevant political parties' local support bases. Additionally, observational data were gathered, since this helped to produce first-hand insights that complemented data from key informants and FGDs and improved the trustworthiness of my research findings. I specifically targeted adults and youths to explore whether there are differences in perspectives and to ensure an intergenerational learning through the focus group discussions and intervention processes.

#### **6.5.4 Sample size**

The participants for this study consisted of political leaders from the major political parties (ZANU-PF, MDC/Citizens Coalition for Change) (n=2), church leaders (n=1), NGO representatives (n= 4), councillors (n=2), District Development Councillors (n=1), and political party supporters (community members) (n=20). The 30 study participants made up the interview participants in the exploratory phase. The total number of 30 participants was reached through data saturation. Morgan (2002) states that data saturation should be utilised to choose the sample size. This means a researcher has to explore information through interviews and focus groups until the stage where the shared data becomes repetitive and there is nothing new being shared by participants (point of saturation) (Asiamah *et al.* 2017). The exploratory phase produced saturated data which confirmed the different causes and the extent and the consequences of post-election violence, and partially reflected on suggested ways of improving political tolerance in Epworth. Table 6.2 below provides detailed insight into the sample size.

Table 6. 3: Study Sample Size for Key Informant Interviews

Sample Category	Sampling Technique	Number obtained
Political leaders (ZANU-PF Youth Chairman and CCC Youth Chairman)	Purposive	2
Madanhashe (CBO)	Purposive	1
Church Leader	Purposive	1
CCC members	Purposive	10
ZANU-PF members	Purposive	10
DDC	Purposive	1
Councillors	Purposive	2
Millennial Youth Transformative Hub	Purposive	2
Jairos Jiri (NGO)	Purposive	1
Total		30

The total number of FGDs that were conducted are (n=4) and the details are presented in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6. 4: Focus Group Discussions

FDG	Participants	Date Conducted	Time Period
1	8	17/12/2021	1hr 33min
2	7	28/12/2021	1hr 30min
3	8	15/01/2022	1hr 27min
4	7	29/01/2022	1hr 20 min

## **6.6 Data Collection Methods**

The techniques for gathering the data utilised to produce the results for this study are covered in this section. According to Jovancic (2019), data collection entails methodically compiling and measuring information on relevant factors in order to provide answers to queries, formulate research questions, test hypotheses, and assess results. Questionnaires, archival research, participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews are the primary methods of data collection in qualitative studies (Watson 2015). There are two main types of data sources: primary and secondary. Primary data are those obtained by the researcher themselves and can be traced back to the participants of the study (Crossman 2021). The information is unique and has never been incorporated into another study. Secondary sources, on the other hand, are previously gathered data that were not originally obtained for this study and may be from a different time period or region (Crossman 2021). Key tools for gathering and producing qualitative data include the interview guide, focus group discussion guide, and observations. The data for this study was gathered using primary research tools to examine, give reasons for, and assess the consequences of electoral violence, as well as explore potential applications of Peace Rabbits in post-conflict relationships in Epworth, Zimbabwe.

### **6.6.1 Recruitment process/data collection**

The leaders of the local political parties, municipal councillors, young people, political party supporters, and NGO representatives were all carefully chosen for in-depth interviews. To gain initial access to choose these participants the researcher had to negotiate access through various political offices and relevant community leaders. The community representatives were referred to me by the provincial leadership of the MDC, CCC and ZANU-PF, and then assisted in the identification and provision of the supporters list. The local Community Based Organisations (CBOs), Madanhashe Charity Organisation, Kuwirirana Disabled Children's Centre, and Jairos Jiri offered members of various political affiliations, helping in the purposive sampling approach for the study, and the district development coordinator assisted me in locating the councillors. Having negotiated access through interactions and communication with various stakeholders, familiarising them with the intention of my study, I selected the participants for interviews. FGDs were undertaken with the relevant political parties' local support bases. Additionally, observational data were gathered since this helped to produce first-hand insights that complemented data from key informants and FGDs and improved the validity and reliability/trustworthiness of my research findings.

### 6.6.2 In-depth interviews

Interviewing is described by Kvale (1996: 1) as “an exchange of perspectives between two or more persons on a topic of shared interest, [that] perceives the relevance of human contact for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situation of research data”. In interviews, the interviewer intensively presses the respondent to provide unconstrained replies to very sensitive questions and topics (Muchengetwa & Chakuchichi 2010).

Davies and Hughes (2014) encapsulate an interview as not just a regular chat, but as a chat which has a goal or objective. In a research project, the researcher establishes that emphasis to ensure that s/he maintains a high level of control over the subject, while giving the participants complete freedom to choose the type of response. Rutledge and Hogg (2020) defines an in-depth interview as a qualitative research technique that entails holding lengthy one-on-one interviews with a small number of informants to investigate how they view a specific concept, circumstance, or programme. Harrell (2019) defines an in-depth interview as a discussion, typically one-on-one and conducted over the phone or in person, between an interviewer and a respondent, with the aim of gathering information on a specific set of topics.

In this type of research, the respondents provide the primary data of the study. Since I wanted to learn more about the background of the participants’ experiences, feelings, expertise, and viewpoints, interviews were especially helpful. They performed effectively as a follow-up to other research tools, like focus groups, in order to learn more about participants’ reactions. Given that participants were given enough time to clarify their perspectives and beliefs openly, the interviews gave me detailed information. I had interviews with each of the ten key informants, who included representatives of the local and national leaderships of political parties, as well as twenty party supporters. This gave the respondents the freedom to express their uncensored views on how Peace Rabbits might help communities heal from political trauma. Kvale (2007: 1) urges interviewing, asking, “if you want to know how individuals interpret themselves and their circumstances, why not talk to them?” The interviews were picked as an exploratory study because it was anticipated that they would produce participants’ personal experiences in relation to political violence in their region.

The following sequential approach was used to collect data utilising in-depth interviews (adapted from Boyce and Neale, 2006: 6):

- ❖ Scheduling in-depth interviews with important informants and other supporters of the political party, informing them of the interview’s goal, the rationale for the participant’s selection, and the anticipated interview length.

- ❖ Following informed consent, an in-depth interview was conducted in accordance with the prescribed ethics.
- ❖ Following the interview, the data were summarised, information was verified, and data were analysed by transcription.
- ❖ A report was written.

According to the data I gathered from the community members, they urgently required some kind of intervention plan to enable the transformation of their political affiliation- and election violence-related portrayals of themselves as terrible and broken which emerged during the interviews and FGDs.

One of the key benefits of doing in-depth interviews is that they provide participants the opportunity to share some historical details, while allowing the researcher to direct the path of enquiry (Cresswell 2014). Another benefit of using in-depth interviews is that there is the opportunity to clarify queries, and that the process of probing further improves the accuracy of the data gathered (Kvale 1996). The ability of an in-depth interview to produce detailed information on the ideas, feelings, or behaviours being investigated from a small sample is its key quality (Driscoll *et al.* 2007). The other major benefit of in-depth interviews is that they produce considerably more detailed information than can be obtained from other data collection techniques (Boyce & Neale 2006). The respondents felt more at ease and comfortable during the in-depth interview activity.

In-depth interviews have certain clear drawbacks, such as the possibility of bias in the process, among others (Cresswell 2014). Patton and Cochran (2002) note that conducting, transcribing, and analysing the data from in-depth interviews takes a lot of time. Additionally, a skilled interviewer is required for the procedure to produce enough rich and thorough data (National Science Foundation 2002). Another drawback is that since in-depth interviews typically only utilise small samples, the findings cannot be generalised (Boyce & Neale 2006). As a result, knowing the benefits and drawbacks can help determine how to employ in-depth interviews as a method of data gathering for a study.

### **6.6.3 Participant observation**

In research, observation is an excellent approach to gathering knowledge that is both authentic and limitless, which makes it especially relevant in the social sciences (Muchengetwa and Chakuchichi 2010: 49). In this method, I participated in the environment and made observations while being aware of the subjects of my observations. Understanding and observing the realities and surroundings of the ZANU-PF and MDC supporters in Epworth was

necessary for this. A checklist of things to watch for and events to note was required to help guide the observation process. To increase its dependability and credibility, the results from this research tool were combined with information from focus groups and interview techniques.

When performing participant observation in the realm of research, a number of problems have been found. I was reminded by my research to constantly keep in mind that I would be in a social situation for the express goal of conducting social science research and that I should be engaged while remaining objective. This assisted me in avoiding the dangers of being overly identified with the individuals and in maintaining my objectivity in the situation. I also had had an awareness that being given a supporting role in hidden studies where the researcher is unable to take notes or utilise a variety of other research methods frequently violates the norms of informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality and raises ethical issues for the researcher (Lauder 2003). Therefore, as a participant observer I played an oversight role with an awareness of the difficulties faced during the research process, engaging in critical self-reflection of the research experience, and successfully concluding the study.

#### **6.6.4 Focus group discussions defined**

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are a creative approach to conducting multiple in-depth interviews at the same time, but they must be effectively structured in order to be successful (Muchengetwa & Chakuchichi 2010). Morgan (2002) reaffirms that FGDs refer to a research method that gathers data through group discussion on a topic chosen by the researcher. In essence, the researcher's interests serve as the focus, while group interaction serves as the source of the data. Additionally, Oliveira and de Freitas (1998: 1) describe FGDs as a special kind of in-depth interview carried out in a group, with meeting specifications established with respect to the composition, size, and interview techniques. Last but not least, the National Science Foundation (2002:52) defines FGDs as a gathering of eight to twelve individuals who share some common characteristics relevant to the evaluation, whereas Harrell and Bradley (2009: 14) define a FGD as a dynamic group discussion used to gather information.

#### **6.6.5 The size and characteristics of FDGs**

People's participation, a series of assemblies, the production of qualitative data, and the homogeneity of the participants are among the primary characteristics of FDGs that are frequently emphasised (Dilshad and Latif 2013). FGDs have also been praised for being able to acquire additional information to quantitative data collection and for being able to gain more in-depth information on views, perceptions, insights, attitudes, or experiences (Morgan 2002).

Through their responses to the ideas and factors brought up throughout the discussion, the participants affect one another's behaviour (Freitas *et al.* 1998).

In terms of group size, Rubin and Rubin (2011) suggest 6 to 12 participants for the FGDs, while Kvale (2007) advises 6 to 19 participants. There is a strong argument that having fewer than 8 people makes the debate boring, while having more than 12 participants makes it more challenging to moderate (Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook 2015: 64). When there are too many participants, some participants may not have enough time to contribute. However, due to the nature of the study, which required equal representation from both political parties, 10 participants from each of the three FGDs were used. By allocating their members equal quotas in the FGDs, I consciously offered both political parties the same amount of attention. The data from interviews and observation methods are expected to be clarified and supplemented by FGDs in order to improve data reliability and validity (Stewart *et al.* 2015).

#### **6.6.5.1 Conducting the FGDs**

FGDs were carried out in three stages: planning, meeting execution, and data analysis. According to Freitas *et al.* (1998) and Dilshad and Latif (2013), planning is essential to the process of conducting FGDs. Planning for this study included developing the project's research questions, identifying the participants, and deciding where the sessions would take place.

The interviews were conducted with discussion moderators, and the interview transcripts were used for data analysis. These transcripts were analysed and explained in a report that was a component of this study. Davies (2007) claims that a maximum of six FGDs should be done; this study held three FGDs to collect data, with each session lasting an hour. The first round of FGDs was performed prior to the execution of the intervention strategy, and the second round served as an evaluation tool to chart and plan the future after Peace Rabbits was established with the goal of altering post-conflict relationships.

#### **6.6.5.2 Merits and demerits of FGDs**

The table below outlines the major merits and demerits of FGDs.

Table 6. 5: Merits and demerits of FGDs

Merits of FGDs	Demerits of FGDs
----------------	------------------

Allow collection of a suitable amount of data in a short time	Demand thorough groundwork before conducting them
Have low cost	Data analysis is more difficult to perform
Promote spontaneous interaction of participants	Demand well-trained moderators
Help in construction of questionnaire when they precede a survey	Much effort is required to assemble the groups
	Discussion needs a conducive atmosphere

Adapted from Freitas *et al.* (1998: 5)

It is crucial to remember that the advantages of FGDs described above support their use as one of the data gathering strategies in this study. Additionally, it has been suggested that despite their drawbacks, FGDs nonetheless make it easier to gather relevant information that serves as the foundation for developing a framework (Freitas *et al.* 1998). In order to first obtain my AT and then to assess the early results of the intervention strategy used in this study, I conducted FGDs with a subset of Epworth residents.

## 6.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

High-quality research methods always begin with a detailed list of inclusion and exclusion criteria for potential study participants. Criteria for inclusion are those characteristics of the study population that are most important for answering the research question (Patino & Ferreira 2018). In this study I needed participants that lived in Epworth and who were knowledgeable about the political experiences of violence in the community. Thus, the inclusion criteria for the study consisted of political party leaders, members/supporters, NGOs, CBOs, religious and community leaders.

### 6.7.1 Pretesting

Pretesting, according to Caspar *et al.* (2016), is a scaled-down version of the information-collecting process that contains all techniques and tools that are applied during data gathering prior to the actual data gathering exercise. The purpose of the pretesting activity was to evaluate the research tools before the actual research got underway (de Jong, Hibben & Kelley 2015). Additionally, the pretesting revealed whether participants consistently missed any important questions and whether sufficient response categories were available (Caspar

*et al.* 2016). This gave me the chance to identify weaknesses and limitations in the interview and FGD guides, respectively, and aided in refining the research instruments and questions with the aim of attaining the study objectives. The study found that the pretest research tools needed simplified diction, and residents had so much information to share such that I had to merge some of the questions so that the discussions were not prolonged. I then designed Shona and English translated guides for the discussion, which I transcribed.

### **6.7.2 How pretesting was undertaken.**

Pretesting of the research process was conducted in two phases. Firstly, to establish the quality of the research interview and FDGs instruments, three in-depth interviews and one brief focus group discussion with ten participants were conducted as pilot sessions with a small sample number of persons at Domboramwari Community Hall in Epworth. The process allowed me to revise and reflect on the way I was asking some questions, which some participants considered to be “tricks” or incriminating, although the process of research is bound by ethical standards and participants who participated in the pilot study project were not recruited for the main research effort. This aided in refining the research questions and tools in order to accomplish the study objectives.

Secondly, I engaged a pilot process for the action research process. I carried out some consultative and logistical meetings with the action team as a mapping tool for designing the most relevant and effective intervention strategy to be used for the research. I conducted two preliminary pilot assessments at the beginning of 2021 with the Madanha Ashe Community Organization (MACO), the Jairos Jiri Association, the Kuwirirana Disabled Children’s Trust, the Millennial Youth Transformative Hub (MYTH), and local leadership. These meetings were intended to map out intervention and implementation modalities. I had communicated with the Kuwirirana Disabled Children’s Centre coordinator while still at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) for the allocation of a portion of land to erect rabbit cages for the project.

I was convinced that the intervention strategy would offer a better and more effective alternative to the traditional methods that have been used in addressing the transformation of post-conflict relationships among rival political party supporters, based on the knowledge I had gained from the university about action research. In order to support the validity and intent of this study, I therefore made the case for action research very obvious during the initial sessions. I also made it apparent that it was a strategy that addressed community relations and transformation in a more comprehensive and long-term way, rather than as a “band-aid”. The CBOs MACO and MYTH mobilised for these consultative meetings, which is why there was an impressive turnout. At the discussions, I was able to clarify the study’s goal and dispel

rumours and misunderstandings that it might be a political or regime-change project. The sessions were also designed to ensure my safety during the data gathering process as well as the safety of the research participants.

The pretesting sessions conducted gave me fresh perspectives that I used in my research, particularly the enhancements to my research instruments, the FDG and interview guides. This equipped me to create a study tool that would not arouse emotions or provoke anyone during participant sessions.

## **6.8 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis, which categorises qualitative data, was used to analyse the qualitative data (Boyatzis 1998). Data analysis includes breaking a complex whole down into its constituent components, frequently scaling it down to manageable size, and then extracting themes and patterns from the data (Mouton 2001). The AR team conducted a pilot assessment of the programme after the intervention approaches were put into place. When anything new is developed, according to De Vos *et al.* (2011), it should be evaluated; in this case, Peace Rabbits had been established. In order to ascertain whether there had been any beneficial change in the community's strained ties, Peace Rabbits was evaluated using a series of perceptive questions. Mouton (2001) suggested that data analysis really starts in the field. This required examining the notes and categorising the data.

### *Analysis of Transcripts*

The data collected through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and insights. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis approach, the transcripts were (1) familiarised, (2) coded, (3) categorised into themes, (4) reviewed, (5) defined, and (6) interpreted in relation to the research objectives.

To maintain reliability, an intercoder reliability check was conducted by reviewing selected transcripts with a research assistant. NVivo software was used to organise and code responses, ensuring systematic categorisation of themes such as political tolerance, economic cooperation, and community cohesion. The final themes were derived from participant narratives, providing a rich understanding of how the Peace Rabbits initiative influenced social relations in Epworth. (See Appendix E for sample coded excerpts.)

## **6.9 Data Presentation**

In this thesis, I present interview excerpts in Shona, the language in which the data was collected, followed by an English translation. This approach aligns with scholarly arguments emphasizing the importance of preserving meaning, ensuring transparency, and respecting participants' voices. Language carries cultural and contextual nuances that may be lost in translation; thus, providing the original Shona excerpts allows readers to engage with the data in its authentic form while also assessing the accuracy of the translation (Temple and Young 2004). Furthermore, this practice enhances research transparency by making the interpretive process explicit and allowing for critical engagement with translation choices (Van Nes et al. 2010). Scholars also highlight that maintaining the original language respects the voices of participants, particularly in contexts where language is deeply tied to identity and lived experience (Squires 2009). Additionally, translation is inherently an interpretive act, and by presenting both versions, I acknowledge my role in shaping meaning while encouraging reflexivity in the translation process (Birbili 2000). This dual presentation strengthens the credibility of the research by facilitating cross-linguistic validity, enabling bilingual readers to engage with the data and assess alternative interpretations if needed (Regmi, Naidoo, and Pilkington 2010).

## **6.10 Delimitations/Scope**

The research was conducted in Epworth township. The study involved residents from all seven wards in the area. Considering that the next cycle of elections was due to take place in 2023, I saw the research as an opportunity to embark on the study to help in developing strategic engagement and creating meaningful conversations that trigger changes towards a more tolerant political culture and reduce political violence in the community. Hence, the contextual approach that was utilised in conducting this study was meant to ensure that key solutions were birthed by the local members. Residents of Epworth and development partners took part in this study. The findings from this research are applicable to Epworth and environments like it, because Epworth is a high-density suburb, but they might not be generalisable to other contexts.

## **6.11 Limitations of this Study**

The limitations of this study included lack of financial resources, and logistical challenges. The process for conducting this research required financial resources to transport participants to

meetings and provide food in some gatherings. In most cases, I had to dig into my limited resources just to ensure that the meetings were successful. To reduce some of the transport costs I had to look for some central meeting places that would save some money for me as well as the participants. Moreover, the study was conducted with a limited timeframe, and yet the process of conducting exploratory AR is unpredictable. The study had some complex situations which made the intervention process slower than expected. However, this provided insight into understanding that AR as a research approach exposes real life challenges that require patience and careful engagement in addressing. The processes of addressing some of these challenges provided rich insight and outcomes that make crucial contributions to new knowledge. This was a contextual study that focused on Epworth. As a result, the study's findings would not apply to other contexts or populations aside from those to which the sample would be related.

## **6.12 Trustworthiness**

The upsurge in the use of qualitative methods across studies demands the need for producing data outcomes that are trustworthy (Stahl & King 2020; Cloutier & Ravasi 2021). Qualitative research is in a special position to offer researchers process-based, narrative, story-based data that is more closely tied to the human experience. According to Stahl and King (2020: 26), “the degree of trust one has in the person telling the tale has much to do with the degree of trust attributed to the telling”. Therefore, the same holds true for qualitative research studies, and ensuring reliable and trustworthy outcomes is crucial. Qualitative methodologists have made a number of attempts to outline strategies for effectively communicating and ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative findings. Hall (2003) notes that most concerns on qualitative research are that it does not seek replicability as compared to quantitative studies, which do require replicability to validate their results. Thus, in qualitative studies, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are key components that are utilised to ensure the trustworthiness of the study output.

### **6.11.1 Credibility**

Credibility in this study was achieved through triangulation. Utilising different data-gathering tools – also known as triangulation in the world of research – improved and expanded the credibility of the study's findings (Kyngäs, Kääriäinen & Elo 2020; Cloutier & Ravasi 2021). In order to provide trust in the information that will be the subject of the research, De Vos *et al.* (2011: 436) state that the term “triangulation” in research refers to the convergence of data from the numerous research instruments. Triangulation was described by Yeasimi and Rahman (2012) as the process of confirmation to boost validity and completeness by

combining some points of view. Triangulation, according to Stahl and King (2020), helps the researcher gather more comprehensive, meaningful data as well as to cross-check that data's consistency to increase the reliability of the conclusions. It is crucial to remember that triangulation, which is defined as the mixing of information and extra procedures, with the aim that stated views or points of view might illuminate an issue, is used not only for validation, but also for enhancing one's comprehension of a topic (Olsen 2004).

### **6.11.2 Transferability**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose transferability as a second criterion for trustworthiness. Given that qualitative research is not (and cannot be) designed with replicability in mind, this claim presents several challenges. But qualitative researchers insist that generalisable patterns and descriptions can be drawn from one setting to another. Stahl and King (2020) emphasise that transfer is only achievable when a detailed description offers a compelling enough portrait of the scenario to apply to other people's circumstances. Therefore, in this study I offered detailed descriptions of the study background using sources that can be traced. I also offered detailed descriptions of the methodological steps taken and presented the findings using simple language that provides rich contextual insight on study issues. The procedures outlined in this study can be followed, though the outcomes might not be the same.

### **6.11.3 Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research refers to specific research procedures that ensure that the process of conducting research is trusted, and hence produces trustworthy outcomes (Stahl & King 2020). In qualitative research it's essential that the research process is adequately monitored to ensure that the findings of the study are trustworthy (Cloutier & Ravasi 2021). To ensure dependability I carried through an authenticated process, following the DUT research processes. Thus, the proposal process was peer reviewed, and the process of writing the thesis was reviewed by my supervisors, who commented and reflected on the outputs. The use of peer-reviewed journals, published research, and past research studies in university repositories also ensured that the outcomes of the study are dependable. The data-gathering process also involved member checking: this entailed reviewing the participants' conclusions to see if their input during interviews and focus groups was accurately captured (Davies & Hughes 2014).

### **6.11.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to getting the closest to objective truth that qualitative research can provide (Stahl & King 2020). The presence of objective reality is necessary for auditing the

study and ensuring trustworthiness of the research. The method I employed to make sure the data I obtained achieved confirmability was to stay in the field for a considerable amount of time (Davies & Hughes 2014). Before the actual research exercise, the FGDs and interview guides were pilot tested with a sample of eight participants to ensure that another study would yield the same rating and results (Davies & Hughes 2014).

## **6.12 Ethical Considerations**

The research experience should not harm participants physically or psychologically, or subject them to humiliation, unusual stress, cruel treatment, or harm to their reputation (Muchengetwa & Chakuchichi 2010). I had an ethical responsibility to make sure that participants' data were stored securely and that their names remained a secret. In this research project, I did not record video or take photographs of anyone without their permission. In order to secure the participants' identities, the obtained data was handled professionally, and pseudonyms or codes were preferred when drafting the report. Until it was time to destroy it, the information was kept locked up at home or in the office.

Soft copies of the data from the FGDs, interviews, and observations were also preserved on my laptop, which was continually password-protected, and stored in lockable cabinets with limited access. In accordance with DUT's ethical requirements, the data on my flash disk and backup files will be totally deleted when the five-year window has passed. Participant confidentiality was preserved using anonymity in the interview and evaluation processes (De Vos *et al.* 2011: 121). Participants in the Peace Rabbits project were not anonymous, because everyone knew who they were and could see them taking part in the research, but the data they produced was kept confidential.

### **6.12.1 Invitation to participate/informed consent**

The majority of the non-English speaking individuals who were to participate in this research received information and consent letters that were translated from English to Shona before being sent out to participants. Data collection started after study participants' informed consent had been obtained. Recruitment of the AT then took place on a voluntary basis after having the interview sessions and FGDs, and after a comprehensive description of the next course of action to pursue had been provided. The AT then implemented the intervention plan and assessed the early results.

### **6.12.2 How DUT ethical requirements were addressed**

Any research must follow the guiding principles of respect for societies, compassion, and justice. Respect for society dictates that research experiences acknowledge participant rights, such as the right to informed consent, the freedom to decide whether or not to participate, and the right to leave the study at any time without prior notice (Patton & Cochran 2002). The guiding concepts for this investigation are those mentioned above.

Gatekeepers sent letters to the ZANU-PF and CCC leadership requesting their cooperation in contacting their supporters and the owner of the property where the cages were housed. Before I started my investigation, letters of authorisation were obtained for me to conduct it. I adhered to the vital study ethical principles – voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and participant well-being. Participants were offered the option to participate in the study or not, and they were advised that they might leave the study at any time, permanently or temporarily, without having to give me any previous notice.

This study required free and informed consent, and I avoided deceit at all costs, because it is unethical to fabricate data to justify results. This study embraced beneficence, which connotes doing good deeds for others without harming study participants physically or psychologically, or subjecting them to humiliation, exceptional stress, degrading treatment, or harming their reputation. As a result, this study followed crucial ethical standards for research, such as beneficence, informed permission, voluntarism, and secrecy. The research gave participants the option of accepting or declining participation and the freedom to withdraw from the study temporarily or permanently without giving a reason. Throughout the research project, I adhered to DUT's ethical standards.

### **6.12.3 How voluntary participation was ensured**

The research participants were provided with information and consent letters which outlined the concept of voluntary participation. These letters were translated into regional tongues for the benefit of participants who did not speak English. Participants had the option to agree to participate in the study or not, and they were allowed to stop participating in it permanently or temporarily without having to notify me first.

## **6.13 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the methods, tools, and research design I used to carry out this study, with the intention of attaining its goals. This chapter covers the research philosophy, research approach, research design, population and sampling techniques, data collection

tools, pretesting, anonymity, how consent was obtained, the setting of the study, data analysis, and ethical concerns. The chapter detailed the key methodological processes used in conducting the baseline qualitative exploratory research approach to gather relevant data that addressed the first and second objectives of the study. The next chapter will continue with the methodological procedure's second phase, discussing how the action research process was conducted.

# **Chapter 7**

## **Constituting the Action Research Team**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter is an extension of the methodology chapter, and lays out the processes I undertook in carrying out the action research process. While I will write in the first person, the actions undertaken in this project were collective. The research participants were key stakeholders whose views, opinions, beliefs, and actions shaped the project. However, for academic purposes and to take accountability of any scientific shortfalls, I will use a first-person narrative.

The overall aim in conducting the research was to promote and improve community relations damaged by post-2018 election violence in Epworth, a peri-urban community in Zimbabwe. Therefore, I was interested in working with interested parties from the community to build social and peace mechanisms to reduce election-related violence in the community. Adopting an action research (AR) approach was crucial in establishing a participatory process driven both by locals and myself (as the researcher) to identify the challenges and establish programmes considered significant in addressing the problem of political violence. I used purposive sampling to create the research action team (AT). This chapter gives a detailed discussion of the research process, the selection of participants and a series of sessions that were held by the action team. The chapter also justifies the importance of action research as an opportunity for change and learning. To that end, in this chapter I outline how AR was conceptualised in this thesis, unpack the AR cycle carried out, and finally describe how the AT was selected and carried out the intervention planning.

### **7.2 Conceptualising Action Research**

According to O'Brien (1998), a number of names have been ascribed to action research, the most prevalent of which are participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and augmented contextual reality. It is important to draw attention to the historical context and other key elements of this style of investigation. AR can respond to changing demands of new situations, such as that of post-conflict relationships, which this study focused on. The usage of indigenous languages during the AR exercise makes the procedure accessible and advantageous to different designs, making AR adaptable compared

to other research designs. Essentially, AR is rooted in people's culture and everyday practices and is malleable to their needs. It is not rigid.

Furthermore, O'Brien (2001: 02) notes that AR could also be referred to as "learning by doing", where a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, observe the results of their efforts, and if not satisfied, try again. Peacebuilding is not a straightforward process. Though the desired outcome is known beforehand, the path to the outcome is often unknown and is determined by circumstances. Action research allow for a peace process to follow this natural path of conflict transformation. More succinct definitions of the same term are highlighted below, with Ramirez, Krants and Gilmore (1986: 161) defining AR as:

Some form of problem-solving research involving a close collaboration between academic and managerial staff as it seeks to contribute towards organisational effectiveness and the development of a management theory.

In action research, there is a dual commitment to study a system while working with the system or community members to advance what is viewed as a desired outcome by all parties. What this means is that an action research project is unlike "helicopter researchers" who just "fly past" communities for their selfish needs. AR is nested in, and directed by, communities to achieve an agenda that they have set. My role as a researcher was to facilitate and guide the research while actively engaging with the community. This dual objective necessitates active participant and research collaboration, highlighting the significance of co-learning as a key component of the research process. Taylor (2016) views action research as that which

... aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously.

Based on the definitions provided above, I concluded that AR is primarily concerned with both practical and scientific research methods, distinguishing it and making it pertinent to the study of changing post-conflict relationships. In addition, the definitions make excellent use of the concepts of cooperation, learning by doing, problem identification, and problem-solving, which also served as the foundation for my study. My attitude toward AR, which I had previously viewed with mistrust and had underrated with regard to its strong impact on transforming communities, was altered because of this project and the inspiration I received from my supervisor.

### **7.3 The Action Research Cycle**

In action research (AR), the first crucial step is to explore the issue at hand, gaining an understanding of the nature and extent of the problem, as well as of possible interventions.

One of the key principles of action research is its participatory and collaborative nature, which plays a pivotal role in knowledge formation. What this means is that the exploration is done in collaboration with the community members. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the exploration stage of the study was conducted using qualitative in-depth interviews and FGDs. AR is not a one-sided endeavour; instead, it forms an interactive cycle of collaborative engagement between the researcher and the participants, as articulated by (Young-Jahangeer and Loots 2006). In this approach, participants in action research are not mere objects of study, but are recognised as co-researchers actively involved in the research process. This co-researcher model, where participants work directly with the researcher, is an essential aspect of the AR process, aligning with the perspectives of (Baum, MacDougall, and Smith 2006). This collaborative and participatory approach to action research ensures that the research is not just a theoretical exercise, but a practical, solution-oriented process that involves and values the voices and expertise of all stakeholders.

Action research, according to O'Leary, Rao, and Perry (2004), is the process of gaining knowledge through involvement in, and taking cyclical steps in, actions. The main difference between this style of research and other general professional research practices is that in AR, the researcher investigates the problem methodically and guarantees that theoretical considerations influence the intervention strategy. It devotes the majority of the researcher's time to fine-tuning the methodological apparatuses, and ongoing, cyclical data collection, analysis, and presentation (O'Brien 1998).

Another feature that sets AR apart from other types of research is that it strongly emphasises making participants into co-researchers. It is widely believed that societies learn best and more willingly use what they learn when they do it themselves (O'Brien 1998). Dick (2000) points out the uniqueness of AR by highlighting that it is renowned for being:

- Cyclic, in that it frequently repeats the same processes in the same order.
- Undertaken with the understanding that clients and informants are partners in the study process, or at the very least active participants.
- Qualitative, because it uses language more frequently than numbers.
- Reflective, because each cycle should include critical reflection on the process and results.

From Dick's comments above, I concluded that the described cyclical component, AT participation, dealing with small numbers, and re-strategising after reviewing the results feature strongly (see section 6.4). The cyclic steps in AR are shown by the diagram below:



Figure 7. 1: Cyclic Steps in AR

(Dick 2000: 1)

The process depicted in the diagram above was undertaken. This study ensured that the AT who worked with each other on the Peace Rabbits project became co-researchers and could improve their post-conflict relationships and political openness. The AR component also addresses the social aspect, because Epworth, where the intervention technique was implemented, serves as a real working environment for the residents as they seek to improve their post-conflict relationships using Peace Rabbits.

#### **7.4 Choosing the Action Team**

This study was conceived to encourage the search for solutions to common, genuine societal problems or for strategies to sharpen conflict-resolution abilities and raise levels of political openness. AR was particularly useful in this regard due to its emphasis on collective actions involving peers and collaborators (Ferrance 2000). Therefore, the study sought to transform post-conflict relationships via using a collectively implemented cuniculture initiative aptly titled the Peace Rabbits project, where participants from opposing political parties were brought together. Rather than dealing with the theoretical components, AR allows practitioners to address those concerns closest to them, ones over which they can exhibit some influence and make some desired change (Ferrance 2000).

Following the exploration stage, I purposively selected participants who would form part of the Action Team (AT) from the participants involved in the interviews and FGDs. I chose the study

AR participants with the help of two community-based organisations, Madanha Ashe and Millennial Youth Transformative Hub, who have long-standing relationships with the community. As a result, the community found it easier to accept me. Beyond negotiating entry on my behalf, these two organisations had better knowledge of the participants' profiles. I shared with them that for the purposes of the research I had to carefully select participants, based on their representation of the topic of interest, and on their knowledge of the population and their understanding of the experiences of political violence related to the election in Epworth. The organisations helped me to decide on the participants who would most likely contribute appropriate data with relevance and depth regarding the politics and moral debates surrounding electoral violence. They also assisted in identifying participants with the capacity and willingness to participate. Choosing participants with the wrong temperament or who were known to lack commitment would have been a self-defeating exercise. I therefore decided to work with people who had high chances of success so that we could build future initiatives on the initial success and lessons learnt.

#### 7.4.1 Selection criteria for the action team

The action team consisted of twenty participants purposively selected from Epworth community from the two predominant political parties (CCC and ZANU-PF) with a gender-responsive criterion and ten key informants. I purposively selected five females and five males from the two parties, and ensured that of those, two from each were youths and of the twenty, one person with disability was incorporated. According to (Creswell and CLARK 2017b: 174), there is a need for a qualitative investigator to identify and work with a select group of individuals who can provide thorough information about the crucial issues, which in this action research study were about transforming post-conflict relationships through Peace Rabbits. It was simple for me to select and organise volunteers who could best inform the research because I had already been introduced to them by a local CBO who had a complete database of practically all locals. Table 6.1 shows the composition of the AT.

Table 7.1: Action Research Team

Name	Political Association / Professional Association	Role played in the study
Mr <b>Penya</b>	Epworth Residents' Development Association	Public Relations officer
Mr <b>Naka</b>	Madanhashe Charity Organization	Secretary

<b>Mrs Mbada</b>	Jairosi Jiri	Committee member
<b>Ms Nwanga</b>	Citizen Coalition for Change	Deputy secretary
<b>Mrs Nguru</b>	Kuwirirana Disabled Children's Centre	Senior rabbit caretaker
<b>Mr Miramba</b>	Citizen Coalition for Change	Committee member
<b>Mr Dzemi</b>	Apostolic Faith Mission Church	Public education
<b>Mrs Koma</b>	Women Empowerment Group (NGO)	Director
<b>Mrs Deme</b>	Citizen Coalition for Change	Committee member
<b>Mr Ngoma</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front	Committee member
<b>Mrs Zawi</b>	Zimbabwe Republic Police	Treasurer
<b>Mrs Nana</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front	Committee member
<b>Mr Mukanya</b>	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association	Member
<b>Mrs Chihuri</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mr Tawanda</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mrs Karikoga</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mr Chigariro</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mrs Nyasha</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mr Maziva</b>	Resident	Member
<b>Mrs Chuma</b>	Resident	Member

## **7.5 Action Team and Intervention Planning**

Action Research is extremely important in the field of study, owing to the fact that it offers communities which have experienced conflicts the best chance for transformation and learning (Stringer and Aragón 2020). AR is dynamic as it creates an ideal opportunity for change and learning to take place, not only for the researchers, but for the participants as well. This study was driven by AR principles in working with the residents of Epworth to ensure the goal of transforming post-conflict relationships; hence, the use of Peace Rabbits was considered crucial.

### **7.5.1 Intervention planning process and the birth of Peace Rabbits**

The study leaned heavily on the use of action research to pursue evidence- and consensus-based social change. Primarily, the study was meant to at least initiate a process of transforming relationships and fostering reconciliation in the Epworth community. To that end, before the beginning of the study I envisioned an intervention that not only encouraged learning, but also ignited a sense of collaboration in building solidarity and relationships. These newly formed bonds, I believed, would serve as a foundation for advocating against political violence. However, my aspirations, no matter how sensible, were not going to bring sustainable change. Real change had to come from and be implemented in collaboration with the affected community.

I had to play the role of a facilitator, and the process of planning this intervention took the form of a focus group discussion. We used the nominal group technique to facilitate the exchange of ideas and the co-creation of strategies that would be executed during the intervention phase. Harvey and Holmes (2012) define the nominal group technique as a group process for eliciting opinions and aggregating judgements to increase rationality and creativity when faced with an unstructured problem situation. The challenges faced in Epworth are by no means simple – though there is an almost simple way past them. We discussed the nature of the challenges faced in the Epworth community and during the session we also shared possible solutions. From listening to the community, I suggested the Peace Rabbits project, an idea borrowed from the Peace Gardens that were successful in Masvingo (Rukuni 2018). But it was received well, and the community's imagination expanded it into a grand intervention that we were to implement.

During our deliberations, the idea of Peace Rabbits resonated with the community, but it went beyond being just an idea. It was seen as a practical approach to addressing the core issues identified during the exploratory phase: unemployment and poverty. It was clear that these

factors played a significant role in pushing people towards political violence. The Peace Rabbit project was therefore appropriate in this regard, but beyond that it had potential to attract more community members to join the project in the future. This marked the birth of the Peace Rabbits initiative.

Besides the economic potential that the culinary project held, the Peace Rabbits was also a platform for dialogue. The initiative was conceived as a collective project which meant that participating members had to be in close physical proximity when working but also had to speak to each other more frequently. These intertwined goals fit perfectly with the community's vision for reducing political violence in Epworth. I will present more details about how the project affected social relationships in the coming chapters. I recognised the importance of consulting with the affected community to ensure that the intervention aligned with their needs and aspirations.

### **7.5.2 Understanding the Rabbits for Peace project as an AR intervention strategy**

The idea behind Peace Rabbits was to create a practical agricultural project that would attract people to work together and trigger peace conversations. Differently put, the project was a conversation starter which also had positive financial externalities. We viewed the rabbit project as a way of establishing a mechanism to prevent violence during an election.

The people of Zimbabwe place reverence on symbols – particularly animals. The national emblem for Zimbabwe is a carved stone bird which appears on the national flag, the coat of arms and the national dress or national cloth. Different families also derive their clan names from animals. It was, therefore, almost a natural choice for the researched people to think of the rabbits symbolically. The rabbit project was considered a symbol of peace and wisdom in the community. As a start to our project, we went for a white colour to complement the symbolic meaning of the rabbits.



Photo 7.1: Day 6 after the arrival of white bunnies

The peaceful nature of rabbits was set to remind the people in the community always to maintain peace. In Zimbabwean folktales the rabbit, *tsuro magen'a*, is considered to be a wise animal that always has clever solutions to problems. Several peace symbols have been used in various cultures and contexts. The dove and olive branch was used symbolically by early Christians, and then eventually became a secular peace symbol, popularised by Pablo Picasso's dove lithograph after World War II. Rabbits are social creatures with gentle natures and individual personalities. Their gentle nature acted as a reminder to the people of the community that violence was not the last resort, and this is why the community chose the rabbit project to act as their symbol for peace.

Also, the project taught the people of the community people always to solve their differences more peacefully. The action team always met to resolve their issues through dialogue at the rabbit hutches. Since the rabbits' cages were attractive to various people, the owners of the projects were able to talk about peace and reconciliation to the people who came from their community to see the rabbits. This meant that the project became the anchor for spreading the gospel of peace in the Epworth community. Also, the Rabbits for Peace project created a platform to debate peace-related issues in a conducive environment without any fear of being victimised. The project created a safe place where people involved came to discuss peace-related issues, especially after they were done with cleaning the cages. Thus, the project served as a meeting and interaction place and taught them about the possibility of living in peace.

The research found that the main perpetrators of violence were youths. Youths interviewed mentioned factors such as unemployment as pull factors to committing violence during elections. Thus, the project aimed to empower the people in the community by giving them a source of income which would lead to violence prevention. Youth entrepreneurship development is an important lever for consolidating peace, and the rabbit project succeeded in achieving this. Empowerment was achieved because youth members received a 2–4-month-old female rabbit. When the rabbit gave birth, the youth member repaid the loan to the project in the form of 2 female rabbits, which were then used as new loans to other youth in the community. This then gave them something to be occupied with and reduced the stress of frustration, which sometimes leads to violence.

With the details discussed above, Peace Rabbits can be understood as a rabbitry project where people from across the political divide work together to raise rabbits, not only for family consumption and sustenance of their livelihoods, but mainly for transforming their past relationships, damaged due to past election-related violence. Peace Rabbits were used as an intervention strategy where people of diverse political orientations carried out rabbitry together to transform their negative attitudes towards one another into positive ones. Although rabbitry has been a common project used for other purposes like meat production, using rabbits as peacebuilding and conflict transformation agents in broken communities proved to be a critical strategy towards advancing peace and political tolerance.

### **7.5.3 The role of Rabbits for Peace as a strategy for reconciliation**

Farming projects have been used in post-conflict situations, and indeed in areas of continuing conflict, as a means of bringing people together, providing sanctuary and fulfilling a basic need for food: a form of psychosocial peacebuilding, inclusive of age, gender, and ability – both physical and intellectual (De Soysa *et al.* 1999; Akande, Kaye & Rukuni 2021; Rukuni 2022). Likewise, the rabbit project proved very useful for reconciliation in post-conflict situations. For example, the Peace Rabbits project brought together people from different political backgrounds and people with different political disgruntlements. Through the project, they were able to give each other duties such as cleaning the hutches. It was through those duties that indeed, the people learnt to set aside political differences and focus more on the production of their project. The results showed that people with political differences can work together over something.

The Peace Rabbits project also promoted and provided dialogue platforms that were limited in the past. This serves as an important aspect in building peace, since, through these dialogues, the local community members managed to make deliberations in their local

language on how to transform their post-conflict relationships in positive and nonviolent ways. These dialogues provided a natural environment for the participants to express their views, and it encouraged people from different political parties to engage and talk to each other. As noted earlier, the rabbit venture provided a timely platform for the participants to interact with each other and hear the narratives from both parties, a feature envisioned as the key towards reconciliation and peacebuilding in general. Detailed information on how Peace Rabbits impacted the community is presented and analysed in Chapter 9.

## **7.6 Concluding Summary**

In this chapter, I presented and outlined how the action research process was carried out. I discussed in detail the value and importance of AR as a research approach and how it guided the conduct of this study. I also outlined how the AT was composed and how we planned the intervention. Finally, I outlined how Peace Rabbits was adopted as an intervention strategy to engage people from different political backgrounds to work together in a peacebuilding programme to promote political tolerance and reduce violence during elections. The next chapter will present the findings from the study, unpacking the identified drivers of political violence in Epworth.

# Chapter 8

## Drivers of Political Violence in Epworth

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*“Poverty is the worst form of violence.” Mahatma Gandhi (1947)*

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### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings from the fieldwork carried out in Epworth, Harare, Zimbabwe between March 2021 and March 2022. The chapter details the causes, extent and consequences of post-election violence in Epworth. The outcomes of the research matched the goals of the study that were mentioned in Chapter One. The research community, the criteria for choosing study participants, and the history of conflict in Epworth are all discussed in this chapter. Politics and elections, which residents, key informants, and focus group participants regarded as the primary sources of tension in the neighbourhood, are discussed. The chapter also outlines additional contributing factors for conflict that were mentioned by research participants.

### 8.2 Research Setting

Epworth is located about twelve kilometres from the Harare city centre. It is a high-density dormitory town administered by the Epworth local board. Epworth is largely dominated by ZANU-PF youths, most of whom benefit from the spontaneous loyalty-based land allocations during campaign periods. Epworth was originally the site of two villages of subsistence farmers, but the land was donated to the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Trust under British colonial rule (Watson 2018: 16). The neighbourhood grew slowly at first with households that were associated with the mission station (Butcher 1986). In recent years, Epworth has been known for its informality. People who settled there, and those who provided land for settlement in Epworth focused mainly on providing shelter, forgetting other social and psychological needs that are important to the well-being of individuals and the community (Mujinga 2020).

The poor physical and social infrastructure in Epworth contributes to the increase in social vices. Ncube and Kgatla (2021: 1) posit that “Epworth is one of the challenging settlements to both the church and the state; it has the highest crime levels, and high prostitution and poverty levels”. Implied here is that the problems in Epworth go beyond the conflict between political parties. However, the politics is a stimulant for most of the violent conflicts, as well as the continued suffering of residents who rely on politicians for their everyday being.

Residents secure land tenure through patronage and many are perceived as ZANU-PF supporters (Chavunduka 2018a). The land barons in Epworth are affiliated to ZANU-PF and “some ‘original’ residents claimed land rights themselves through ZANU–PF, mobilising around war veterans and through party structures, establishing their own territorial authorities who sold and allocated land to others” (McGregor 2020: 12).

Epworth was an MDC stronghold despite ZANU-PF’s patronage (Mwonzora 2020). The Epworth community has increasingly become polarised due to the opposition’s popularity and ZANU-PFs presence (Chatiza 2020). The opposition parties are currently making some advances in the area in terms of their support base (Chavunduka 2018b). As a result, political confrontations frequently arise as the nation approaches elections, pitting supporters of the opposition parties and the ruling party against one another.

The Epworth community is also battling with rising incidences of drug and alcohol abuse involving women and youth (Muzondo 2023). At a broader scale, Epworth residents also face the economic challenges that are bedevilling Zimbabwe generally. What could be peculiar to this community, though, is that in this area there has been a great deal of political violence that has resulted in the deaths and disappearances of party activists and sympathisers as well as the maiming of supporters of opposing political parties. Structural violence in Epworth is even perpetuated by the different formations of the MDC (Makonye 2021). The current state of affairs in the region shows that the years of persistent structural violence have left unhealed wounds (Chikwanda 2014: 24). The Epworth community has a high incidence of criminality and a growing rate of unemployment, making the populace vulnerable to manipulation before, during, and immediately following elections (Bandauko et al. 2022)

### **8.3 Reflection on Data Collection and Participant Recruitment**

For the research, I made use of both interviews and focus group discussions in order to complement and enhance the data collection methods. I consulted the Madanha Ashe community organisation to identify and recruit the study participants and piggybacked on the organisation’s rapport with the community to negotiate my own entry. Madanha Ashe have extensive experience working in the community over the past ten years and have essentially become one with the community. Most importantly, they are not research naïve, and they understood what my study was about. This was important for me, because growing up I saw my parents participating in surveys they understood so little about. My grandfather, who was the gatekeeper, was not formally educated to understand research and the participants’ rights, while Madanha Ashe has educated personnel who in my view would keep me in check if I had transcended my duties as a researcher.

Madanha Ashe have, in their data base, participants of different ages, and as a result it was fairly easy to convene focus group representatives of different ages and genders, and equal political party representation. I carried out 30 interviews, and I noted that most victims had a lot of bitterness and open wounds of political violence. They did not fear sharing their experiences as I assured them of confidentiality. Most openly shared their experiences and most proved to be in need of psycho-social support as part of the post-conflict reconstruction process. In hindsight I now realise I made a good decision to start with individual interviews before the focus group discussions. It is highly likely that if I had gathered people in a group without understanding their issues or preparing for possible conflict, I would have inadvertently created a platform for bruising physical violence.

But beyond the fights, I also came to understand that there was pervasive fear. There were other victims who feared to disclose information on politics because of their insecurities and fears of the unknown. The implication here is that some residents in Epworth live with trauma; unfortunately, I was not adequately resourced to deal with this trauma. However, I made mention of the problem to Madanha Ashe so that they could either intervene or gather resources to create an intervention that could deal with the trauma.

The complementarity of the data collection methods allowed me to gather general and specific information to amass data and come up with a comprehensive implementation strategy. I also phased my data collection into pre intervention, intervention, and post intervention stages. However, the phases were not uniform for all data collection techniques. The focus group discussions were held in two phases. The first two focus groups (FGD 1 and 2) were conducted in the exploration phase of the study, the other two focus groups (FGD 3 and 4) were conducted with the action team, focusing on discussing and planning intervention strategies and reflecting on the values peace projects can bring to the community. The idea of the Peace Rabbits was generated and discussed during the formative stages of the study. However, it was later bolstered by the information which was collected from the key informants and other victims interviewed.

Due to the nature and sensitivity of this study, both political parties had to be equally represented. Hence, I accommodated men, women, youth, people with disabilities, and activists, drawn from the nation's two major political parties (the CCC and ZANU-PF), human rights activists, and some victims of past political violence. These FGDs facilitated the collection of useful data for this study, which created the basis for articulating a framework and coming up with the Peace Rabbits concept which guided this study. Table 8.1 below gives the demographic information of the people who participated in the focus group discussions.

Table 8.1 Demographic Information of FGDs

FGD	Participants	Age Range	Gender	Participant Affiliations
1	8	23–78	F=3 M=5	ZANU-PF Youth & Members (4), CCC Youth & Members (3), Human Rights Activist (1)
2	6	25–46	F=4 M=2	ZANU-PF Youth & Members (2), CCC Youth & Members (2), Human Rights Activist (1), Victim of Past Political Violence (1)
3	10	23–78	F=5 M=5	ZANU-PF Youth & Members (4), CCC Youth & Members (4), Human Rights Activists (2)
4	12	23–78	F=6 M=6	ZANU-PF Youth & Members (4), CCC Youth & Members (4), Human Rights Activists (2), and Victims of Past Political Violence (2)

Participants who took part in the focus group discussion were aged between 23 years and 78years old. The age range allowed for generational representation of both political ideas and understanding of community. To curb over-representation or dominance from either ZANU-PF or CCC, an equal number of participants was drawn from either party. There was an equal distribution of political party representatives in terms of women, men, and youths, and there was also inclusion of the disabled and male and female resident victims.

Participants' responses to the interviews and FGDs were utilised in presenting the findings. The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions, and their answers were quoted verbatim to highlight the unusual and nuanced aspects of the data that were presented.

## 8.4 Questions Used to Produce Data

The following enquiries were used to gather data for this study:

- 1) What are the key reasons why there is conflict and violence in your neighbourhood?
- 2) How do you feel about generalised political violence and conflicts?
- 3) How has polarity impacted this community's way of life in general?
- 4) What are some ways to strengthen communities?

## 8.5 Thematic Findings

The gathered data was transcribed and reviewed for presentation. The findings were organised into the following themes:

Table 8.2: Identified Study Themes

Theme	Sub-Theme
<b>The Roots of Political Violence in Epworth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Formation of the MDC and the End of the One-Party State</li> <li>• Polarisation in Epworth</li> </ul>
<b>Major Drivers of Conflict in Epworth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics</li> <li>• Political Intolerance</li> </ul>

<b>Causes of Conflict in Epworth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic Causes</li> <li>• Social Causes</li> </ul>
<b>Effects of Political Violence in Epworth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow to No Development</li> <li>• Mental Health Implications</li> <li>• State Fragility</li> </ul>
<b>The Call for Peace Building in Epworth</b>	N/A
<b>Need for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Epworth</b>	N/A
<b>Peace Rabbits Initiative</b>	N/A

## 8.6 The Roots of Political Violence in Epworth

The findings of the study corroborated existing research that identified Epworth as one of the key hotspots for electoral and political violence in Harare and the broader Zimbabwean context across studies (Brazier 2009; McGregor & Chatiza 2020; Moyo 2020; Mwonzora & Helliker 2020; Chitofiri & Nkomo 2022). However, this present study gave prominence not only to political issues, but also to other issues affecting the social infrastructure in the community. Often local issues are bundled up with national challenges, leading to the imposition of ineffective intervention strategies.

It is understandable, though, why there is an emphasis on politics, as activities of gross electoral and political violence in Epworth have often resulted in injury and deaths of victims, destruction of property and houses, and displacement (Brazier 2009; Moyo 2020). With the understanding that electoral and political violence is a critical challenge, participants in both the interviews and FGDs showed how the roots of these issues can be traced to the end of the one-party state system in 1999 and the increasing political polarisation that followed. In addition, they also had an awareness that the challenges now have a local character which is not necessarily tied to the one-party state.

### 8.6.1 The formation of the MDC and the end of the one-party state

Participants narrated how the formation of the MDC in 1999 spawned the rise of political violence in Epworth. The country was a one-party state, and therefore creation of an opposition party created tension. Epworth was grabbed by ZANU-PF as land for their loyal

supporters and therefore anyone who proved to be supporting the opposition party or was aligned to the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions was persecuted. One of the victims, during an in-depth interview, gave the historical background of political violence in Epworth. He said:

Uchigara kunoKuEpworth zvaisadiwa kuti unzwikwe uine voice riri opposite kune bato rikutonga. Early 2000 I recall very well kune mumwe akazongotsakatika wataishanda naye saka ini ndakabva ndatiza pamba pandaigara ndakanogara kubasa. Muna 2002 imba yandanga ndasiya ndavaka 6 rooms ndakazongonzwa kuti ndanga ndasirwa 2 dzimwe dzese vanga vapunza.

[Being an Epworth resident, no one was allowed to speak against the ruling party. In early 2000, I recall very well one of my co-workers disappeared mysteriously and because of that I left my 6-roomed house to go and stay at work. After some time I heard that my house had been demolished, only left with two rooms]. (FGD, 2021)

These details provide an understanding of the roots of electoral and political violence in Epworth. They reflect on how the patronage networks that were created by the ruling ZANU-PF party were utilised as tools to incite violence and squash any emergence of political opposition. Thus, the study established how this formed the basis and the beginning of long-term political and electoral instability in the community, which has continued for over two decades.

## **8.7 Polarisation in Epworth**

Epworth, since the formation of the opposition party, has been highly polarised, firstly because of some people in ZANU-PF who were willing to crush any voices that were against the revolutionary party ideals. The MDC, too, played a role in fanning violence in the Epworth community, either by omission or commission (Makonye (2021)). These two major political parties have remained divided over their dogmas, and this has flowed to the party supporters, spelling a crisis of political leadership in Zimbabwe (Chipere 2020). For ZANU-PF, anyone who was seen associating with the opposition party was regarded as the enemy of the state, unpatriotic and a sell-out who deserved to be dealt with in any way reckoned fit.

During the FGD, there was evidence of division and unwillingness to cooperate by opposition representatives, as they have opposing ideologies; one participant stated that:

Vafanha vakatengwa nemutoriro ava ndivo vanoita basa rekurova vanhu kuti vavhotere pavasirikuda, ndivo vaidambura vanhu ma short nema long sleeve. There is no way yatinga shandidzane nevanhu vanongoshandiswa kuita zvinhu zviriri inhumane. Zvinotonetsa kuti tibatirane pamwe especially pedyo nema elections vanenge vatova mhondi.

[Youths who have been patronised with cane spirits are the ones who torture people, forcing them to vote for the ruling party, they even short- and long-sleeved people. There is no room for cooperation with people who are used to perform inhumane atrocities. It's more difficult to cooperate during elections because most of them turn into political terrorists.] (FGD, 2021)

The remarks show that residents are divided and are not willing to partner in developmental processes because of political differences. Youths who are unemployed are willing to do anything so that they stay drunk – and this means even political terrorism – just to ensure that the ideals of their master are realised.

## **8.8 Major Drivers of Conflict in Epworth**

All respondents from FGDs and interviews alluded to the fact that politics is the main driver of conflict in the community. Political violence during elections and political terrorism are the major causes of polarisation and the spiralling cycles of violence. However, it appears that the political violence camouflages other equally important avenues to understanding the violence in Epworth. Participants also mentioned other causes of conflict, apart from politics and elections, which include economic challenges (high rates of unemployment, increasing inequality, high rates of poverty, microeconomic instability, cartel activity and high levels of informality in the economy). They also raised points on social drivers, including cultural xenocentrism, ethnic pluralism, criminal justice systems, extractive institutions, weak public institutions, and state fragility. While focusing on the politics, this study realises that the “othered” or subsidiary causes of violence actually have a local character and can have micro solutions that will have an effect on the macro politics over time. I will, however, start by detailing the political problem and within the discussion I will bring in ties to the subsidiary problems.

### **8.8.1 Politics as a major driver of violence in Epworth**

All of the respondents named politics as one of the key factors causing tensions in the Epworth neighbourhood. Since the post-independence era, Zimbabwe has experienced spikes in violence. These participants remarked that, ever since the general elections of 2000, the level of politically motivated violence has increased to startlingly high levels as the nation approaches major elections. The participants in the FGDs detailed the following:

Vanu vepolitics vanoshandisa mayouth edu muno kunyanya kana kune maelections. Vana havasi kuenda kumabasa saka vanoendeswa kumabase votengerwa hwahwa nekupromiswa mabasa asingafi akabuda. Kumabase ikoko vanobva vanzi tiudzei kuti masupporter eopposition ndivanani. Ukaita munyama wekunzi ndiwe weopposition unochiona kana maelection Atanga, vamwe vanobatwa chibharo kana kurohwa zvekuitwa kafira mberi chaizvo. Kana kutotsakatika zvigorova.

[Politicians take advantage of the vulnerability of unemployed youths during the electoral season as they take youths to bases, give them beer and promise them goodies. They use those people to identify people who are against the ruling party who are then at the spotlight of violence including rape, torture and disappearances.] (FGD, 2021)

Muno munharaunda yeEpworth I think mutone bato rinotonzi ndiro rinofanira kuvhoterwa saka ukaita go against it unotowanoikwa wakutoshungurudzwa. Vanotoitora setaboo iyoyo saka iwewe nekuda kuchengetedza mhuri yako unotozongotevera zvavanoda kana uchida kuti zuva rikudokere zvakanaka.

[In this community of Epworth, I think there is a political party that everyone is obliged to vote for and if anyone has a different political opinion they will be regarded as traitor. It is regarded as a taboo so for personal security and that of your family you will just have comply.] (FGD, 2021)

*Pasina vepolitics muno dai takatobatanao asi vanhu havasi willing nekuti ma election akangosvika munhu akutochinja* [Without politicians Epworth would be unified, but lately people have been unwilling to do so because towards elections polarity manifests.]

*Ehe mamwe matambudziko arimo muno mu Epworth asi nyaya dzematongerwo enyika ihonye pahukama hwevanhu.*

[Yes, there are other problems in Epworth but politics is toxic to community relations.] (FGD, 2021)

Mu Epworth hatisati tamboita resident MP ivo vanobva kunze ivava ndivo vanouya vachikonzeresa nyonganyonga mukutsvaga kuvhoterwa.

[Epworth has never had a resident MP and it's those external leaders who cause havoc in their quest for political support.] (FGD, 2021)

Essentially, the 2000 elections marked the genesis of present day political conflict in Zimbabwe. The MDC shook ZANU-PF's dominance. But this should not be misconstrued as the only cause for structural violence observed in Epworth. The above responses from FGDs prove that politics has disturbed community development or community cohesion. Politics divided people, patronage politics has caused a one-party community where people's right to a political opinion in Epworth is totally denied, and politics has hindered sustainable development and promoted community fragility.

The manner in which the above responses were highlighted shows that there is a thin line between politics and elections. The political landscape in Epworth, is significantly shaped by a history of violence that is deeply intertwined with the country's broader political dynamics. The community members, however, agreed in their statements that politics and elections have played complementary roles in fuelling conflicts in their community.

The environment in Epworth confirm findings that political violence in Zimbabwe, particularly in urban areas, has been characterized by the mobilization of youth and other groups by

political elites. The ruling party, ZANU-PF, has historically employed tactics that include the use of youth militias and war veterans to intimidate opposition supporters, especially during election periods (Maringira and Gukurume 2022). This culture of violence has been institutionalized, creating a cycle of political impunity where perpetrators are rarely held accountable for their actions, thereby reinforcing the belief that violence can yield political results (Chibango and Mgovo 2023; Chitofiri and Nkomo 2023). Political elites often utilize violence as a means to suppress dissent and maintain control over their constituencies.

### 8.8.2 Political intolerance in Epworth

Politics in Epworth (and by extension, Zimbabwe) is predicated on a will to power as opposed to a will to live. Political opponents treat each other as sworn enemies and as a result there is a great deal of intolerance in Epworth. Most respondents highlighted that the political ideology since 1980 has been that of perceiving a person from the opposition political camp as an enemy. This has even been noted from the party slogans, which encompass the phrase *pasi nemadzakutsaku* which means “down with the enemy”. To illustrate the lack of political tolerance and how it has been a major factor in causing conflicts in Epworth, the responses from an in-depth interview with victims help exemplify the notion:

Vanhu tinototyva kufambidzana nevanhu vekubato risiri ravo nekuti unozonzi uri mutengesesi, munhu wawaitowirirana naye kubva kumashure as long as asiri webato rako unotoona kuti hukama hwachinja nekutya.

[We are afraid of interacting with people from other political parties as this can lead to being labelled sellouts or traitors, a person in whose good books you were in can change their attitudes and reactions due to fear.] (FGD, 2021)

The above assertion was bolstered by the views in the quote below, where participants from both the interviews and the FGD stressed that:

Kusununguka kutotaura kana kuita maslogan nezvebato risiri pachigaro especially nguva dzema elections ndokutsvaga kurohwa ka ikoko.

[Freedom of expression or doing slogans of opposition parties, especially during elections, is like applying for torture.] (FGD, 2021)

In terms of political association, Epworth has extremely high levels of political intolerance. The quotations demonstrate that mixing and socialising with members of opposing political parties was truly seen in their community as prohibited and an act of treason, a feature that signified extreme and frightening levels of political conservatism.

## 8.9 Everyday triggers of conflict in Epworth

As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, politics and elections are at the core of violence and conflicts in Epworth. There are, however, other causes, which include social and economic factors. Economic challenges encompass high rates of unemployment, high rates of poverty, microeconomic instability, cartel activity and high levels of informality in the economy. Social causes include cultural xenocentrism, ethnic pluralism, criminal justice systems, extractive institutions, weak public institutions, and state fragility.

### 8.9.1 Economic challenges

The sections below present data on several of the economic challenges in Epworth.

#### 8.9.1.1 High rates of youth unemployment

Epworth has a large concentration of unemployed youths. Prolonged unemployment makes the youths extremely vulnerable to political manipulation by potential candidates who use patronage politics to incentivise these youths with *mutoriro* (crystal meth) in return for political terrorism and forced voting. One key informant raised the point that:

Mapoliticians akutora advantage yekushaikwa kwemabasa vitora vanhu sevakuda kuvapa basa ivo vachida kuva trainer kumbunyikidza vanhu panguva yekuvhota, kutovaita mhondi chaidzo zvekuti tototyisidzirwa nevana vedu kutaura nyaya dzezvematoingerwo enyika kana kuenda kumisangano yatinoda. Dai hurumende yaita kuti mabasa awande, but neCorona iyi tese tese tatogarao pamba hameno kuti zvichasvikepi.

[Politicians are taking advantage of youth unemployment. They take the unemployed youth and promise them jobs and recruit them into bases where they are trained in political terrorism and turned into political bandits such that they crush any opposition. I wish our government created some employment, but due to the COVID-19 lockdowns even us adults have even lost our jobs, the future is now bleak.] (FGD, 2021)

The unemployment challenge is, however, not unique to Epworth. More than 185 million people are unemployed worldwide, with over half of them being young adults between the ages of 15 and 24. Youth unemployment has become a global issue (ILO 2013). Zimbabwe has the highest unemployment rate in the world, at 95% (International Monetary Fund 2013; Maune, Matanda & Mundonde 2020). Africa as a continent and Zimbabwe as a nation are both severely afflicted. Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is four times higher than adult unemployment, according to the Zimbabwe Parliamentary Portfolio Committee report on youth development (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe is a growing social, economic, and political concern (Maulani & Agwanda 2020). Unemployment

has the capacity to undermine national unity, economic growth, peace, and stability if it is not addressed.

Some of the unemployed find consolation in gangs, whom they spend their days with, hanging out on street corners smoking marijuana or other illicit drugs, or drinking alcohol. Young people are taking intoxicating substances with the belief that doing so will allow them to temporarily forget their difficulties. One of the young people who was a key informant said the following:

Muno tine dambudziko redoro nemadrugs, especially kumayouth. Pane maprograms eawareness ari kuitwa but problem haisi kupera meaning kuti mayouth ari kuziva kuti madrugs akaipa but the root cause haisi kugadziriswa. Vakuru vedu vanofanira kuziva kuti needs we face a lot [of] pressures, and there should be programmes to help us break free from this cycle. It's not just about politics dzeZANU neMDC.

Alcohol and drug abuse are grave issues in our community, especially among the youth. I know there are drug awareness campaigns that are being held but the problem persists. The problem is therefore not a lack of awareness on the dangers of drugs. It's the root causes that need to be fixed. The older generation needs to understand the pressures we face, and there should be programmes to help us break free from this cycle. Our problems are not just about political polarity between ZANU and MDC. (FGD, 2021)

I observed during fieldwork that youth frequent nightclubs, beer halls, and other social settings where drug abuse is prevalent. The same spaces are also prone to violent altercations. Young people openly engage in stealing, robbery, open womanising, and prostitution at night. The social vices in Epworth are also noted by Nhongonhema (2021: 4) who points out that “[i]n Epworth, there is a place called ‘Kubooter’ that the Epworth residents consider to be one of the hotspots of child sex work”.

The high unemployment rates, poverty, and substance abuse contribute to a volatile environment where political violence can thrive. The lack of economic opportunities often leads to disenfranchisement, making individuals more susceptible to recruitment into violent political factions (Tsikai, Chingarande, and Chaminuka 2023; Moyo 2008). The interplay between economic hardship and political violence creates a fertile ground for the perpetuation of violence as a tool for political mobilization and control (Maringira and Gukurume 2022).

### **8.9.1.2 Food insecurity**

All participants noted that poverty is a major threat to peace in Epworth and that the extent of poverty in the community is very high. This makes the people vulnerable to political manipulation – for example, forced rally attendance by political candidates, as one FGD respondent noted:

Vanotoziva kuti muno munenzara, kana nguva yema elections yasvika vanotanga kuti promisa chikafu vachiti vachauya kumusangano ndivo vachawaniswa zvikafu nemari dzekuita ma self-help projects. Vanhu ivavo vanenge vatova nechikwereti chekuita sezvavaudzwa vakasavhotera munhu avapa chikafu vanorakashwa zvakaomarara.

[They know that there is hunger and poverty thus, towards elections politicians start promising food stuffs and capital for projects to loyal supporters who will be attending rallies. Beneficiaries of campaign resources are then expected to vote accordingly and if they do otherwise, they are traced and tortured inhumanely.]

Another FGD respondent also said the following:

*Zhara inoita kuti vanhu vavengane. Hakuna chikafu mwana wamai.* A hungry man is an angry man.

Hunger leads people into hatred, my sister. A hungry man is an angry man.

The above quotes show that as people do not have adequate resources to cater for their livelihoods, they become tools for political breakthrough, as patronage politics is used as both a carrot and a stick during elections. This has caused violence, as political candidates then expect an obvious win from their campaign investment, which when unmet is usually characterised by political terrorism.

### **8.9.1.3 Social causes**

The challenges in Epworth also have a social character, as they are deeply intertwined with the fabric of the community. The alcohol and drug abuse is symptomatic of wider issues related to social dynamics, peer influences, family structures, and the limited access to support systems. Young people in Epworth face economic hardships and poor educational opportunities. When addressing the challenges in Epworth, it is important to understand and acknowledge the broader social context in which these challenges arise and persist.

### **8.9.1.4 Weak public institutions**

When victims of political violence seek justice and health attention in Epworth, they are left to deal with their problems alone, as the responsible institutions are unwilling to be involved in issues to do with politics, especially during and after elections. Seventy-eight percent of FGD 2 respondents said that:

Wakaenda kuchipatara kuti ndarohwa nekuda kwezvematongerwo enyika, unongonzi hatikwanise kukubatsirai tanga waenda kumapurisa. Kumapurisa kwacho kuvaudza kuti warohwerwa MDC kuzvingisa chaiko

[If you go to the hospital seeking medical attention as a victim of political violence, you will be told that the authorities cannot assist you before you report to the police.]

And if you tell the police that you were beaten for your allegiance to the MDC, you will essentially be putting yourself up to being arrested.] (FGD, 2021)

The above sentiments show that public institutions are weak, as they seem to be controlled by certain political parties to further their agenda. One keynote interviewee said

Kana varova vanhu vanorambidza zvipatara kurapa vanhu vanenge varoverwa nyaya dzine chekuita nepolitics mapurisa anoita seasisazive basa rawo, hauvaone nguva yekurohwa kwevanhu, kana vakamusunga haatomboraremo apa munhu anenge auraya chaiko.

[If they beat up people, they tell health personnel not to attend to victims of political violence and the ZRP during that period seem to neglect their posts and seem invisible; even if they arrest perpetrators, they will not even spend a night behind bars, even after committing murder.] (FGD, 2021)

Politics is therefore at the core of public institutions, and in Epworth these have become weak as they no longer carry out their respective duties, but rather extend the political agendas of the ruling party.

## **8.10 Effects of Political Violence in Epworth**

Electoral and political violence have different effects and implications in human life. Studies reveal that political violence in Epworth results in negative health, socio-economic, and development effects for the people (Brazier 2009; Chitofiri & Nkomo 2022). The participants revealed how the persistence of political violence has resulted in slow to no development, has mental health implications and has kept the community in a state of fragility.

### **8.10.1 Slow to no development**

Collective effectiveness, a combination of social cohesion and the capacity of the collective to act as a unit and effect change for the common good, is the reason why communities function well. Without communal union, people's health and wellbeing suffer, especially when they are exposed to significant human tragedies. According to study participants, political violence impairs social cohesion and community functioning by harming the community as a place where people gather to share a physical space, a culture, and an identity, and by displacing people, destroying their homes, and changing the environment generally. There is no development when there is collective fear and terror, destruction of networks, and diminishment of community organisation activities. One key informant noted that

*Epworth haife yaenda kumberi kana kubudirira nekuda kwekuti ndimo munobikwa violence muno.*

[Epworth will not prosper or develop because it is the epicentre of political violence.] (FGD, 2021)

The above quote shows that political violence is a hurdle to community development. Peace is a necessary precursor for development in Epworth.

### **8.10.2 Mental health implications**

The study found that political violence that occurs in election periods has a plethora of mental health implications, including post-traumatic stress disorders, depression, and anxiety. FGD participants gave examples of individuals who still have not recovered from mental disorders due to the political violence that occurred in the 2008 elections, and some people who are still hallucinating. One participant said,

*Varimo vatikutoziva nanhasi varikutopenga kubva pavakauraiswa vabereki vavo muna 2008.*

[There are some people here who are still crazy since the 2008 election violence after they were forced to kill their own parents.] (FGD, 2021)

There has not been deliberate follow-up on victims of political violence to foster proper reintegration and psycho-social care for those who are failing to move on with life because of the ghosts from the past. A keynote interviewee said:

*Vazvinji havachatodi kunzwa nezvema elections tine vatinotoziva vanoenda kumusha kana ma elections akusvika.*

[Most no longer want to hear of elections, they would rather go to their villages when election time comes.] (FGD, 2021)

The participant meant that people fear that the past will always repeat itself and those past atrocities are the deciding factors for the lives they are living today. Therefore, there is need for counselling and mental healing for these people.

### **8.10.3 State fragility**

The entire Epworth community relies on the local board or governmental structures to provide basic needs for health and justice, such as systems for emergency response, water, sanitation, health, schooling, and security, as well as to create opportunities for meaningful participation. Political violence is closely linked to a number of aspects of governance, including leadership and responsibility for crimes on the part of the state. According to the study, political violence in Epworth weakens the sector and undermines democratic spaces, which reduces the local board's ability to assist the community and its ability to function.

Local board yaparara yangova yeZANU zvada musangano ndozvainotevera apa hapana kana chavachatombogona kuita chine musoro kunze kwekuchengetedza zvinodiwa nemusangano wavo.

[Epworth local board is now fragile as it has become an assortment of ZANU-PFs, it represents the party and focuses on extending its hegemony rather than service provision.] (FGD, 2021)

In Epworth there are deliberate attacks on physical infrastructure, which create lots of governance voids, and there is also poor service delivery because the responsible institutions have been politicised and, because of political violence, have lost control of the community; thus, there is state fragility.

## **8.11 The Call for Peacebuilding in Epworth**

The findings of the study established that participants demonstrated a keen interest in peacebuilding solutions that can help turn around the community of Epworth. A review of literature revealed that even though studies have identified key major challenges and causes of electoral and political violence, there remains a huge gap in studies on practical implementations towards peace efforts. As highlighted above, some of the major hinderances to peace efforts include high levels of polarisation and socio-economic challenges. Hence, the participants provided crucial reflections on how the engagement of peacebuilding programmes that pay special attention towards promoting tolerance would play a big role in reshaping the politico-social conduct of tolerance in the community of Epworth. Programmes that engage and interact with societal members at grassroots levels to address key problems, such as violence, are considered crucial in developing meaningful and long-term solutions (Brazier 2009).

The participants in both interviews and FGDs emphasised that addressing electoral violence would require dedicated commitment to the promotion of sustainable peace, development and post-conflict reconstruction in Epworth. For instance, one of the participants during the FDG emphasised that

Kuti runyararo rutovapo panoda vanhu vanotorovedzera nhau iyoyo muchisanganisa vanhu vekumapato akasiyana. Uye zvichitungamirirwa nevanhu vasinei nezvematongerwe enyika vakaita semaNGOs.

[For peacebuilding work to succeed there is a need for dedicated people that engage political actors from different groups. This work should be led by people who are non-politically aligned, especially these NGOs.] (FGD, 2021)

Most of the interviewees and focus group discussion participants resonated with the above sentiment. They believed that if efforts towards promoting reconciliation were engaged, a

different, tolerant environment would slowly emerge, unwinding the indoctrination of violence that has affected the political spaces (Mwonzora & Helliker 2020). The participants stressed the need for a peacebuilding mechanism to promote healing and reintegration for victims of electoral violence. They justified the need based on the political environment of Epworth, which is characterised by fear, division, lack of trust and a lack of political permissiveness. Political conflict in Epworth clouded any prospect of sustainable implementation of locally owned intervention strategies because of the politicisation of institutions and too much bureaucracy for CSOs and development partners to actively empower citizens.

The FGD members advocated for social cohesion and community collaboration as the only means to foster development. The current polarity, however, is the stumbling block to durable peace and promoting political liberalism. Thus, the findings confirmed how peacebuilding strategies need to be implemented in the township through interventions meant to transform post-conflict relationships among the political party devotees.

## **8.12 Need for Conflict Transformation in Epworth**

Research participants submitted that if peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction is to be realised in Epworth, then truth-telling, forgiveness and healing become necessary precursors. This point was raised from the fact that perpetrators have been going unpunished, mingling every day with victims who have wounds and strong bitterness caused by physical injuries, loss of family and relatives, loss of property and even permanent injuries, without any justice or reparations paid. One key informant noted that

If no one intervenes to facilitate dialogues between perpetrators and victims so that there is room for forgiveness and healing, then we cannot talk of community cohesion or peacebuilding. (Interview, 2021)

All FGD participants predicted that if no arrests of perpetrators of political violence are made, the cycle of violence will most probably continue. People no longer fear committing atrocities. One participant said:

Vanhu ivava vakasungwa chichatova chijairira chekuti takarova vanhu nguva yema elections hapana zvatinoitwa, mirai muone next election muno zvakasagadzirwa.

[ If these people are not arrested it will become a culture for them to beat up people during elections as they know nothing will happen to them. Wait and see what will happen in the next election if this problem is not addressed.] (FGD, 2021)

It is imperative to note that, according to the above quotations, participants meant that in order to address the future, the past has to be dealt with. Without transitional justice, truth telling, forgiveness, reconciliation, reparations, and justice, there will not be any room for community union.

While participants are not peacebuilding and conflict transformation experts and are often left out in national programs, their ideas on how to change their situation are recognised as important components in the framework of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Truth-telling, in particular, is recognized as a vital mechanism for addressing past injustices and fostering reconciliation among divided communities. It allows individuals and societies to confront their histories, acknowledge grievances, and begin the process of healing (Brounéus 2010; Mendeloff 2004). This highlights the importance of not treating communities as voiceless passengers with no say on the both the journey and destination.

Truth-telling initiatives, such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), have been implemented in various post-conflict settings to facilitate dialogue and understanding among conflicting parties. These commissions provide a platform for victims and perpetrators to share their experiences, which can help to validate the suffering of victims and promote a collective understanding of the past (Le 2021). The act of sharing personal narratives not only aids in individual healing but also contributes to the broader societal process of reconciliation by fostering empathy and understanding among previously opposing groups (Mendeloff 2004; Le 2021).

On the other hand, forgiveness allows individuals and communities to move beyond the cycle of retribution and violence that often characterizes post-conflict societies. The act of forgiving can be transformative, enabling individuals to release feelings of anger and resentment, which can otherwise perpetuate conflict (Le 2021; Datzberger and Donovan 2020). However, forgiveness is not a straightforward process; it requires a foundation of truth-telling to ensure that the acknowledgment of past wrongs occurs before individuals can genuinely forgive (Brounéus 2010; Le 2021). However difficult and uncomfortable, participants considered this interplay between truth and forgiveness as important to facilitating conflict transformation in the community.

### **8.13 Concluding Summary**

This chapter presented the findings of the study that were obtained from the groundwork conducted in Epworth, Harare. The chapter outlined how political violence in Epworth has resulted in different problems, including property damage, injuries, loss of life and traumatic

experiences for many people. The findings helped to address the key study objectives and unpacked the genesis of Epworth's political violence, politics as a major driver of conflicts in Epworth, social and economic causes of conflicts in Epworth, and the effects of political violence in Epworth. The next chapter presents the findings from the Peace Rabbits intervention project.

# Chapter 9:

## Peacebuilding through Peace Rabbitry

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter is a presentation of the findings from this study that established and implemented a cuniculture project which brought together conflicting members of the Epworth community into dialogue and working together for economic emancipation. The chapter explores how people who have disagreements due to society, religion, or politics can still come together when platforms for dialogic conversations are set up. In this chapter, I also share the process which the action team went through to agree on ground rules, and the motivations behind the Peace Rabbits project. But to begin with, I will make some very general observations of the overall situation in Epworth in order to situate the study and to give a better understanding of the personal and social factors that influenced their participation and behaviours during the research period.

Research Community:

I engaged the Epworth community for this action research project. This community was selected because it is a post-conflict dormitory town in south-eastern Harare Province in Zimbabwe. The Epworth Local Board administers the area. Informal traders dominate Epworth's socioeconomic landscape due to extreme unemployment, a high crime rate, and abject poverty. The area is highly polarised due to the post-election conflicts and harsh economic conditions the nation has been facing for the past decades. I chose Epworth because of the in-depth knowledge I gained during my 15 years' stay in the area. The fact that I stayed in this community for a reasonable duration did not compromise the outcome of this research, given the qualitative nature of the study.

In the run-up to elections, Epworth has been characterised by an increase in cases of human rights violations, abductions, torture, theft, murder, rape, and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment of civilians based on their political opinion. For the purposes of completeness, I present below findings detailing the state of Epworth from the viewpoint of the participants.

As the study developed, I partnered with twenty local participants who belonged to the two major national political parties, ZANU-PF and the CCC, after recognising the need to change connections between political competitors and exploring the pertinent theory and the literature

for this study. It was decided to employ a Peace Rabbit intervention technique to help this community's post-conflict relationships to change. This project's goal was to develop an intervention that would result in a harmonious co-existence in Epworth, the dissemination of knowledge about conflict transformation, and the encouragement of community healing and reconciliation. The realisation that unresolved disagreements result in division and intense frustration, which leads to destructive acts to resolve political differences, served as the impetus for this study.

### **9.1.2 Epworth from the community's perspective.**

I had the opportunity to engage with residents before implementing the intervention. This section explores the general lifestyle that characterised the Epworth community.

#### **9.1.3 *Mavanga eruveno rwa2018<sup>2</sup>: the polarity of the community***

As I learnt from the peacebuilding meeting I facilitated with the Action Team (AT), post-election-related violence in 2018 in Epworth produced a great deal of division and alienation. I found that the divisions caused a lack of trust among community members, so that they could not even share opportunities or security awareness messages on the basis of political opinion. All the AT members echoed this notion:

*Vanhu vemuno havatomboudzana mikana yemabasa kana kwakatonzi kukuuya donor kuzopa vanhu chikafu, nenyaya dzezvakaitika kare nanhasi vanhu vanongodarikana. Munu kana munhu kuti angokuudzao kuti kwaukuenda uko hakuna kumira zvakana munhu anotokusiya uchipinda mudambudziko nekuda kweruveno rwakasikwa nemavanga a 2018. [People in this community do not share business opportunities or even when donors bring food relief, they don't inform each other because of past unhealed wounds. Here, people can leave you to face danger without alerting you, just because of hatred bred by 2018 election-related violence. (AT, 2021).*

At this stage of initiating the project, the AT members also indicated that they did not trust each other and were of different political opinions. They alluded to the fact that at first they did not disclose some information or open up, because they did not trust other action team members. One of the members said,

*Nekusangana kwatakaita pano taitotya kutaura zvimwe nekuti munu munhu wese anenge atori mutengeswi webato ake saka ndakataura zvimwe ndogona kutonyurira pano. [Since this is a fusion of members from different political parties, we feared openly expressing ourselves since everyone is an eye and ear of his/her party; therefore if I say sensitive stuff on this platform it could be my road to death.] (AT, 2021).*

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<sup>2</sup> "Scars of hatred bred in 2018"

The discussion made it clear that, given their history of tense relationships, the members of the peace rabbitry group needed a sufficient amount of time to build lasting relationships with one another. Different political loyalties, and the violence they experienced in their community each time elections were coming, had strained relationships. Participants in the AT underlined the fact that there was open hatred between members of various political parties and a lack of confidence between those who committed political violence and those who were the victims of it.

Vanhu vakafirwa nehama, vakarohwa, vakapazirwa dzimba, nevamwe vakabatwa chibharo nguva yekuvhota vaneruvengo rwakasimba nebato raikonzera uye nevavanoziva vaiita izvozvo vemunharaunda. Vanototaura pachena luti pasina kukumbirana ruregerero havangambonzwanana. [Victims who were tortured, lost their relatives or were raped during elections have passionate hatred for perpetrators and do not talk to them without post-conflict reconciliation.] (AT, 2021).

The above sentiments showed an urgent need to address the past in Epworth so that the future can be realised. Therefore, there was a real need for the creation of a platform whereby the perpetrators and victims could dialogue and settle their differences so that they could begin to face the future.

#### **9.1.4 Poverty and unemployment**

Epworth, according to the information shared by research participants, is marred by abject poverty and calamitous hunger. This situation left people vulnerable to political manipulation through patronage politics. As a means to food security, some youths joined political parties that disbursed food and seeds during campaigns, and they became tools for impunity and repression during election times as they became subject to their providers. It was noted that because of this backdrop, some youths engaged in antisocial behaviour such as drug misuse, while young girls turned to prostitution:

Vana vapera kuita mhondi dzemapato iwaya senzira yekutsvaga chikafu uye tuvana sikana tudiki twazara pabooster apo kutengesa miviri yavo kuti vawane kurarama. Nhamo iri mu Epworth nekuda kwekushaikwa kwemabasa ndiyo imwe ikuzokonzera mhirizhonga nekuti vamwe vacho karovero kavu unotoona kuti idzi ihasha dzemunhu anenzara [Young men are becoming political thugs and young ladies are selling their bodies as a way to escape from poverty. Unemployment is a dominant causative factor for election-related violence as one can tell that people are more driven by frustrations which makes them too aggressive which then translates into violent conflicts] (AT, 2021).

The AT members also emphasised how the bad situation in their neighbourhood forced them to act as thugs in electoral campaigns in exchange for money that was used to buy food for their families or pay for their children's school expenses. The AT members all agreed that

Epworth was the epicentre of election-related violence, which sparked the wave of discord and lack of political tolerance that characterised the neighbourhood.

### **9.1.5 Political tolerance in Epworth**

Political party teachings have ideologically colonised Epworth residents. The AT explained that political opinion was treated as compulsory, as loyalty was only supposed to be given to the ruling party and acting otherwise came with drastic consequences:

Muno munhu wese anoita seakato zvarwa achinzi haufanire kutrevera rimwe bato risiri ZANU-PF, hapachisina kusununguka munhu kuita zvinoda moyo asi nekuda kwekuvhundutsirwa nekudzvinyirirwa kwevanoda kupikisa, tingangoti munhu wese anotongoti ndiri weko nekuda kwekutya uye kuti achengetedzeke. [In Epworth there is so much political intolerance to the extent that it seems as if everyone is born ZANU-PF and trying to drift away from its ideologies sparks political and personal insecurities; therefore to ensure these, the majority of people in here use ZANU-PF as their passports to security.] (AT, 2021).

The above sentiments expressed by the participants revealed the heights of political bigotry in Epworth. This then created a division in those who stood as free-willed and followed other political parties, as they were treated as traitors in the community and mixing or interacting with them was therefore strictly prohibited, as someone in the team said:

Zvatakatoita pano izvi zvekuti vemapato anopikisana tenge takagara tichitokurukura nekupangana mazano muno zvotoonekwa sekuva mutengeswi. Kumusangano mukuru zvinonzi hapana chinonzi chingadzidzwe kubva kune munhu anopandukira nyika yake [Collective discussions like these are regarded as taboo in this community and according to party ideologies a person who was capable of betraying [their] own country cannot help rebuild it, therefore there should be no interaction with the opposition party members.] (AT, 2021).

What is most disturbing is that the Zimbabwean Constitution clearly states that the nation state is democratic, and all have freedom of political opinion; but in practice, people are tied to certain political parties because of fear.

## **9.2 Peace Rabbits Initiative**

The pre-intervention engagements that I had with participants were meant to enable me to understand the challenges faced in Epworth, as well as to ideate on an intervention strategy that was going to bring these people together, to work in harmony and build sustainable relationships. This study was conceived as participatory; as such, one of the project objectives was to support capacity-building in a way that could lead to the empowerment of local

community members who had little economic and political power, reducing their reliance on political leaders who used them for political gain.

From our conversations with the community, the change was to be accomplished by supplying new technical and entrepreneurial skills, along with skills for peacebuilding. The participants noted that community associations are largely comprised of people from specific political unions and fusion of those was just fallacy. One participant noted that:

Kuno munhu anotongozvishandira akazvimirira hakuna zvekunzi mushandirapamwe unless itori project yauya nemusangano zvekuti vanenge vasarudzwa nema councilor ndivo vano shandidzana asi nguva zvinji vanenge vari vebato iroro vake vaanoziva.

[Here people do their own things, there are no cooperatives in terms of projects unless it's a politically funded project that only benefits political devotees selected by councillors.] (FGD, 2021)

Another participant echoed this:

Ehe maNGO anombouya ozama kuita nesu ma project vasingasarudzi kuti uyu ndwebato ripi kana ripi asi pavanongouya through ma relevant authorities zvese zvinobva zvatoenda mupolitics nekuti zvinototangira kulocal board kwacho kusvika kuzasi. Maprojects iyayo vamwe vanotozosara nekuti havanyorwe pamalist ema beneficiaries nekuda kwekuti havasi vana vemusangano.

[Yes, NGOs come here and then [are] trying to implement all-inclusive projects without any political bias but in their quest for permission to implement their projects, it becomes politicised because all the relevant authorities, starting from the local board, are politically biased. This usually results in exclusion of opposition supporters in most programmes.] (FGD, 2021)

I made a suggestion to have Peace Rabbits which excited the interest of participants. One of the activists noted that:

Maprojects akaita sekuchengeta huku, kugadzira ma detergents, nemamwe ma soft skills haa vanhu vakawanda vavamazviri nema programs aiunzwa nana Zimbabwe Women's Bureau kuburikidza ne Spotlight Initiative, but munhu anenge achiita akazvimirira. Kana takuita project yemubatanidzwa ndino funga kuti takamboedza tsuro dzamakambotaura zvinogona kutibatsira.

[Projects like poultry, skills like detergent making and other soft skills are now flooding Epworth through trainings and sponsorship from organisations like the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau through the Spotlight Initiative, but those were done to capacitate individuals on economic challenges. For community cohesion we could opt for a culinary project like the one you once mentioned.] (FGD, 2021)

A resounding support for that sentiment was given from all the other six FGD participants, who then started giving advantages of this project over others. Below are the supporting statements:

*Yea tsuro ndakanzwa kuti dzinobereka vana kana 8 after every 2 months chero takatanga ne 5 panopera gore project inenge yatisvitsa kure tatova kuma thousands.* [Yeah, rabbitry is a good project; I heard that they multiply quickly such that even if you start with five, when the year ends you will have more than a thousand.] (Participant 1).

Inin ndongoziva hangu kuti muno makudiwa something unique, zvehuku izvi hazvisi sustainable, ko takadzitengesa dzakapera tomirira futi dzimwe six weeks kuti tiite mari apa dzinodhura kuchengeta hatizodzighoni maenad.

[All I know is that there is need for something unique in Epworth, projects like poultry are not sustainable, what if we sell off the first batch are we going to wait for the next six weeks so that we restart the whole project, and the feeds are expensive we may fail to sustain the project when you leave.] (Participant 2).

Tsuro dzikutengwa nevarungu, project yehuku muno ikuitwa nemunhu wese kana dzakasvika six weeks dzacho unoitengesera ani uye nemarii. Ndopakuzoendesa huku nepondo.

[Rabbits have a ready market, broilers have very low demand here in Epworth because everyone now has the skill and is doing it, so even if we do that project we might end up selling our broilers at as low as USD\$2 instead of 6 or 7 because of the competition.] (Participant 3)

*Project yetsuro iniwo ndoitsigira pakuti haidyi nzimbo yakawanda uye hadzidi zvakawanda.*

[I also support rabbitry because it does not require a lot of land and they are very easy to manage.] (Participant 5)

*Takatodzidziswao kuchengeta tsuro tinogona kutozobudirira nekuti vakawanda havazviiti.* [If we learn cuniculture, it may be a life-changing project because only a few people are doing it.] (Participant 5).

Sekuti munhu wese anotendera kuti tiite tsuro ini ndotongomira nevamwe, ndopanotangira kubatana ipapa handichina chekuramba dzakanaka dzakadaro.

[Since everyone else is in agreement with rabbitry I don't have any reason to think otherwise, this is where unity begins, the idea is perfect as is, I concur.] (Participant 6)

The aforementioned comments demonstrate that community people yearned for initiatives like Peace Rabbits, which had the potential to empower them and actively combat poverty. Such a project would provide them with additional revenue, which would increase their confidence and prevent political players from using them to further political violence. The idea of Peace Rabbits was then put forth as a result of this call, and all of the other FGD participants and interviewees agreed that it would make for an effective and long-lasting intervention method for peacebuilding in Epworth.

### 9.3 Pre-Peace Rabbits State of Epworth

The peace rabbitry initiative gave Epworth a community gathering platform they had never had before, and the Peace Rabbits stimulated political rivalry discourse in a very constructive way, according to the preliminary evaluation exercise. The Peace Rabbits served as a discussion starter for peace-related topics, as well as a force for social change and a tool for ending poverty. According to reports, the peace rabbitry effort also advanced the AT's ability to support grieving families and helped reduce barriers of hatred while also enhancing their rabbitry abilities. The preliminary evaluation exercise exemplifies the success story of a community-based project, whose measure of success is that it expanded and developed new ideas, whereas those that are not actually supported by people tend to die away once the NGO leaves. Fisher and Zimina (2008) question whether peacebuilding is still relevant and valuable, or whether individuals are just wasting their time due to the inability of peace players to incorporate local populations in the development of intervention methods. Despite the positive aspects mentioned, the preliminary analysis also showed that COVID-19, the state of the economy, and marketing difficulties all had a negative impact on the AT.

The facilitator began by recapping the pre-intervention phase in Epworth before asking about the results after a year of intervention. The recap session was led by one of the participants. I deliberately asked one of them to lead, because key to the continuity of the sessions in my absence or after the end of the study was the ability of local people to drive the work.



Photo 9.1: Participant leading recap session

Discussants explored the general lifestyle that characterised the Epworth community before the intervention strategy, the Peace Rabbits initiative. The idea behind this recap was to make sure that we did not forget where we started from and where we are going.

### 9.3.1 The polarisation of the community

As I learnt from the peacebuilding meeting I facilitated with the AT, it was highlighted that post-election-related violence in 2018 in Epworth produced a great deal of division and alienation. The researcher found that the divisions caused lack of trust among community members, so they could not even share opportunities or security awareness. All the AT members echoed to the notion by resonating that:

Vanhu vemuno havatomboudzana mikana yemabasa kana kwakatonzi kukuuya donor kuzopa vanhu chikafu, nenyaya dzezvakaitika kare nanhasi vanhu vanongodarikana. Muno kana munhu kuti angokuudzao kuti kwaukuenda uko hakuna kumira zvakanaka munhu anotokusiya uchipinda mudambudziko nekuda kweruvengo rwakasikwa nemavanga a 2018.

[People in this community do not share business opportunities or even when donors bring food relief, they don't inform each other because of past unhealed wounds. Here, people can leave you to face danger without alerting you just because of hatred bred by 2018 election-related violence.] (AT, 2021)

The team also indicated that they themselves did not trust each other at the start of the Peace Rabbits initiative, as they were of different political opinions. They alluded to the fact that at first, they did not disclose some information or open up because they did not trust other action team members. One of the members said,

Nekusangana kwatakaita pano taitotya kutaura zvimwe nekut muno munhu wese anenge atori mutengesi webato ake saka ndakataura zvimwe ndogona kutonyurira pano.

[Since this is a fusion of members from different political parties, we feared openly expressing ourselves since everyone is an eye and ear of his/her party; therefore if I say sensitive stuff on this platform it could be my road to death.] (AT, 2021)

Against this background of polarity and mistrust, the Peace Rabbits initiative is validated as an intervention strategy to create a forum for discussions and a relationship-building space through daily interaction by working together. The discussion made clear that, given their history of tense relationships, the members of the peace rabbitry group needed a sufficient amount of time to build lasting relationships with one another. Different political loyalties and the violence they experienced in their community each time elections were coming had strained relationships. Before Peace Rabbits, there was a great deal of hatred and bitterness

in Epworth. Participants in the AT underlined the fact that there was open hatred between members of various political parties and a lack of confidence between those who committed political violence and those who were the victims of it.

Vanhu vakafirwa nehama, vakarohwa, vakapazirwa dzimba, nevamwe vakabatwa chibharo nguva yekuvhota vaneruvengo rwakasimba nebato raikonzera uye nevavanziva vaiita izvozvo vemunharaunda. Vanototaura pachena luti pasina kukumbirana ruregerero havangambonzwanana.

[Victims who were tortured, lost their relatives or were raped during elections have passionate hatred for perpetrators and do not talk to them without post-conflict reconciliation.] (AT, 2021)

The above sentiments show an urgent need to address the past in Epworth so that the future can be realised. Therefore, there was a real need for the creation of a platform whereby the perpetrators and victims could dialogue and settle their differences so that they could begin to face the future. Hatred, polarity and lack of trust were all major hurdles in Epworth that called for Peace Rabbits as an intervention strategy for post-election-related violence transformation.

### **9.3.2 Poverty and unemployment**

Epworth, according to the information shared by research participants, is marred by abject poverty and calamitous hunger. This situation left the multitudes vulnerable to political manipulation through patronage politics. As a means to food security, some youths joined political parties that disbursed food and seeds during campaigns, and they became tools for impunity and repression during election times as they became subject to their providers. It was noted that because of this backdrop, some youths engaged in antisocial behaviour such as drug misuse, while young girls turned to prostitution:

Vana vapera kuita mhondi dzemapato iwaya senzira yekutsvaga chikafu uye tuvana sikana tudiki twazara pabooster apo kutengesa miviri yavo kuti vawane kurarama. Nhamo iri mu Epworth nekuda kwekushaikwa kwemabasa ndiyo imwe ikuzokonzera mhirizhonga nekuti vamwe vacho karovero kavo unotoona kuti idzi ihasha dzemunhu anenzara.

[Young men are becoming political thugs and young ladies are selling their bodies as a way to escape from poverty. Unemployment is a dominant causative factor for election-related violence as one can tell that people are more driven by frustrations which makes them too aggressive which then translates into violent conflicts.] (AT, 2021)

The AT members also emphasised how the bad situation in their neighbourhood forced them to act as thugs in electoral campaigns in exchange for money that was used to buy food for their families or pay for their children's school expenses. The AT members all agreed that Epworth was the epicentre of election-related violence, which sparked the wave of discord

and lack of political tolerance that characterised the neighbourhood. While the Peace Rabbits initiative's primary goal was to change how this community interacted after a conflict, it also succeeded in tackling poverty and hunger issues and providing sustainable livelihoods.

### **9.3.3 Political intolerance in Epworth**

Political party teachings have ideologically colonised Epworth residents. The AT explained that political opinion was treated as compulsory, as loyalty was only supposed to be given to the ruling party and acting otherwise came with drastic consequences :

Muno munhu wese anoita seakato zvarwa achinzi haufanire kutrevera rimwe bato risiri ZANU-PF, hapachisina kusununguka munhu kuita zvinoda moyo asi nekuda kwekuvhundutsirwa nekudzvinyirirwa kwevanoda kupikisa, tingangoti munhu wese anotongoti ndiri weko nekuda kwekutya uye kuti achengetedzeke.

[In Epworth there is so much political intolerance to the extent that it seems as if everyone is born ZANU-PF and trying to drift away from its ideologies sparks political and personal insecurities; therefore, to ensure these, the majority of people in here use ZANU-PF as their passports to security.] (AT, 2021)

The above sentiments expressed by the participants revealed the heights of political bigotry in Epworth. This then created a division with those who stood as free-willed and followed other political parties, as they were treated as traitors in the community and mixing or interacting with them was therefore strictly prohibited, as someone in the team said:

Zvatakatoita pano izvi zvekuti vemapato anopikisana tenge takagara tichitokurukura nekupangana mazano muno zvotoonekwa sekuva mutengesesi. Kumusangano mukuru zvinonzi hapana chinonzi chingadzidzwe kubva kune munhu anopandukira nyika yake

[Collective discussions like these are regarded as taboo in this community and according to party ideologies a person who was capable of betraying [their] own country cannot help rebuild it, therefore there should be no interaction with the opposition party members.] (AT, 2021)

What is most disturbing is that the Zimbabwean constitution clearly states that the nation state is democratic, and all have freedom of political opinion; however, in practice, people are tied to certain political parties because of fear.

## **9.4 Reflections on the Research Journey**

This unit of the study provides a comprehensive narrative of the action research process which we conducted in Epworth with the action team over a period of 12 months. The motivation for me to embark on this study was two-fold. First, I wanted to grow as an academic, and doing a PhD was one sure way of improving myself in that regard. But I did not want to just do a PhD which only improved my thinking and did little in improving the quality of life of people.

Therefore, my second motivation for embarking on a participatory action research was to contribute towards positive social change “in the now”. This seemed a great idea until the process towards working for change became a reality. The initial steps of the process were just as important as they were difficult. I have the benefit of insight to share how the process panned out and the logic behind the web of steps that we undertook in pursuing the research goal.

#### **9.4.1 Background reflection: A journey of 1000 miles**

Working with individuals living in a community faced with conflicting societal, religious, and political differences was no easy feat. One of the key challenges was selecting and uniting seemingly disparate individuals into creating the Action Team (AT). Naturally, even with the help of Madanha Ashe the process started with scepticism, doubt, and resistance from residents. What bothered me the most was that besides the visible challenges in the society, I had also spoken to some residents who had confirmed what I had seen – yet there was a lack of excitement. It appeared, to me, that the culture of conflict was deeply entrenched in people’s beliefs and norms, and they were not eager to step out to experience new realities. However, it was deep belief in oneness of humanity and the potential of dialogic interactions that drove me forward. I knew before starting the research, as I am more convinced now, that change begins with one person.

Studies from elsewhere in Zimbabwe strengthened my conviction in the belief that beneath the surface of the outwardly seen conflicts, lies some commonalities that can be threaded for peace (Mutero & Kaye 2019; Rukuni 2018). At the very least, the source of challenges was the same as averred by Tshuma (2019: 14), who posits:

In Zimbabwe, while conflicts today find expression in different interconnected layers, ranging from a household level (domestic violence) to broader social-level land conflicts, the majority of conflicts remain deeply rooted in disputes over national power (politics) and socio-economic hardships.

I was confident that we would find each other.

During the early processes of this study, when introducing the topic and the interests of the study to various potential participants and stakeholders, the idea was met with mixed feelings. Key amongst these was an expression that the study was “sensitive”, and one would hear some express their concerns using local slang language: “paritricky”, meaning “this is problematic”. Discussions, engagements and research on political issues and opinions is considered to be “sensitive” in most societies across Zimbabwe (Mare 2017; Mutsvairo & Sirks 2015; Sigauke 2011, 2013). As such, any response which suggested “paritricky” was very

understandable – though I hoped people would be willing to engage beyond their uncertainties once they understood the apolitical and peacebuilding stance of the study interest.

I knew Epworth well enough from the 15 years that I lived in the community to understand a few things that were important for the success of this study. What I had was not a completely emic perspective of the community. I was a sister outsider; I could not fully fit in, but neither was I totally lost and unaware of my physical and social surroundings (Lorde 2012). I knew, for example, that the higher education degrees that I had acquired over the years, outside Zimbabwe for that matter, set me apart from many. I was also aware that political conversations and research can easily be linked to the notorious Central Intelligence Organisation. And most importantly, I knew I had to piggyback on trusted individuals or organisations to negotiate entry into the community (Chinyowa *et al.* 2016).

I figured that my key to earning the community's trust as a researcher was through engaging the services of a community-based organisation, Madanha Ashe. This choice was very easy, because I had friends within the organisation who could vouch for my character both within their organisation and in the community. But most importantly, with its established reputation and privileges, Madanha Ashe could serve as my bridge to the Epworth community. I had to leverage their credibility to gain acceptance. The Madanha Ashe Trust has been working with the Epworth community for a little under two decades. They have deep-rooted connections with the community built from years of cultivating relationships, understanding the community's needs, and a history of making a positive impact. My study aligned with their purpose, and I was willing to respect their organisational values. As such, they introduced me to the community and held my hand in choosing reliable research participants.

I should hasten to say that working with Madanha Ashe should not be in anyway be thought of as exploiting privileges. It should be seen for what it was, building trust. I got involved in the study with a genuine commitment to understanding the community's perspectives and working together with them to address their concerns. "Affiliating" with an organisation that they already respected smoothed the journey and, in my view, can contribute towards project sustainability.

However, I did not engage with Madanha Ashe only. I contacted various stakeholders (NGOs, political parties and church leaders) whose influence I believed would be instrumental in negotiating access into the community. This allowed me to understand the political environment of Epworth through engaging local community members, human rights activists, NGO actors and political leaders from ZANU-PF, CCC and the MDC in informal conversations on peace and development and how the study could be crucial, as unpacked in the previous

chapters. This foundation laid a platform to identify key strategic partners for conducting the study as an Action Research Team (AT).

#### **9.4.2 Journeying with company**

The foregoing discussion on how I negotiated entry makes it clear that I was aware that I relied on the community's corporation to make this study a success. What the discussion does not say, albeit already implied in the methodology section, is that I had to collaborate with the community. This study was designed as a participatory action research, implying that I had to work with the researched community. I identified and purposively selected AT members during Focus Group Discussions.

As this was a qualitative research type of exercise, the AT members had to be limited in terms of number, since high numbers could bring coordination challenges over time. Members of the AT were equally distributed to represent the two major political parties, as earlier discussed. This process, like the rest of this study, was guided by the DUT ethical standards.

My partnership with the Madanha Ashe Community Organisation also eased my responsibilities, not least in terms of selecting dependable people to make up the right sample for my study and to obtain protection and easy acceptance by the people in this community. While each person participated in their individual capacities, the project benefitted immensely from the associations they had with different organisations. These organisations included the Women Empowerment Group, Epworth Residents' Development Association, Madanhashe Charity Organization, Jairos Jiri, Citizen Coalition for Change, Kuwirirana Disabled Children's Centre, Apostolic Faith Mission Church, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front, and the Zimbabwe Republic Police. What was also clear was that community groups are alive in Epworth.

Despite the political polarity, people knew the positive outcomes of working together. The AT members essentially became the peace committee that provided a deep understanding of the local context and social and political dynamics of the area (Chivasa 2017). The AT's knowledge was invaluable in designing and implementing effective peacebuilding interventions. The community's involvement in the research process was meant to persuade them in owning and investing their minds and time in the project (Mutero and Chimbari 2021).

We made it clear from the start that the research would be difficult and would require individual effort to complete. We also stated that our definition of justice in this research was not to be confused with the concept of retribution. In no way did we want our research to encourage hatred; rather, we wanted to encourage social change that was fuelled by individual

development. Therefore, the recruiting process justified my deliberate selection of participants who had either been victims of or perpetrators of political violence, which was a crucial theme examined in this study.

## **9.5 The Key Research Steps**

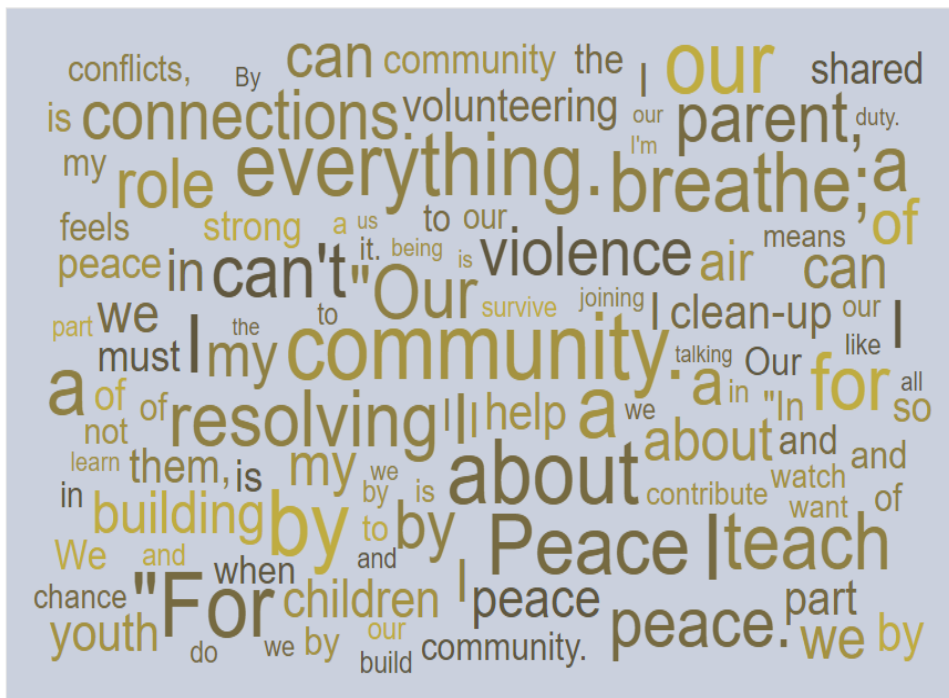
This section outlines and reflects on the key findings from the action research steps that were followed in conducting the study.

### **9.5.1 Step 1: De-escalating tensions**

Our initial meetings were visibly filled with apprehension among all participants. It is not often that ordinary members of political parties come together to fashion a peacebuilding architecture. Participants in the first meeting were tense and unwilling to cooperate; some even vowed never to cooperate again due to their political disagreements. Given that they had previously promised never to band together for the same reason, it took some convincing to get the participants to agree to the project's main goals and objectives, as well as to promise their devotion to it. Although this endeavour seemed impossible at first due to its delicate nature, I seized the opportunity to thoroughly explain the study's aims and objectives to the persons involved, and eventually, they came around and consented to join. The majority of the members were at first wary of being seen as sell-outs by other political participants and worried about being held accountable for divulging party secrets to supporters of other parties.

It was clear from the participants' reactions that attitudes do not change suddenly, but that rather it is a gradual process. Some were sceptical of the intervention technique, which stopped them from making decisions and necessitated the need for additional cycles or for individual follow-ups with other AT members. As local CSOs and youth associations, who facilitated in mobilisation and who were close to the research participants, were given the chance to partake in the consultations, they also helped in convincing the AT members that as a researcher I had the sole intention of promoting community cohesion and community peacebuilding through action research using Peace Rabbits as an intervention strategy.

With a lot of convincing and deliberation the participants reflected on how the programme would form the first of its kind in the community to attempt to create a platform for promoting tolerance among political foes. Participants reflections showed that they fully understood the importance of the project for both their present and the future. Below I have created a word mesh from what they said during the deliberations.



9. 1 Word mesh created from participants' reflections.

In addition to the word mesh, we came up with the following peace pledge and ground rules that all of us promised to live up to. The ground rules (or guiding ground agreements) would serve as our guidance for the peace rabbitry activity.

### 9.5.2 Step 2: The ground rules

The ground rules were co-created with the AT in a discussion forum where everyone suggested rules that would guide the process, and everyone adopted them. With the goal of fostering cohesiveness and trust within the community, these guiding ground rules assisted in making our meetings and dialogue sessions secure.

The ground rules also created a respectful atmosphere in which the participants felt free to be who they really were and to share honestly. The ground rules were established by the participants themselves, which gave them a sense of ownership over the agreements and made them more likely to be upheld. The following table shows the agreed guiding ground agreements which were set by the AT and were meant to guide us throughout our Peace Rabbits initiative.

Figure 9. 1: Guiding Rules which were set by the AT

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members are to be equally treated</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members can use any vernacular language freely</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No political regalia during sessions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No political party mottoes</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking questions freely without fear</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respecting every member's opinions regardless of political affiliation or gender.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All members to be punctual for all peace rabbitry activities</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No use of phones during sessions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No use of hate speech.</li> </ul>

By establishing clear ground rules, potential misunderstandings that might have resulted from the exchange of hateful or intimidating speeches were reduced to a minimum. Ground rules help in establishing clear expectations for behaviour and participation in the peacebuilding process (Kelman 1998). The rules helped with ensuring that everyone was on the same page and was working towards the same goal. Also, considering the Epworth context, setting the ground rules was important in creating a safe and respectful space for dialogue and collaboration.

The nature of the research demanded that participants contribute to dialogue sessions and in ideating when implementing the Peace Rabbit project; as such the ground rules helped to level the playing field for all AT members and shield them from intimidation. Since they were obliged to abide by these agreements, the guiding ground agreements helped the AT become more unified and manageable. During our first meeting, I noticed that the participants were passively contributing as they got used to the concepts, realised where the intervention method was going to take us, and adjusted to this unusual group structure.

From what I could gather from this first meeting, group dynamics revealed some unseen tensions, which, however, gradually dissipated as participants got to know one another. Amin (2002) speaks of how physical proximity cannot be substituted for intentional conversational relationship-building in creating a cohesive community. We had managed to bring the AT into

physical proximity, but more had to be done intentionally to build relationships. The premise that building compassionate relationships with individuals, whether they are oppressed or not, requires time for meaningful involvement in each other's lives and nurturing of the relationship fits well with the lack of trust in groups, especially when it comes to the first time of meeting (Zeiderman 2005). Similarly, it took a considerable amount of time for the members of our group to build meaningful relationships with one another, especially in light of their previous tense interactions caused by their differing political affiliations and the violence they had witnessed each time they were approaching an election in their community.

### **9.5.3 Step 3: Reflections on intervention planning**

It was in the preliminary sessions that I managed to create a platform to explain the research methodology and draft our research activities with the AT. Sargeant (2012) opines that researchers should explain the research methodology to participants in ways that make them understand that the research process contributes to building trust and credibility between researchers and participants. I also reiterated the intervention should come from, and be owned by, the community Sending (2010: 191). It was important for participants to realise that participation and ownership of the project did not necessarily mean taking sole responsibility for all the vices, but it was extremely helpful in our efforts to change post-conflict relationships because they were either victims or perpetrators of electoral violence in some capacity.

I also emphasised to the participants that the space that we had created was safe, allowing all versions of truth. In other words, blame shifting and "stereotypes" were acceptable in the space as it allowed us to fix the issues. Yoshizawa and Kusaka (2020) also note that "Everyday peace redefines behaviours usually perceived as negative, such as avoidance, ambiguity or blame-shifting, as potentially positive practices". The first major intervention-related task we undertook was deciding on which project we would implement. As the newly constituted AT, we felt that it was necessary to carry out a peace rabbitry activity to provide a forum and safe space for discussing the suffering of the populace. The AT members emphasised how important peace rabbitry was, since they saw it as a force for change in their interpersonal interactions.

My thinking, based on the first meetings' animosity, was that we were going to struggle with agreeing on what to do collectively. I was, however, pleasantly surprised when participants showed an inclination towards the rabbitry project which I had shared with them when I was negotiating entry. I shared the idea, not with the intention of swaying them to my preferences, but just as an example of what we could do, emphasising that we could not just do a project

without doing an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Below I present a table summarizing the SWOT analysis of the project.

Figure 9. 2: SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p><b>Community Involvement:</b> We could engage more community members in the project to enhance ownership and dedication to its success.</p>	<p><b>Limited Resources:</b> We have to start the project with limited funding and resources.</p>	<p><b>Social Impact:</b> The project can serve as a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution, addressing the root causes of violence.</p>	<p><b>Political Instability:</b> Ongoing political issues may create challenges in maintaining a peaceful environment for the project.</p>
<p><b>Culinary Skills:</b> Leveraging local culinary skills and traditions ensures authentic and appealing dishes.</p>	<p><b>Training Needs:</b> Ensuring that community members have the necessary culinary skills and hygiene knowledge can be a challenge.</p>	<p><b>Tourism Potential:</b> Authentic local cuisine can attract tourists, boosting the local economy.</p>	<p><b>Economic Downturn:</b> Economic instability may reduce consumers' purchasing power and affect the project's sustainability.</p>
<p><b>Cultural Sensitivity:</b> Promoting local dishes and culture can build stronger bonds among community members.</p>	<p><b>Competition:</b> The food market in Epworth may already be saturated, making it harder to stand out.</p>	<p><b>Collaboration:</b> Collaborating with local NGOs and governmental agencies can open up access to resources and support.</p>	<p><b>Competition:</b> Existing food vendors and restaurants could pose a threat to the success of Peace Rabbits.</p>

<p>Positive Message: "Peace Rabbits" conveys a peaceful and non-political message, which can help in curbing political violence.</p>	<p>Changing Tastes: People's preferences for food can change over time, and keeping up with trends may be challenging.</p>	<p>Education: The project can provide training and employment opportunities for youth and women, contributing to skills development and economic empowerment.</p>	<p>Health Regulations: Adhering to food safety and hygiene standards is crucial and may be subject to regulatory scrutiny.</p>
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We used the SWOT analysis as a guide in developing and implementing our intervention. We were aware of what could go right and what could also go wrong. During the meetings, the action team pointed out that Peace Rabbits have the potential to promote lasting peace through providing a forum for dialogue, in which participants can discuss the past and plan for the future. This idea was borne out of the challenges faced by the people in the community through polarisation and they hence opted for laying aside their political differences so that they could unite for a purpose that brings community development rather than maiming, fighting and hating one another. This notion is supported by Ngwenya and Harris (2015a) who observe that suffering that is not transformed is transferred, indicating that the political violence, trauma and suffering the people of Epworth have experienced will continue be passed on to subsequent generations, a characteristic known as intergenerational conflict. Thus, there was a need for a strategy that would initiate and allow the healing of their wounds to unfold and pave the way for reconciliation. This insight was central in the discussions by the AT; it became a key driving factor for them to create a platform they considered to be a crucial vehicle in attracting the broader community to join in the project in the long term.

It was agreed upon by everybody that the primary goal of our peace rabbitry venture was to support ongoing peacebuilding initiatives in local communities to prevent violence and mend strained relationships. This Peace Rabbits strategy aimed to change post-conflict relations by giving individuals of different political ideologies a neutral space to interact, collaborate, and create strategies to advance their sustainable lifestyles and peace. The Peace Rabbits project was identified as a vehicle that sought to improve local communities' skills in conflict management and resolution initiatives based on the values of inclusivity, integrity, and diversity, with the aim of restoring the economic function of those who had been injured in election-related violence. We again agreed that it was important for us to share peace stories, reflect on our painful pasts, and develop strategies for fostering peaceful change in our

community. This included talking about the negative effects of electoral violence, conflict in general, and the importance of communal cohesion.

Rukuni (2022) reveals that practical peace initiatives, such as agricultural projects, play a critical role in creating necessary platforms that trigger steps towards building relationships that dismantle the barriers of division in polarised communities. The AT also established, as shown in the SWOT analysis, that rabbits have been used for other reasons in the community (such as for food), but our initiative was going to be a unique intervention strategy with a broader spectrum, including transforming broken relations caused by election-related violence and promoting community cohesion. The team also agreed that we needed to use different operational strategies, such as working in small groups, to prevent circumstances in which the Peace Rabbits would end up inciting participant conflict. Therefore, the 12 members of the AT were divided into 3 groups of 4 who would work together in their Peace Rabbits projects. They would coordinate using WhatsApp groups on how to monitor their rabbits and they would make weekly reports on the progress of their projects and how they were managing to work together.

In general, the AT and I held the same belief that the peace rabbitry project had the potential to advance society by repairing damaged relationships. However, we also recognised that, if poorly managed, the peace rabbitry project could unintentionally fuel conflict and reinforce long-held assumptions and attachments. We had to come to terms with the specifics of how the action research process should be used and come to an understanding as a group regarding what to expect from action research and the conflict transformation theory. This was not an easy procedure, because I was trying to prevent the participants from thinking that I was the group's expert, which would have undermined their opinions and contributions. I was putting myself on a par with the AT, which boosted their confidence and stoked their enthusiasm to walk the path together, which led to a thorough learning experience for all of us. Along with the aforementioned ideas, we created the ground rules that would direct us throughout the research exercise during this first session. During that meeting, the members' assent was obtained, and a deal was reached regarding the procedure for establishing the peace rabbitry, as well as the times of the meetings. The AT decided to gather once every two weeks for peace rabbitry and discourse sessions, due to other obligations.

The AT participants also pledged that they would only make exceptions to this predetermined schedule in the event of unexpected events that were out of their control. Efforts were to be made to follow the predetermined schedule as seen in Table 8.3 below.

Table 9.3: Predetermined Schedule

Date	Purpose	Number of participants
March 2021	Focus groups	38
March 2021	Interviews	30
April 2021	Pilot/Assessment meeting	14
April 2021	Establishment of the Action Team	12
May 2021	Peace Rabbitry training workshop	12
May 2021	Establishment of the Rabbitry project	12
June 2021	Monitoring session	12
July 2021	Dialogue	12
August 2021	Peace talk	30
September 2021	Rabbitry marketing workshop	30
November 2021	Peace talk	30
March 2022	Evaluative meeting / mapping the way forward / thesis compilation	12

#### 9.5.4 Step 4: Peace rabbitry training workshop

The second session was a training workshop for the AT participants on how to keep rabbits and how to breed them. The researcher hired some experts in rabbitry to teach rabbitry in detail, since it is not an easy project. The training included:

- ❖ Types of rabbit farming
- ❖ Types of rabbit breeds
- ❖ How to feed rabbits
- ❖ Rabbit diseases

- ❖ How to breed rabbits
- ❖ How to know if a rabbit is pregnant
- ❖ How to manage litters, and
- ❖ How to make the rabbitry initiative an interaction space for peacebuilding.

During the session, participants had a lot of questions and made quite interesting additions, especially in rabbit feeding. For example, someone suggested:

Sezvo pano pa centre pakugara tsuro pane nzvimbo yakakura isiri kushanda zvirinane makatitsvagirao mbeu ye lucern todyara hedu tichidiridzira kuitira kuti mari dzekutenga huswa ne chikafu zvidzikire zvishoma.

[Since there is a lot of unused space here at the centre, we could ask the researcher to provide a little money so that we buy lucerne seeds and water them as a way to reduce feeding costs over time.] (AT Participant, 2021).

Another participant added:

Ini ndogara kuside neku research uko munguva yekukohwa iya tsangadzi inenge yakazara iyi zvekuti tikaikohwa irinyoro toiomesa toichengeta kuitira patichazo pererwa nechikafu nekuti tadzidza kuti tssuro dzinoda kudya kunyanya huswa hwakaoma.

[I stay close to an open space where I can easily access star grass; we could find time and harvest it, dry it and store it for later use when we run out of feed as we have learnt here that hay is the best rabbit feed.] (AT Participant, 2021)



Photo 9.2, showing some of the AT members after the comprehensive rabbitry training workshop.

The workshop allowed participants to exchange ideas on how to sustain the project and how they could work together effectively to protect the cages and the rabbits; they also designed their own routine to do cage cleaning and feeding. My observation was that they were already prepared to start reconciliation and were becoming gender sensitive, as their routine reflected that there was fusion of political party members in every duty and each duty was gender balanced. This was a very important step towards community-building and a big step towards realisation of the study's main objective.

#### **9.5.5 Step 5: Introduction to peacebuilding workshop**

During this session, all the AT members were present, and it was the most important workshop of the study because it addressed the core aim of the research. The workshop was facilitated by a consultancy agency (Innovative Research Hub) that is prominent and professional, especially in issues surrounding peacebuilding. It is a youth-led and -coordinated organisation that focuses on social science research and consultancy. They gave a comprehensive training on peace architecture, exploring some questions like

- ❖ What are the effects of political violence?
- ❖ What is peace?
- ❖ What is peacebuilding?
- ❖ What is conflict transformation?
- ❖ What are the various methods of conflict resolution?
- ❖ How can Peace Rabbits be used for conflict transformation?
- ❖ How can teamwork bring community change?
- ❖ How can we improve we communication, trust, political tolerance and interdependence?

The participants actively participated in this exercise, as the facilitators used a question-and-answer technique in their presentations where the participants gave answers using their own experiences and also giving practical examples. This helped in creating a bond between the participants themselves, the researcher, and the facilitators, as the training workshop was also coupled with some teambuilding games, including “divide the loot” and “9 dots”. The games were very challenging and opened up many alternative conflict management skills that the AT members generated in teams. These were all lessons building on how important teamwork is compared to pursuing self-interest. Due to the way in which they were doing their activities, the AT was gradually bonding. They were trading stories of their agonising past experiences. The AT acknowledged that prior to joining the peace rabbitry project, members had considered the effects of what they had gone through, but they admitted that they had never had the

opportunity to truly discuss it in a private setting. Thus, it became clear that the AT members saw the Peace Rabbit project as a secure setting for sharing their suffering. During this session, members also urged those who had suffered as victims of the previous election-related violence against taking revenge. There was concern that these victims might wind up turning into perpetrators as well and, in doing so, depart from the Peace Rabbits ethos, which called for a change in interpersonal dynamics. Day by day, the AT was showing great excitement for their Peace Rabbit project, and at that point, they had begun to recognise the value of this intervention technique for resolving post-conflict relationships in the context of peacebuilding.

#### **9.5.6 Step 6: Communicating for peace and community development.**

At the persuasion of Innovation Research Hub, we conducted a dialogue session in which we sought to operationalise what we had been taught during the introduction to peacebuilding workshop. The facilitators advised us that key to achieving success with the Peace Rabbitry project, as well as community-wide peacebuilding, was how we spoke amongst each other and with the community. We had also realised earlier on, when we set ground rules, that the quality of our interpersonal engagements were key to achieving our set goals. However, we had been deliberate about improving this area in terms of how we would communicate in our everyday lives.

Using insights from the Alternative to Violence Programme, the communication session was centred on learning and practising use of words of affirmation in our communication. The session was designed in a way that all participants would have a chance to speak. Our conversation trigger was to get each participant to talk about their role models and why those people were their role models. The instruction was that the role model should be someone that one had interacted with physically, as opposed to talking about media personalities. The exercise was important in three ways, as exemplified by some of the responses that I got from the participants when we were doing reflections. First, each participant had a chance to speak, hence contributing towards building the esteem and self-worth of all participants. A participant noted that:

I chose to speak about my mother because she is one person I know best. It was also easy to speak about her because I at times have difficult but respectful conversations with [her] and I expect our project to be difficult like that. (AT Participant, 2021)

Blitzer and Johnson (2018) noted that positive affirmations are important in building self-esteem, a key ingredient in any dialogue or negotiation. Shonhiwa (2016:122) also argues that positive affirmations in communication contribute to how one can engage in difficult

conversation without feeling overwhelmed or having the urge to insult whoever one is negotiating with.

Secondly, the session created similarity in two ways: all of them had an immediate family member as a role model. In addition, in one way or another the persons that were chosen as role models had honesty as a quality. All participants alluded to the fact that the people they deemed role models had a way of speaking the truth even when it is not fashionable to do so. This quality was very important for our project. The urge was that we should all learn to be truthful and respect people we are talking to. An older participant aptly put the issue of how one's communication can make or ruin a relationship. He said:

Hatirambi kutsiurwa asi ukanditsiura zvisina respect ndopisa musoro.

[I am not against taking advice. But if you disrespect me when talking to me, I will not heed the advice. (AT Participant, 2021)

Third and perhaps most importantly, talking about role models paved way to participants speaking positive affirmations about themselves. The idea was that if all participants could speak well about themselves and the people they care about the most, they had moved very close to being able to engage other people with love and respect. Komuhangi Judith Sheenah *et al.* (2007, p. 63) posit that "in order to care for others, people must first learn to care for themselves. They need to build self-esteem and self-respect. To do this, they need affirmation, positive feedback and a safe environment". It is remarkable how this exercise encouraged all participants to listen to each other intently, speaking with confidence as well as applauding each other, regardless of the known divisions. We had made a big breakthrough; talking positively about ourselves and people we love is infectious, and every person has a soft spot that we should reach for in humane conversations.

### **9.5.7 Step 7: Building trust and cooperation between participants**

Social trust, sometimes called interpersonal or generalised trust, is a basic requirement for the smooth functioning of any society. Beyond formal rules embedded in laws, people rely on informal expectations; they need confidence that others will desist from harming them and that fellow citizens will stay true to their word. We established during the exploratory phase of this study that one of the challenges faced in Epworth was a prevalence of mistrust among residents. The mistrust is a product of years of polarity and negative social experiences. It was imperative that we worked towards building trust, as the high levels of mistrust often lead to feigned cooperation and a total avoidance of social networks. I however had an awareness that all the activities that we were working on contributed to building trust. I was nevertheless

later to find out that there is need to be intentional about trust-building, and that intentionality does not make the process an event.

The process of trust-building requires an awareness of context and addressing immediate security needs, as well as the root causes of strife (Porter 2003: 256). Mistrust was a constant threat to the project from the outset, even to the time when we were implementing the Peace Rabbits project. Some of the participants suspected that their fellows in the action team had sold out or defected to their rival political parties. It was interesting to note that each time members came back from campaign rallies, they came back with the mentality of no longer continuing with the Peace Rabbits project, as highlighted in the following statements from n AT participants, who said:

Patakaenda kuMass Rally yakaitirwa muno nemukuru wenyika tange tave kutorwa sevatengesi nevamwe vedu uye taikurudzirwa kusiyana nezvema projects ane vavengi vedu aya.

[When we attended the mass political rally for by-election by the president, we were being perceived as sellouts by our fellow members and persuaded to pull out of the Peace Rabbits venture.] (AT, 2021)

Another participant also concurred that some fellow political members no longer trusted them when she pointed out:

Waingoona kuti vamwe vedu vemusangano vanga vasingachavimbi nesu sezvavaimboita nenyaya yekuti tainge tave kuita zvetsuro dzerunyararo nevanhu vataisimbatora sevavengi.

[It was easy to detect that people from our political parties no longer trusted us since we were now associating with our political rivals whom we earlier viewed as enemies.] (AT, 2021)

Political polarisation was still very rife in Epworth, as noted from the lack of trust which was now being exhibited by the political members from the mainstream political party structures towards their fellow members who were taking part in the Peace Rabbits venture. They were not very sure about the discussions we carried out during the peace rabbitry. Interestingly, the AT members were bold enough to encourage others not to be distracted by the comments coming from their fellow political members. This indicated how their lives had been improved by the Peace Rabbits' primary goals of promoting political tolerance and peacebuilding. This is stated in the following quote:

Tava kutorwa sevatengesi nevamwe vedu vasiri muchirongwa chetsuro dzerunyararo idzi nenyaya yekuti havasi mukati macho uye havanyatsonzwisisa kuti tinenge tichiita nezvei zvokuti dai vasiri vamwe vatinavo muchirongwa muno vakatondisimbisa Ndanga ndatofunga kubuda muchirongwa chetsuro ichi.

[We are now being viewed as sell outs by our fellow party members and the general public who are not participating in the Peace Rabbits because of their lack of knowledge on how we carry out our peace rabbitry activities. Had it not been for the support I got from other members; I had initially decided to quit the project.] (AT, 2021)

In light of the challenges mentioned above, we went on to organise trust building exercises to promote teamwork, communication and problem solving. Below I present a snapshot of the exercises we did.

Figure 9. 3: Trust Building Exercises

<p>Human Knot</p> <p>The human knot involved getting participants in a circle while interlocking their hands. Then they would have to untangle the interlocked hands (human knot) without letting go of each other.</p>	<p>What was key in this exercise was clear communication and coordination. Both these qualities were key to the success of the project as an economic venture as well as a community peacebuilding project.</p>
<p>Blindfolded trust walks</p> <p>We paired participants, with one person blindfolded and the other guiding them through a predefined obstacle course. The obstacles included chairs, tables and different advice (noises from spectators)</p>	<p>This exercise encouraged trust and effective communication between pairs/teams. Blocking out noises was particularly difficult, considering that some of the noises came from “trusted people”.</p>
<p>Kids’ problem-solving puzzles</p> <p>We bought children’s puzzles and participants were put in small groups to solve the puzzles as challenges.</p>	<p>The puzzles required collaboration to complete the tasks successfully.</p>

The trust-building exercises were meant to enhance communication. Their playful nature allowed participants to be more expressive and attentive to colleagues’ needs and instructions, which, in turn, fostered trust. The purpose of the exercise was also to allow participants to be receptive of different perspectives and to stimulate creative thinking. My observations were that the group dynamics evolved throughout the activities. Initially, AT members were reserved and cautious, but as the activities progressed, they became more comfortable in each other’s presence and became very expressive and open.

## 9.10 The Necessity of Intentionality in Trust-building Strategies

It was very encouraging to note that there was a paradigm shift among the action team members in how they related during the Peace Rabbits project. During the peace rabbitry exercise, it did not take long to see signs of reconciliation and transformed relationships among the AT participants. It was now common to see people from the two political parties moving side by side as they went to fetch hay and water for the rabbits, as noted from the following AT participant's remarks:

Workshop yekuvaka runyararo yakatibatsira zvemazvirokwazvo nekuti ichipera takange tatova nemaonero akasiyana emagakava uye nzira dzisina mhirizhonga dzatinokwanisa kushandisa kuyanana vanhu.

[The peacebuilding workshop was essential to us because it gave us a different view of conflicts and a plethora of conflict resolution strategies that we use even now.] (AT, 2021)

Observations revealed that the action team members were now openly interacting and joking, and a new practice of hugging each other had also become evident. It was important to note that laughter among them was not only becoming a common feature, but one which replaced fear, suspicion and bottled anger which were evident before the implementation of the intervention strategy. Though peacebuilding does not take place within a short period of time, there is evidence in this study that if proper planning is carried out, desired peacebuilding results can be achieved quite early.

In addition, this study established a vital need for proper planning in fostering and promoting relevant and result-yielding peacebuilding initiatives such as the Peace Rabbits project. The research findings here concur with the "peace and power" theory, which stipulates that individuals normally require spaces in life where they are moderately serene and free from rivalry and power imbalances, and where collaboration and peace prevail. Such spaces in life should then create conditions for people to interact freely, joke together and even hug each other, as noted in this study. Earlier, there was a strong belief that homes provided such serene places and served as safe havens where competition was limited. Unfortunately, some homes failed to provide such kinds of safety so desired by many people.

## 9.11 Taking Peace to the Community

The AT was well aware that the desired goal of the project was to get everyone in Epworth living peacefully. We discussed the potential of expanding the Peace Rabbits project and realised that while it was possible, people might join in for the economic benefits or not come at due to "fatigue". Some participants also believed repeating another Peace Rabbits project

showed a lack of creativity and could also be another form of conflict, as people compete for markets. However, a compendium of suggestions on how peace could be taken to the community was shared. What was interesting was that AT members emphasised that local community members must own the whole process, because they have sustainable solutions fit for their context. Mutero (2017) argues that for any peacebuilding process to be sustainable, it must be pro-people, using bottom-up approaches as opposed to the trickle-down theories that donor agencies frequently use.

One of the intervention suggested by AT members was carrying out peacebuilding dialogues. It was revealed that a consensus can be reached when conflicting people agree to sit together and talk about what went wrong in their hitherto good relationship. It is believed that when people participate in dialogue, the chances are very high that there will be some healing process taking place, as highlighted by a participant who said:

Chinhu chakakosha chandinooona seimwe nzira yekugadzirisa makakava ndeyekuva nenhaurirano. Kupa vanhu mukana wokutaurirana zvakaipa zvavakaitirana kunobatsira kutounza kamwe kakuregererana munguva yenhaurirano.

[One important way of solving conflicts which I suggest, is promoting dialogue among the affected people. Giving people some dialogue platforms facilitates some process of healing.] (AT, 2021)

According to the AT, the other way of creating conflict resolution modalities is by promoting communal projects where people with different political opinions work together and share ideas. The call for local-to-local solutions to problems is imperative, especially in communities like Epworth that have been ravaged by electoral tensions. The people therefore applauded the intervention strategy, as it created room for opponents to live and work together towards a common goal.

Another way people saw as the best avenue to resolving conflicts was instilling the spirit of peace in children. The “catch them young” phenomenon was identified as a further means of resolving conflicts, considering that generations have inherited conflicts started by their great-grandparents. As Ngwenya (2014) notes, intergenerational conflict can best be resolved or minimised by equipping young children with conflict resolution mechanisms in homes and schools at a very tender age. This can be achieved by re-designing the school curricula and putting more emphasis on peace clubs in schools and communities.

Another way of resolving conflicts, as reported by the respondents, is through sensitisation of people through mass media, promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence. The media has been associated with transmitting conflict-promotional material and hate speech, especially towards election times. Therefore, it is necessary to encourage a culture of peace by requiring

all media outlets in the nation to spend some time, say an hour or even only fifteen minutes per day, discussing the benefits of toleration and peaceful co-existence. In addition, inviting leaders of communities or groups in conflict with each other into the studios would help to resolve conflicts that have become entrenched their communities. As highlighted by the Epworth community participants, such initiatives are bound to restore and transform broken relationships within communities or nations.

The respondents further suggested non-violent techniques in addressing conflicts, particularly in disputes between the state and its citizens. While people might have contrary views, community members are encouraged to resort to non-violent means of resolution, instead of resolving differences through violent means. This can be through measures such as demonstrations, sit-ins or strikes.

### **9.11.1 Evaluative meeting and mapping the way forward**

This section evaluates the peace rabbitry initiative in Epworth. The AT participants emphasised that through mending earlier damaged connections brought on by election-related violence, peace rabbitry – and the study overall – promoted cooperation across political divides. They applauded the intervention strategy as it was unique, directly addressed critical issues in Epworth, and came as a livelihood betterment project for the beneficiaries.

The participants pointed out that this study was a milestone in healing post-electoral violence-induced wounds. According to observations of the researcher, AT members had fully gained trust in each other and were willing to continue working together towards community development. One said,

Ino ndakuiona semhuri yangu yandinokwanisa kuudza chero zvekumba kwangu. Dai takaramba takabatana zvakadaichero Sheilla achinga aenda ngatirambe tichichinjao mafungiro evanhu panhau dzeshiviro.

[I am now considering the AT members as part of my family and in this space I feel more comfortable to open up even stressful family problems. I hope we will remain united even when Sheila completes her studies to transform people's attitudes towards political tolerance.] (AT, 2021)

It appears the study managed to meet the core objective, and even went further, to enhance the livelihoods of research participants.

## **9.12 Reflections: Why Peace Rabbits were Preferred by the Action Team**

The engagement and support of agricultural innovations to promote empowerment of local people has been increasingly used as a novel strategy to build relationships and partnerships towards addressing conflict challenges with much success (Mindzie 2015; Akande, Kaye, and Rukuni 2021; Rukuni 2022). Scholars agree that farming projects have been utilised to bring people together, provide refuge, and satisfy a fundamental need for food in post-conflict settings, and even in areas of ongoing violence (De Soysa et al. 1999; Akande, Kaye, and Rukuni 2021; Rukuni 2022). On the grounds that they saw peace rabbitry in small numbers as an untapped resource for fostering harmony among political opponents, the action team decided to participate in peace rabbitry as an intervention technique for reshaping post-conflict relationships rather than in other communal projects. The concept of Peace Rabbits had been well-represented in both the FGD and the key informant interviews. The AT members had witnessed similar community development initiatives involving huge numbers of people failing, and escalating conflicts among the participants in the rabbitry. They thus agreed that it was feasible to use rabbitry as a peacebuilding tool to transform post-conflict affairs of Epworth using a small group of people from diverse political backgrounds so that they could unite over a purpose and find a common ground that they could use for dialogues and peace training.

## **9.13 Reflections: Challenges Faced in the Operationalisation of the Peace Rabbitry**

Every peacebuilding initiative in communities is confronted by its own unique challenges. According to Rukuni (2022: 433), “peacebuilding initiatives do not work like magic, considering that participants in post-conflict situations do not change their attitudes over a short period of time”. Therefore, it is important to understand that the intervention process of the peace rabbitry project had its own critical challenges.

Action research programmes seek to make an impact towards addressing the identified problem and improving the conditions of communities through intervention programmes. For instance, Akande, Kaye and Rukuni (2021) clarify how community peacebuilding programmes have been playing a crucial role in Zimbabwean and Nigerian communities through action research programmes promoting sustainable peacebuilding initiatives. They outline how using community participation and local peace ownership strategies has been at the centre stage of creating solutions towards sustainability, policy development, promoting stakeholder

cooperation, resolving community conflicts, and ensuring inclusivity and integration in addressing conflict challenges.

With an understanding of the political and electoral violence experiences that the study sought to address, the conflict transformation lenses guided the peace rabbitry project with an interest in facilitating transformation. Lederach (1997) reflects that transformation in post-conflict societies means that the social conditions that give rise to conflict are addressed. Therefore, the peace rabbitry was something of a “Trojan horse” strategy that sought to create structures that promote the involvement of people in making key peaceful decisions and promoting tolerance within the community of Epworth. Thus, the peace rabbitry was utilised to help foster a change in structural relationships among members of opposition parties in Epworth.

The broader message of the project was spread to the community by the researcher and the AT through hosting peace talks and a rabbitry marketing workshop. These programmes were conducted in partnership with the Innovative Research Hub, which coordinated the programme, and invited members of the community and other different stakeholders. The details of efforts towards ensuring sustainability of the peace rabbitry project are laid out in Table 9.4 below.

Figure 9. 4: Sustainability Programmes

Programme	Key Discussions	Attendance	Impact made
Peace talks and rabbitry marketing workshop	Paradigms of peace; General causes of peacelessness; Peacebuilding strategies; How Peace Rabbits is being used to promote peacebuilding in the community.	30	The AT shared their stories and experiences of the processes with the attendees. The various stakeholders involved, which included some human rights activists, members of different political parties from the community and political leaders, reflected interest in how the programme functions and how they could reproduce it.

It is important to note that though the programme initiative that was aimed at marketing the project to the broader community was successfully achieved, the desired attendance of at least 100+ attendees was not attained. This was mainly due to poor organisation and planning between the AT and the researcher, and lack of financial means to cater for the key resources that would make the programme a success. Partnership with Innovation Research Hub was achieved at a later stage, and it helped with the venue and coordinating the rest of the programme, which they also adapted to promote the sustainability of peacebuilding in Epworth.

The study confirms that open communication, trust, and cooperation are fundamental components for successful peacebuilding, echoing established research in conflict resolution and social cohesion. These pillars promote understanding and empathy across diverse groups, setting the foundation for sustainable peace. This discussion explores how each element individually contributes to peacebuilding, their interdependence, and the challenges that peacebuilders encounter in fostering them in conflict-prone environments.

The participants had open communication characterised by free and honest exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives among individuals and groups. This approach fosters transparency, reduces misunderstandings, and creates a space for dialogue and negotiation. Galtung (1996) emphasizes that open communication significantly reduces the likelihood of conflict escalation, promoting peaceful resolutions through shared understanding. Lederach (1997) further suggests that open dialogue between conflicting parties enables a deeper understanding of underlying issues, which is essential for sustainable peace. By facilitating honest conversations, peacebuilders can break down barriers and create more inclusive, cooperative spaces (Schirch, 2004).

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Peace Rabbits initiative fostered collaboration among politically divided community members, supporting Lederach's (1997) assertion that conflict transformation must go beyond resolving disputes to building sustainable relationships and social structures. Participants from different political backgrounds worked together on a shared economic project, which gradually reduced tensions and enhanced dialogue. This aligns with Lund's (1996) conflict resolution framework, which emphasises that local actors and economic incentives can serve as stabilising factors in fragile communities.

Furthermore, the study found that political tolerance grew organically through economic interdependence, a process not explicitly covered in traditional conflict resolution models but supported by recent studies on social entrepreneurship in post-conflict settings (Richmond,

2012; Ojielo, 2007). The initiative provided a neutral space for interaction, reducing political labelling and polarisation by embedding peacebuilding within an entrepreneurial framework.

These results suggest that integrating economic collaboration into peacebuilding efforts could offer a sustainable, community-driven model for reducing electoral violence in similar settings. The next chapter evaluates the overall impact of the intervention and provides recommendations for policy and practice.

## **9.14 Conclusion**

This chapter emphasised the environment of the research community in which this study was conducted, as well as the research methodology used by the AT for the peace rabbitry project. The chapter also examined how the team conducted all the crucial sessions, and the guiding principles that were utilised in completing the peace rabbitry project. The bond, the forgiving hearts, and the reconciling qualities displayed by the AT throughout the peace rabbitry project are demonstrated in some of the outstanding success stories from this chapter. The analysis and study results are discussed in the following chapter.

# Chapter 10: Evaluation of the Action Research Intervention

## 10.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the preliminary evaluation of the impact of the Peace Rabbits initiative on the beneficiaries and how it transformed post-conflict relationships among the diverse political supporters in Epworth. Peace Rabbits (PRs) were hypothesised in this research as peace-loving animals collectively raised by members of the AT. The main purpose of the PRs was to transform post-election-related conflicts that left wounds and broken relationships that needed healing and reconciliation. The idea of PRs was proposed by research participants from focus groups and the key informants as a responsive instrument that could allow residents to take the lead in achieving their own peace.

Monitoring and evaluation of community peacebuilding is very important to the success of projects. Monitoring and evaluation can help achieve project goals and visions if monitoring and evaluation are considered from the time that projects are conceptualised and designed up to the time when they are implemented. I have always been aware of the technical difficulties that come with designing and implementing a functional monitoring and evaluation system, as noted by (Wisniewski et al. 2016). In addition, (Robertson and Sawadogo-Lewis 2022) share that most NGOs are motivated to adopt monitoring and evaluation only for the purposes of satisfying proposal submission or grant reporting. However, as this project was not funded as such, the value of monitoring and evaluation was intrinsic.

## 10.2 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) have been named together to such an extent that they now appear as if they are one thing. However, these are two distinct but complementary processes (So-Jung Yune 2020). Project monitoring is the review and overseeing of a project to ensure that input deliveries, work schedules, target outputs and other required actions proceed according to plan. Monitoring is an ongoing process that relies on systematic analysis of data related to specific indicators (Njuguna 2016: 2). Similarly, (Bester 2012) posits that monitoring is a continuous process undertaken in the organisational or programme management phase to provide regular feedback and can offer early indications of progress and success and can be used to identify the potential for improvement.

On the other hand, “[e]valuation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy including its design, implementation and results” (Huicho et al. 2010). Chernykh (2023: 8) states that “[e]valuation is the collection of, analysis and interpretation of information about any aspect of a programme of education or training as part of a recognized process of judging its effectiveness, its efficiency and any other outcomes it may have”. Project evaluation can be done either at baseline, during the course of, or after project implementation (Uwamungu 2014).

The baseline evaluation reports on the status before an intervention. It is also at the stage at which objectives, goals, and key result areas of a project are discussed. The process evaluation, just as is the case with endline evaluation, is important for identifying what is working and why, and also for highlighting blind spots. This chapter will mainly focus on the summative evaluation. However, for that to make sense and so as not to be drawn into the debate on choosing the most suitable evaluation framework, I will briefly describe how the project team understood M&E. To ensure that the realities of the community counted, we used participatory monitoring and evaluation design (Vohland et al. 2021; Apgar and Allen 2021).

### **10.3 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation**

With the help of an external moderator, I engaged the Action Team to participate in evaluating the process and results and impacts of the Peace Rabbits interventions. Oginga, Odongo, and Nguku (2023: 438) posit that “Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) involve the consideration of primary stakeholders as active participants in the initiation, design and planning, and implementation of programs.” Participation of communities in projects that concern them is very important, as has been alluded to before. The definition of participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) given here parallels the tenets of both participatory action research and conflict transformation. All these processes take a bottom-up approach, emphasising the participation of communities at all stages. In fact, participatory monitoring and evaluation is embedded in participatory action research, which is also a process of reflexive and reflective action (Kemmis and Wilkinson 2002). Participatory monitoring and evaluation covers the limitations of other M&E frameworks that seem to focus on the interests of implementers and funders (Vernooy, Qui, and Jianchu 2003: 22). It caters for the interests of communities.

However, there is a need to take cognisance of the difficulties of M&E. Robertson and Sawadogo-Lewis (2022) contend that monitoring and evaluation can be perceived as daunting and very technical, deterring even professionals within non-governmental organisations from

engaging fully in the process. Ordinarily, a project M&E plan will detail the log frame, the primary data collection source documents, and the data base for consolidating all the data that has been collected, as well as the roles of the project team in the M&E system of the project. Clearly this is a very technical endeavour. But don't people assess their everyday actions and those of people around them and base their decisions or course of action on what they deduce? Perhaps M&E is difficult for financial reporting purposes, a requirement that this project did not have. PME has advantages which, in my view, outweigh its demerits, and most importantly it appeared to be an accessible way to measure progress that we could use without deep technical knowledge.

Table 10.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of PME

Advantages of PME	Disadvantages of PME
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowers beneficiaries to analyse and act on their own situation (as “active participants” rather than “passive recipients”)</li> <li>• Builds local capacity to manage, own, and sustain the project. People are likely to accept and internalise findings and recommendations that they provide.</li> <li>• Builds collaboration and consensus at different levels – between beneficiaries, local staff and partners, and senior management.</li> <li>• Reinforces beneficiary accountability, preventing one perspective from dominating the M&amp;E process.</li> <li>• Saves money and time in data collection compared with the cost of using project staff or hiring outside support.</li> <li>• Provides timely and relevant information directly from the field for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires more time and cost to train and manage local staff and community members.</li> <li>• Requires skilled facilitators to ensure that everyone understands the process and is equally involved. Can jeopardise the quality of collected data due to local politics.</li> <li>• Data analysis and decision-making can be dominated by the more powerful voices in the community (related to gender, ethnic, or religious factors).</li> <li>• Budgeting for M&amp;E demands the genuine commitment of local people and the support of donors, since the project may not use the traditional indicators or formats for reporting findings. (Chaplowe 2008: 17)</li> </ul>

management decision-making to execute corrective actions.	
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Source: Chaplowe (2008: 17)

Realising that the language of M& E is technical I tried to simplify it in ways that could accommodate all participants, regardless of their level of education. But most importantly for functionality, my approach aimed to make the M&E procedures accessible and understandable so that all the participants were empowered to actively participate and provide valuable insights in the project. I used some Shona idioms to simplify what we were going to do for the M&E. First and most importantly, we spoke about the meaning of the following two idioms: “*Mviro mviro dzemhanza mapfeka*” and “*gavi rinobva kumasvuuro*”. Literally *mviro mviro dzemhanza mapfeka* suggests that balding is not an inevitability. We know that one is going to lose their hair just from the shape of the hairline. In other words, the shape of the hairline is **indicative** of balding that is going to come.

In M&E, indicators provide a sign or a signal that something exists or is true. It provides information to monitor performance, measure achievement and determine accountability. *Gavi rinobva kumasvuuro* means “the manner in which the bark is stripped determines its form” and by extension influences its usability. This implied that we should design a monitoring and evaluation system at the beginning of the project to ensure quality, cost, and delivery goals are met (Saputro and Soetomo 2019). In the context of the project, we agreed that for us to be successful we needed to agree on what we were doing and how we would measure this.

## 10.4 Theory of Change

I have in the previous chapters emphasised why the project was important in the context of Epworth. Our theory of change was aware of the limitations of our contributions but still ambitious enough to contribute to solving the huge problem in the community in our small ways. Dhillon and Vaca (2018: 87) propose that “[a] theory of change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context”. We hoped that the culinary project would increase dialogue (at the very least) among the Action Team, but most importantly that the whole community would be inspired by the cooperation.

We worked on an assumption that healthy financial conditions and cooperation between residents can contribute to reducing tension and conflict, leading to peace. Therefore, we provided community members with rabbits and other resources for a culinary project that would provide a sustainable income. For all of us to understand our theory of change and

what participatory monitoring and evaluation entailed, I explained it as agreeing on the journey that we wanted to embark on and working backwards to plan on how we were going to get there. In the language of monitoring, this meant we had to agree on what would be the key result areas and the outcomes. Connell and Kubisch (1998) posit that the first step towards developing a theory of change is determining the intended outcomes, as presented below. These outcomes are important to list here because the study made use of outcome evaluation, which is explored in this section. Outcome evaluation measures the effectiveness of the programme for changing the targeted attitudes, knowledge, values, skills and behaviours of participants and the extent to which an intervention strategy achieves its outcome-oriented objectives. It answers the question: what benefits/changes occurred to people due to the intervention strategy and changes in the short-term?

Table 10.2: Intended Outcomes

Key Result Area 1	
Key Tasks: Establish the core participants of the Peace Rabbits Action Team:	Project is successful when
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formation of group committed to both entrepreneurship and rabbit husbandry.</li> <li>• Co-design the course of the proposed project.</li> <li>• Strengthening of social bonds and collaboration among group.</li> <li>• Development of leadership skills and organisational capacity within the group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the established Action Team is working together.</li> <li>• the project's implementation indicates active participation and ownership by the group members.</li> <li>• there is internal capacity to manage the project.</li> </ul>
Key Result Area 2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key Tasks: Train on dialogue for social cohesion:</li> </ul>	Project is successful when
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of capacity to dialogue for conflict management, resolution, and transformation.</li> <li>• Improvement in inter-group communication and collaboration among community members.</li> <li>• Strengthening of social networks and trust within the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participants have skills and knowledge to dialogue constructively.</li> <li>• there is improvement in communication and collaboration between different groups within the community.</li> <li>• community networks work together.</li> </ul>
Key Result Area 3	
Key Tasks: Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding:	Project is successful when
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the number of conflicts and tensions reported within the community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the community can work and live together with less tension.</li> </ul>

## 10.5 The Outcome of the Peace Rabbits Initiative

This section explores the outcomes of the Peace Rabbits initiative in Epworth.

### 10.5.1 Space for dialogue

My consultations with the AT demonstrated that the PR initiative impacted them positively, as it created forums for discussions and dialoguing on issues that were never previously discussed. The research participants were impressed with how the project brought people of different political affiliations to the discussion table to reflect on the election-related violence and how to promote positive peace in the community. Their responses revealed that the Peace Rabbits project had encouraged them to meet with other citizens in their community for a noble reason: peacebuilding and community development. They said,

Chirongwa ichi chakaisvonaka nekuti chatibaanidza mapoka aisa sanganakana papi zvapo kuti titaure nyaya dzebudiriro uye dzekudzivirira mhirizhonga tichiumbana hukama tisingatarise zvematongerwo enyika.

[The project was very significant in our lives as it created a platform for discussion on peacebuilding and development issues despite our different political backgrounds.] (AT, 2021)

The Peace Rabbits built a platform so that people could discuss peace in an inviting setting without worrying about being attacked. It was also disclosed that the Peace Rabbits project offered a forum for talking about peace-related problems. Several participants expressed their appreciation for it by saying that Peace Rabbits functioned as a gathering and socialising area and educated them about the potential for peaceful coexistence. This “peace bunny” approach united people socially as well as politically, bringing opposing parties together.

This was a crucial factor, since it allowed them to harmonise and converge their differences, which was extremely uncommon prior to the Peace Rabbits project. It is typically argued that agreeing to meet and talk is the first step towards resolving disagreements. The Peace Rabbits accomplished this by bringing together political rivals. This was crucial in fostering peace and reconciliation within the Epworth community. Therefore, the Peace Rabbits provided the locals with a forum for genuine discussion about rapprochement, peace, and community togetherness.

### 10.5.2 Community cohesion agent

The Peace Rabbits promoted unity and trust among members of the community. Interviews with the Action Team revealed that the strategy used by the researcher to incorporate people from different political parties in a single project provided room for people to share a vision

and become like-minded on issues surrounding conflict transformation and peacebuilding, community development, and how to promote positive peace through teamwork despite political differences. The AT said,

Ichi chirongwa chatibatanidza uye chaita kuti tivenemifungo yakafanana mukuunza budiro uye kudzivirira mhirizhonga kumberi uku.

[This initiative has unified us and has brought us together on issues of community development and securing a non-violent future.] (AT, 2021)

This proved that the intervention strategy was crucial, as it transformed broken relations. The participants also said that the intervention strategy came at a critical period when it was really needed as the community was so polarised.

### **10.5.3 Sustainable livelihood recovery plan and employment**

The Epworth community appreciated that the Peace Rabbits intervention strategy not only brought people to the dialoguing table and unified them, but also improved household food and economic security. The research participants said:

Tsuro takatoona kuti dzinemari pakabara yekutanga ichiita vana 10 kureva kuti dzese dzakabara tatofa kare nemari tenge takukwanisa kuchengetao mhuri kudzimba.

[We realised that rabbitry is a high profit-making project that can improve our livelihoods and promote economic stability.] (AT 2021)

The PR intervention strategy created employment for most of the AT members who were totally unemployed and for some whose jobs were affected by the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. The participants reflected that they could see a peace rabbitry project escalating and being an employment avenue for most community members as the project expands within a short period of time. One of the members said,

Handichashandiswa futi nevanhu, ndakutorima zvangu tsuro ndaona tasvika kure,. Hakuna basa rinodarika ramakatigadzirira Mrs Sheilla.

[I won't seek employment elsewhere, I will focus on this project, which is the best one can ever be part of.] (AT, 2021)

The opinions articulated by the AT members indicate that the Peace Rabbits were a necessary precursor to sustainable livelihoods and community cohesion, with teamwork assisting towards food and economic security.

#### **10.5.4 Platform for truth-telling, forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation**

As presented earlier, Epworth was very tense, as people held grudges and were unwilling to settle their past toxic relations. The Peace Rabbits created space for people with no common meeting ground to tell each other about their post-election violent experiences and some disturbing atrocities during the 2018 elections. Most of the research participants agreed during the interviews that the sessions they had had on sharing stories and experiences, with some telling the truth about what they did, were crucial steps in bonding, as the truth brings forgiveness. Sharing brings some form of healing, and the overall goal was reconciliation, as the members of the AT were all able to settle their personal differences through the PR initiative. While Peace Rabbits achieved its goal of altering post-conflict relationships, it also promoted the idea of interaction and teamwork among those who had previously viewed one another as enemies, ultimately assisting in the empowerment of the local community.

#### **10.5.5 Peacebuilding and conflict transformation hub**

The interviews with participants demonstrated that they had comprehensively grasped the concepts of conflict prevention, conflict analysis, conflict resolution methods and conflict transformation. As presented earlier, the researcher had the intention of convincing participants that conflict is inevitable in human nature, but peace can be realised only if the conflict is managed well using non-violent methods. The participants noted:

Takadzidza kuburikidza nehurongwa huno kuti pane nzira zhinji kwazvo dzekurapa gakava, mhirizhonga haibatsire.

[We learnt through this platform many non-violent conflict resolution methods.]  
(AT, 2021)

The participants really appreciated the peacebuilding training, which they said had a very big impact on their attitudes and behaviour. The workshops created an excellent team of peace practitioners: one of the participants said

*Izvezvi kumba chaiko ndakuswedzana nemunhu wandaisataura naye kuburikidza nema trainings atakaitiswa kuno.*

[At home I now am in good books with a person who I had a grudge with, after the peacebuilding workshop.] (AT, 2021)

The above sentiments prove that the participants are already practising aspects of peacebuilding in their communities, which shows a positive impact of the intervention strategy.

### **10.5.6 Improved political tolerance**

A feature of the Peace Rabbits initiative admired by the participants is improved political tolerance. The researcher deliberately selected members from the main opposition parties, who never saw eye to eye during elections, to carry out a project together. Through training and discussions, all members learnt that everyone has freedom of political opinion; hence it is not political affiliation that determines one's culture of peace. As a result, after the intervention, trust, togetherness and tolerance began to manifest in Epworth and to date people are improving day by day in terms of political tolerance.

One of the participants said during the last interview that:

Nyaya yeshiviro yanga yanetsa muno munharaunda asi kutotangira pane varipano takutonzwisa kuti munhu pamutemio anotenderwa kutsgigira bato raanoda akasununguka uye haafanire kumanidzidzwa kuti atevere rimwe.

[We grasped the concepts of political tolerance and that all should enjoy freedom of political opinion.] (AT, 2021).

The above statement shows that the intervention strategy managed to address the critical issues surrounding political broadmindedness, and if done at large scale may promote peaceful relations in the whole Epworth community, Harare, and Zimbabwe at large.

### **10.5.7 Professional rabbit production skills**

The intervention strategy provided baseline knowledge on rabbitry to the point that all AT members are now professional rabbit breeders. When asked how they rate themselves in terms of experience in rabbitry, one of the participants said:

Ini hapana achandiudza kana chiro chimwe pamusoro petsuro idzi, kubva pakubarwa, kudzipa chikafu nemvura, zvirwere zwayo, mishong yacho, kudzisanganisa, uye kudzigadzira nzimbo yadzinonatso tambanuka.

[I am now a rabbitry expert: I know how to raise rabbits from winners, how to feed them, diseases and how to treat them, mating, as well as how to maintain good hygiene standards in rabbit cages.] (AT, 2021)

A unanimous round of applause was given by the participants to the professional trainer Mr Chinyonga and his assistant Mr T William, who provided a thorough training. The initiative also gave an opportunity to those who already had knowledge about rabbitry in the AT to also conduct training with community members as a way of promoting self-sustenance, and in the last interviews one of the AT members who trained other colleagues commented that:

Ini ruzivo rwetsuro ndagara ndinaro hangu asi nekuwedzerwa kwarakaitwa nanamazvikokota ava uye nemikana yandaipihwa kuti ndidzidziseo vamwe vangu ndavanyanzvi zvisina mubvunzo.

[I now have adequate rabbit knowledge through training from professionals and the opportunity I have been given through this initiative is to boost my skills by coaching others about rabbitry.] (AT, 2021)

The Peace Rabbits initiative not only helped the community gain better rabbitry skills, but also achieved its ultimate goal of improving post-conflict relations and fostering unity among ZANU-PF and CCC followers. The success of this peacebuilding programme was due to its ability to enhance levels of trust and cooperation across the political divide by collaborating with both the victims and the perpetrators of previous election-related violent incidents.

This section covered the Peace Rabbits' initial positive effects on the Epworth community, whereas the next section covers difficulties faced during the peace rabbitry programme.

## **10.6 Challenges Faced in the Peace Rabbits Initiative**

The difficulties encountered during the Peace Rabbits initiative are discussed in this section, along with various local and national political actions that interfered with the participants' planned Peace Rabbits meetings. Despite the beneficial results the Peace Rabbits had in altering post-conflict relationships among political party followers in Epworth, participants also faced difficulties, which are covered here. These difficulties include the COVID-19 lockdown limitations, lack of patience, the lack of water, the conflicts, the thefts, the vandalism, and the unstable political situation. In addition to the difficulties already mentioned, the Peace Rabbits project was hampered by political and national programmes that clashed with the team's efforts.

### **10.6.1 COVID-19 lockdown restrictions**

The Zimbabwean COVID-19 lockdown measures had a devastating impact on the peace rabbitry initiative. The AT members reported that they had challenges bringing hay and food pellets to Epworth due to movement restrictions. Hay had to be collected 15 km away from Epworth and the pellets from the CBD, 12 km away. A person had to carry a support letter from relevant offices asserting that they were travelling for essential services and if not, they had to pay a fine for breaking the set measures. AT members had to smuggle in rabbit feed: one member said

Chikafu chetsuro taitochibvisa musaga toisa muma monaki, takasvika pamapurisa tobuditsa makadhi emusangano ndoti ndikunoona councilor kana minister ndakapfeka

hangu kana scarf, hapana aizonyanya kundisecha secha asi feya feya haa zvanga zvakaoma hazvo mukorona umu.

[For us to transport pellets from the CBD we used ruses such that when we got to a roadblock, I would just produce a party ID and claim that I was travelling to meet with the councillor or minister, and I would do that in my regalia so that I would not go through so many searches or questioning.] (AT, 2021)

The above statement shows that although the Peace Rabbits initiative met its set objectives, it was coupled with hurdles that demanded the action team fashion schemes on how to sustain the project.

### **10.6.2 Financial constraints**

Participants in the Peace Rabbit programme saw the effects of the economic collapse that also hit Zimbabwe's common citizens. As the action team made contributions towards buying detergents and hay, they were also affected by the countrywide economic hardships that were caused by unrealistic monetary policies, hyperinflation during the lockdown, loss of jobs and poor operational services by most banks during the lockdown. Due to the fact that the study depended on the money I received from a university research grant, it was challenging to cover all the expenses, including buying pellets, cages, drinkers and feeders, water containers, and transportation costs. Lack of money resulted in us failing to buy some medication for routine healthcare of rabbits and delayed cage extension. The AT members said that

Pane pamwe panomboitwa ruzha kunze uku vanhu vachiita zvemusangano munzira umu unotoona kuti tsuro yavane stress, dzimwe nguva panosimudzwa dust nechamupupuri chiriko ichi manheru unodzinzwa dzakuhotsira, dzinenge dzichida stress pack nemimwe mishonga asi semhuka yakangwarira zvinozongopera hazvo zvega asi kurikunzi mari iripo panenge pachingodiwa ma stress pack nemimwe mishonga yekuchengetedza tsuro dzikure zvakanaka.

[Sometimes when political rallies are conducted in the area the rabbits get stressed with the noise outside and also due to dust, rabbits sneeze at night, there is not even a stress pack to ensure good rabbit growth, it's just that the animals quickly adjust that they survive the sometimes-harsh environment without the proper medications.] (AT, 2021)

Therefore, because of financial constraints, the intervention strategy was derailed to some extent.

### **10.6.3 Marketing challenges**

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown measures, it was difficult to boost sales and improve the market base, since all the marketing was done digitally through various social media platforms

only. Since rabbitry came in as a new product, it was difficult to get a stable market, as people hesitated to try rabbits as all were used to broilers. The research action team pointed out that:

Vanhu vemuno vajaira kutenga huku ndonyama yavanototenga, zvakatinetsa kuti titange kuvachinja mifungo asi mbijana mbijana vanhu vakatanga kutenga nyama yedu kusvika izvezvi tsuro dzedu dzatova shoma panen dzikudiwa nevanhu.

[Local residents are so used to chicken as meat, so it was not easy convincing them that rabbit meat is better in terms of health and taste compared to other meats, but with time people began to have interest in rabbits such that now demand is higher than our supply capacity.] (AT, 2021).

Market challenges delayed the project's quick progression, as growth depended on profits.

## 10.7 Achieving Study Objectives

According to the research participants, the Peace Rabbits initiative, despite some hurdles explored in the above section, managed to achieve its set objectives, which targeted conflict transformation and restoration of broken relationships. The unanimous sentiments of the AT denoted that Peace Rabbits brought lasting peace and transformed their understanding of conflict management; one of the members held that:

Tsuro dzerunyararo dzakaunza dzidziso huru pamusoro penzira dzisina mhirizhonga dzekugadzirira panenge pasina kunzwisana. Dzakatibatanidza isu vemapato akasiyana takakwanisa kuti tiite mushandira pamwe mukuvandudza raramo yedu uye kudzidzisana kudzivirira mhirizhonga ingakonzereswe nekuda kwezvematongerwo enyika.

[Peace Rabbits brought lessons on conflict transformation and non-violent conflict resolution. It united people from different political affiliations to work together towards enabling a better livelihood and teaching conflict prevention measures in preparation for the next election.] (AT, 2021).

Thus, despite the challenges encountered in implementing the intervention strategy, it met its main objectives due to the tireless work of the action team.

## 10.8 Strategy and Soft Power Issues

The intended outcomes shared above were very important in shaping the vision of the project. However, community peacebuilding is not about the end results only. Equally important is the process, the power play and the relational dynamics that lead to the outcomes. It is a process based on "...soft power, involving the ability to achieve desired results based on voluntary participation, sympathy and attractiveness" (Chernykh 2023: 1). Simply put, conflict transformation fails or succeeds based on how people participate and articulate power in

community peacebuilding. As a result, this evaluation focuses first on “soft power” issues that were relevant to achieving the outcomes.

## **10.9 Collaborative Action Team**

One of the most important outcomes of this project was establishing a well-functioning Action Team. Our assessment of the success of the Action Team is of collaboration on a community conflict transformation project that required a lot of regular contact, communication, co-decision making and trust. The mechanics of the AT’s collaborative efforts are illustrated in the diagram below.

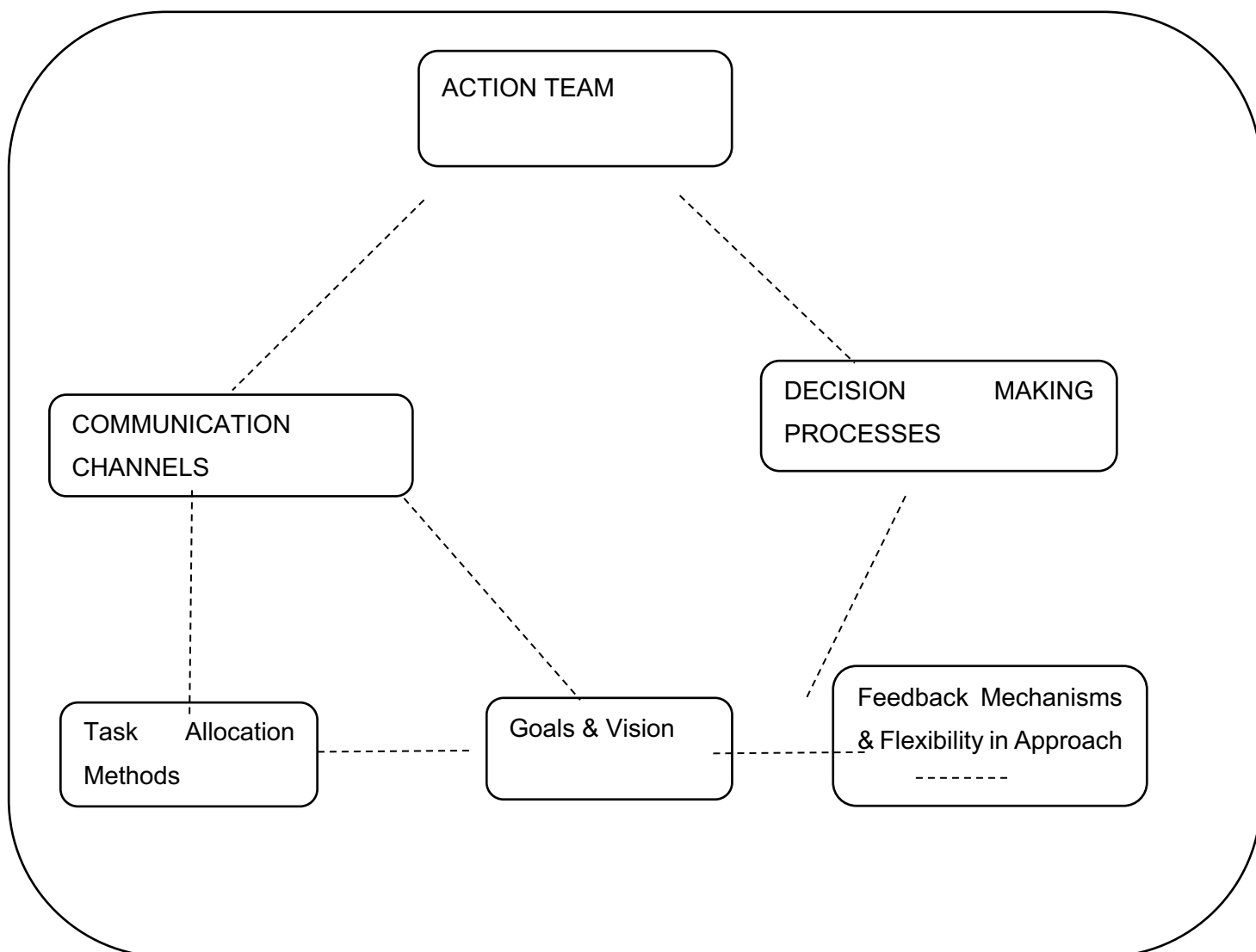


Figure 10.1: Collaborative Team Efforts

### 10.9.1 Communication channels

There was consensus that creating and urging the participants to communicate effectively using different communication platforms is important in creating and sustaining core groups of community change makers. The AT used physical and online meetings to stay up to date with group plans and activities. They created a WhatsApp group in which everyone was an administrator and could send messages related to our project. However, the Action Team agreed on being conscious of the time of the day when messaging as most people preferred not to receive messages that came during family time.

While the peace rabbitry initiative created an experiential platform for the community to dialogue regularly, the WhatsApp group was a ubiquitous channel for communication. Interpersonal bonds were created between members. One AT member shared that:

Group reWhatsApp rakatibatsira kunyanya pakuti taigona kuzotaura beyond the time we met for the project. Tinoshandisa group kushare maideas, resources nemaupdates zvinova zvinobatsira kuumba kuukama pamwe chete neefficiency paproject. WhatsApp inokuswedeedzai padhuze nepadhuze. Something like a WhatsApp status chaiyo inoita kuti mutaure zvakawanda.

[The WhatsApp group helped us a lot in that we could talk beyond the time we met for the project. We use the group to share ideas, resources and updates in real time which helps to bond and for efficiency on project activities. Having each other on WhatsApp facilitated communicating beyond the project business.] (AT, 2021)

The utility of WhatsApp groups has also been observed by Guigon and Marques (2023: 1): “WhatsApp groups can be used as an intervention tool to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group and promote social participation, both in virtual and real spaces”. The WhatsApp group was made up of members with conflicting political ideologies and its sustenance was based on establishing guidelines for engagement. The group has clear guidelines and expectations for communication in the group to prevent misunderstandings and ensure that everyone is on the same page. Members urged that for WhatsApp groups to work, it is important to respect each other’s time and boundaries, and to avoid burdening the group with excessive messages or notifications.

### **10.9.2 Decision-making processes**

The Action Team was also kept together by using a combination of decision-making approaches, including consensus-building, consultation, and democratic processes. The consensus building approach was evident in how, for example the AT scheduled the trainings on rabbit husbandry. They initially had different preferences on when the trainings and meetings could be scheduled. However, after some argument which lead nowhere, they turned to talking about their schedules. Speaking on how they found each other, an AT member shared that:

Takazongoita plan yekuti tosangana mazuva api after tatombokikiritsana. From there zvichienda kumberi tanga takunyanyakushandisa kutaurirana first before munhu angoti let’s do thing my way.

[We eventually came up with a plan that worked for everyone after considering everyone’s schedules and preferences. From there onwards we were resorting to dialoguing as opposed to having someone imposing their plan on the group.] (AT, 2021)

Equally important is how power was used and shared in these group decision making processes, as confirmed in an exchange that they had with one of the participants:

Sezvandambotaura paya, mutemo wedu ndewekuti munhu wese anofanira kuteeregwa nekupiwa mukana wekautaura pfungwa dzake. Zvatinoita paWhatsApp group ndozvationoita patinoita mameeting nepatinoita project. Kuteererana kunoita

kuti tiremekedzane nekuvimbana chaiko nekuti unenge uchiona kuti pano ndiri kutogwa semunhu.

[Like I have said before, one of rules was that we should actively listen to each other, and everyone should be given an opportunity to share their views. This rule applies to our WhatsApp group, physical meetings, and when doing project activities. Listening to each other makes us respect and trust one another because it makes you realise that your humanity is being recognised.] (AT, 2021)

From what was shared by the AT members, I can confirm that they used the consensus-building approach to ensure that all team members voices were heard for their merit. Consensus building is defined by Gupta (2017) as a process of ensuring that a group solves problems through critically engaging in conversations that will lead to acceptable level consensus.

### **10.10 Reflections: Action Team's Operational Strategy**

The AT deliberately allocated tasks to all participants in order to ensure that every member felt a sense of ownership and also of belonging to the project. Their task allocation strategies included rotation on taking up duties, delegation, and allocation of duties based on expertise and interest. Members shared that task allocation ensured that work was distributed efficiently and in alignment with the shared goals. Also key to the success of the AT was establishing an open communication channel that also allowed respectful feedback among the members and being able to adapt and be flexible in response to the context.

The AT created an environment that fosters constructive communication, and a climate conducive to change and fostering open dialogue both within the core group and the community (Khadpe, Kulkarni, and Kaufman 2022). The Peace Rabbits created an experiential platform that fostered inclusivity, where individuals from diverse political backgrounds came together to forge meaningful connections that nurtured both commercial and social gains. The composition of AT facilitated intergenerational and non-gendered interactions, bringing people together regardless of perceived divides.

I have presented above the voices of the participants on the project. However, I also have my own assessment of the successes and challenges that were encountered throughout the project. My evaluation examines soft power issues, including key aspects such as processes, systems, relationships, power dynamics, and participation rates.

Table 10.3: Summative Reflections

Aspect	Evaluation
Processes	<p>The project was successful at creating a platform for dialogue and implementing structured dialogue sessions that have the potential to foster understanding and collaboration among community members. Working with communities on projects that have a bearing on their livelihoods and everyday lives can draw them to engage actively, expressing their viewpoints while also listening attentively to others. However, there might be occasional challenges in maintaining focus and unity of purpose if their “money-making project” dies. In my view, community peacebuilding in Zimbabwe is contingent on providing basics: in the same way politicians use trinkets to hoodwink citizens, we can use empowerment to foster peace and tolerance.</p>
Systems	<p>The importance of establishing clear communication channels and decision-making processes can never be overemphasised. This project owes part of its success to engaging all participants clearly and as subjects, not as objects. This was different from what the government does: it does not communicate effectively.</p>
Relationships	<p>The project facilitated meaningful interactions and collaborations between previously polarised factions, fostering trust and solidarity. However, there were missed opportunities to involve more and marginalised voices, particularly those from vulnerable populations, highlighting the importance of inclusive outreach strategies in future endeavours. For instance, Zimbabwe has outlawed non-heterosexual relations, and non-binary gender identities. However, these are issues that should be dealt with to build a strong ethic of relational well-being for all.</p>
Power	<p>The project leveraged on understanding the local context and working with local people for grassroots mobilisation and this proved instrumental in gaining acceptance, support, and participation from key community influencers. Working with locals amplified the project message effectively. However, issues of power imbalances and perceived threats of the project’s intention to upset existing power structures posed challenges to collaborative decision-making processes, necessitating more deliberate efforts to promote inclusivity and respect for all voices.</p>

Aspect	Evaluation
Participation	The project had good participation from community members across different age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Perhaps this is reflective of a broad-based commitment to peacebuilding efforts. Participants, especially the AT, were actively engaged in both ideating and implementing activities. Nevertheless, there were challenges in sustaining long-term engagement beyond the project's duration, indicating a need for ongoing capacity-building and resource mobilisation to ensure the continuation of peacebuilding initiatives beyond the project lifecycle.

## 10.11 Summary

This chapter assesses the process and results of the Peace Rabbits project implemented in Epworth. There was evidence in this chapter that the peacebuilding process needs adequate time, and that participants do not suddenly change their attitudes, even though the study successfully encouraged collaboration across the political divide in terms of mending the previously tainted relationships. The chapter also discusses the difficulties that the initial evaluation exercise ran into.

The baseline to which we could have compared this evaluation exercise was carried out soon after relaxation of COVID-19 lockdown restriction measures by the Zimbabwean government, from the end of November into December 2021. The first attempt to conduct the evaluation failed as there was no secure venue to conduct the meetings because most places were still operating under strict social distancing measures. This delayed the exercise, and some people with good venues were suspicious of our activity and would not let us use their spaces. As a result, I do not make a solid comparison of the pre- and post-intervention situations. Instead, I assess, in most parts, the process. Due to time constraints, this evaluation exercise had another drawback: it could only be completed after one implementation cycle. Another long-term review would have been beneficial, particularly after the elections, to determine whether the action team's levels of political tolerance had changed.

The Peace Rabbits action cycle was guided by the objectives set out in the study. As a result, the cycle ended with the carrying out of an evaluation exercise. While this cycle ended, the AT made a commitment that they were going to continue with the peace rabbitry initiative. The participants realised that there was a necessity to continue with another, similar, home-grown and context-specific inquiry in the second cycle with trust in linking peacebuilding efforts with

psychosocial and coping skills in post-conflict situations. This perception was largely informed by the nature of conflict under discussion in this study and its effect in Epworth.

Considering the violent nature of conflicts in Epworth, which in some circumstances led to the deaths and disappearances of community members, the issue of psychosocial and coping skills became very topical. The second cycle wanted to address the cyclic nature of conflict in the area, as it tends to be more pronounced after every five-year interval, when elections are held in Zimbabwe. While that some residents formed the action research team, those who did not take part also indicated their desire to participate in the second cycle and take an equally active role in post-election transformation mechanisms since the post-conflict situation affected them. The Peace Rabbits participants gave me the assurance that they were going to continue with the project even after the completion of the research.

# Chapter 11: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

## 11.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the entire research project, the methods used, and the results obtained based on the thesis' aims and objectives. The study was conducted with the guidance of the following aim and objectives:

The overall aim of this research was to transform post-conflict relationships via Peace Rabbits in Epworth, Zimbabwe with the specific objectives of this research being:

1. To determine the causes, extent and the consequences of post-election violence in Epworth.
2. To implement a community peacebuilding intervention for reducing pre- and post-electoral violence in Epworth.
3. To evaluate community peacebuilding interventions suggested by the Epworth community.

These objectives played an important role in shaping the field research and the compilation of this thesis. This chapter summarises the findings and draws key conclusions. The research findings are used at the end of the chapter to make broad conclusions that serve as the foundation for recommendations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future studies involving Peace Rabbits initiatives.

## 11.2 Reflecting on Study Findings

The study was conducted in Epworth with the intention to improve post-conflict relationships using a culinary project as a tool to bring people together. I framed the research using the conflict transformation theory propounded by Galtung to think through how the community could create constructive and peaceful solutions to violent conflicts or threats. The theoretical underpinnings served as the guiding principles for the study and the AT during the Peace Rabbits venture. Its theory's transformational approach recognises that conflict is a normal and continuous dynamic process in human relationships and can potentially bring positive change. The theory enabled individuals to understand how to reduce the levels and dismantle the structures of conflict and create new avenues of cooperation and compatibility throughout

the entire Peace Rabbits initiative. The underlying assumption of the theoretical framework guided the study and the AT. I also looked into the idea of “peace rabbits”, including its definition, application, efficacy, and difficulties, with an emphasis on the Zimbabwean setting.

### **11.2.1 Objective One: Causes, extent and consequences of post-election violence in Epworth**

The first objective of the study was addressed using triangulation techniques. I utilised literature review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions to gather relevant data to understand the causes, extent and consequences of post-election violence in Epworth. The reviewed literature was outlined in Chapter 2 of the thesis, reflecting on previous studies which established various factors such as polarisation, patronage politics, and socioeconomic challenges to be key among the causes of violence in Epworth. The findings from interviews and FGDs confirmed these details and further outlined how traumatic experiences, destruction of property, loss of life, and loss of limbs and other health challenges formed part of the consequences experienced in post-election violence in Epworth. The details of the study findings addressing Objective One were addressed and presented in Chapter 7. The study sought to determine the main causes of conflict in the Epworth community among political party supporters from across the political divide.

### **11.2.2 Objective Two: Ways of improving political tolerance in Epworth**

Objective Two sought to explore and identify ways to improve Epworth’s political tolerance. Hence, the literature review played an important role in understanding the different ways that have been used to address political tolerance in various contexts. The field research paved the way for understanding Epworth’s context and reflecting on the measures that could be put in place to map relevant ways of improving political tolerance. The use, effectiveness, and limitations of Peace Rabbits were covered in Chapters 6, 8, 9 and 10, outlining the action research process that was undertaken to facilitate political tolerance in Epworth. Thanks to the peace rabbitry program, I had the opportunity to watch and take part in a project that examined the use and efficacy of, and obstacles to employing, Peace Rabbits to change post-conflict relationships. The results showed that using Peace Rabbits to change post-conflict connections amongst political party followers from various organisations is both feasible and effective.

### **11.2.3 Objective Three: Implement a community peacebuilding intervention for reducing pre- and post-electoral violence in Epworth**

The prerequisites for Objective Three were pre-determined at the proposal stage when I adopted action research as the key methodological procedure for the study. The intention was to reflect on the contextual problems and develop and put into practice an intervention strategy focused on improving post-conflict relationships in Epworth. Accordingly, I employed a qualitative action research strategy, which included an exploratory phase (interviews and FDGs) to assess political intolerance and an action research process (a community peacebuilding intervention) to implement peaceful alternatives to electoral and political violence. The methodological steps I followed in conducting the research are detailed in Chapters 5 and 6. The intervention of Peace Rabbits in the Epworth community was carried out with an AT of 12 participants. Five critical steps that were followed in implementing the action research were: (1) AT rules and obligations, (2) intervention planning, (3) peace rabbitry training workshop, (4) peacebuilding workshop, and (5) evaluative meeting and mapping the way forward. Following these steps, the AT and I planned and conducted peace talks and peace rabbitry marketing workshops to engage the broader community on their experiences with the peace rabbitry projects and how they can impact political tolerance. I utilised these presentations to outline, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, how Objective Three was achieved through the intervention strategy established, in the form of Peace Rabbits, with the intention of transforming post-conflict relationships.

### **11.3.4 Objective Four: Evaluate community peacebuilding interventions suggested by the Epworth community**

The study's fourth objective sought to provide an adequate evaluation of the community peacebuilding interventions conducted in Epworth by the researcher and the AT. These evaluation processes were covered in Chapter 10, where a preliminary analysis was done to see how the intervention affected the Epworth community. According to the preliminary evaluation results, the pre-Peace Rabbitry atmosphere in the community was marked by low levels of trust among neighbours, high rates of unemployment and poverty, and atrocious acts of political narrow-mindedness. However, the post-rabbitry environment showed that the intervention technique successfully gave them a community gathering platform, something they had never had before – the Peace Rabbits, amazingly, facilitated conversation between political enemies in the AT.

## 11.4 Final Thoughts and Conclusion

The study has revealed that elections and politics were the main causes of conflict in Epworth, with hate speech creating discourses of division among people, and partisan distribution of food being used as a tool by which the conflict is stirred and enforced. The study also found that apart from elections and politics, the formation of new political parties (mainly the MDC in post-independence Zimbabwe), economic and unemployment challenges, and churches served as other contributory factors towards the proliferation of conflict in Epworth, and in Zimbabwe in general. Finally, it established that traumatic experiences such as destruction of property, loss of limbs and other health challenges, and loss of life were some of the consequences experienced in post-election violence in Epworth. These findings constituted some of the exploratory findings, leading to the conducting of action research providing in-depth understanding of the causes, extent and consequences of post-election violence.

The study also showed that peace rabbitry successfully acted as a force for social change, turning the wheel towards eradicating poverty, and as a forum for discussion of peace-related issues, all of which contributed to the realisation of the study's main goal, which was to transform post-conflict relationships. The peace rabbitry programme made significant progress in tearing down walls of hostility, promoting AT support for bereaved families, and improving their rabbitry capabilities. The study's findings, however, showed that despite the previously mentioned positive aspects, the COVID-19 lockdown measures, economic issues, and marketing difficulties negatively impacted the intervention method. Nevertheless, my observations, and comments from the AT participants about the efficacy of Peace Rabbits, showed that, despite the intervention strategy's flaws, it was still a successful tactic for promoting peace and, more specifically, for transforming post-conflict relations.

I established that the action research process makes an effective and unique way of building positive peace solutions in fostering political tolerance and addressing issues of political violence. The peace rabbitry intervention project was identified as being useful in advancing learning and new knowledge, which is crucial in shaping behavioural change. When the intervention process started, there were tensions between participants because of different political opinions. However, by the end of the intervention, the participants were now friends and able to work together. The intervention proved crucial in promoting political tolerance.

The final review reports of the study established that the AT considered the study to be useful and that it had helped them to engage in practical solutions to address the challenges of political intolerance and violence in Epworth. The study formed the first of its kind in engaging practical interventions to the community's violence crisis. Thus, the conclusions from the

evaluation review established that the peace rabbitry effort advanced the AT's ability to support grieving families and helped eradicate barriers based on political hatred and intolerance. It also reportedly improved their rabbitry abilities. Despite the positive aspects mentioned, the preliminary analysis also showed that COVID-19, and financial and marketing restrictions, had a detrimental impact on the AT. Nevertheless, the participants' views and comments revealed that the peace rabbitry programme effectively resolved post-conflict relationships.

Overall, this research allowed me to determine that action research is a useful tool for promoting peace. Additionally, the research allowed me to witness rabbitry's extraordinary role in mending post-conflict relationships between individuals from different political ideologies, and its transformative potential. Participants in the Peace Rabbits project delighted in realising that despite belonging to various political parties, they had developed into potential peacemakers in their homes and communities. In spite of having different political ideologies and being previously unable to agree on anything, their achievement in working together in the Peace Rabbits project showed without a shadow of a doubt that lasting peace is feasible when local communities make peacebuilding their mission. It is significant to remember that in action research and peacebuilding, numbers do not matter. The study taught me that not all action research participants immediately alter their attitudes and perceptions. This necessitates multiple intervention cycles or one-on-one follow-ups with AT participants to get adequate action research outcomes.

#### **11.4.2 Knowledge generation and implications of this study in peacebuilding**

The study's recommendations for this intervention strategy's proper grassroots implementation have the power to alter post-conflict relationships and the way community members from different political perspectives view one another. Political stereotypes, which have been pervasive in urban settings, may be eliminated with this intervention technique. By developing peace intervention tactics that encourage peaceful cohabitation, diversity, and social cohesion among community members, the knowledge gained from this study can assist policymakers in developing laws to reduce violence. While rabbits have traditionally been used primarily for food and recreation, this study suggested that the same rabbits may be used to change post-conflict relationships among political party members in ways that enhance social cohesiveness and political permissiveness. This is an essential addition to the peacebuilding process.

By utilising Peace Rabbits to change post-conflict relationships in the direction of more extensive peacebuilding, the study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of conflict

transformation, which has received little attention. This study contributes to the field of peacebuilding by determining the origins and consequences of conflict in Epworth, as well as by planning, executing, and assessing a peacebuilding intervention in response to the problems noted. The study thus provides a foundation for additional studies in the use of action research in the transformation of post-conflict relationships among people from diverse political backgrounds or with similar challenges, which is important given the dearth of published studies on the use of action research in Zimbabwe.

## **11.5 Study Limitations**

This study used a qualitative action research design, which increased the time and material costs. The limitations included a lack of financial resources and logistical challenges. The main burden consisted of transporting participants and providing food for some gatherings. In most cases, I had to dig into my limited resources to ensure that the meetings became successful. To reduce some of transportation costs I had to look for central meeting places that would save me and the participants money. In addition, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, yet the exploratory AR process is unpredictable. The study had some complex situations, making the intervention process slower than expected. However, this provided insight into understanding that AR as a research approach exposes real-life challenges that require patience and careful engagement to address. The processes of addressing some of these challenges provided rich insight and outcomes that make crucial contributions to new knowledge.

This was a contextual study. The research was conducted solely in Epworth in the province of Harare as a means of mitigating the effects of limited time and resources on the quality of the outcomes. As a result, the study's findings cannot be applied to contexts outside the Epworth community, where the research sample was based, and the study's findings would not apply to other contexts or populations besides those which would be related to the sample.

## **11.6 Recommendations**

Based on the key findings from this study, I proffer the following recommendations to individuals and organisations that are participating in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes:

- ❖ Due to the lessons drawn from this study, I encourage peacebuilding players in Zimbabwe to promote home-grown and context-specific intervention strategies in

resolving conflicts to enhance effectiveness in realising durable peace and transforming post-conflict relationships.

- ❖ There is a need for the de-politicisation of peacebuilding initiatives by involved actors. There is a serious call for peacebuilders to allow the local participants to initiate projects that will directly benefit them. Such acts result in communal empowerment and ownership of the intervention strategy.
- ❖ In order to achieve lasting and sustainable peace, peacebuilding efforts must embrace participatory and bottom-up approaches rather than trickle-down ones. Communities need to be involved in formulating intervention strategies that benefit them, as this enhances the concept of ownership of the peacebuilding intervention strategy. Peacebuilding actors must embrace the concept of co-creating peacebuilding intervention plans with communities. This is crucial to avoid the fading of initiatives, often seen when programmes are developed and implemented without the participatory involvement of communities.
- ❖ There is a need to promote more solution-oriented research studies using the action research approach in promoting peacebuilding and tolerance. This study established that there remains a huge gap for action research, particularly in peacebuilding. More research in the field would go a long way to broadening peace solutions that shape policy in global and local contexts.
- ❖ Further research can also engage in different peace alternatives towards addressing challenges to political violence. The use of a mixed-methods action research approach might help in broadening the understanding of the study context from a more statistical approach, which would help establish relationships between different social, economic and political variables associated with electoral violence in the community.

## **11.7 Areas for Further Study**

The following subject areas are suggested for additional investigation based on the major findings of this study:

- ❖ A paradigm shift in traditional leadership roles in conflict resolution
- ❖ Reorientation of Zimbabwe's institutions
- ❖ Linking peacebuilding with psychosocial and coping skills

## **11.8 Summary**

This chapter examined the summary of findings based on each study objective and provided a synopsis of the entire study. I also provided a summary of the preliminary evaluation exercise

and discussed how this research added fresh information about peacebuilding. After conducting the research excursion reflections, I produced recommendations that were informed by the study's findings, and then I drew my own conclusions from these. I concluded by listing topics I believe deserve further inquiry.

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## APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INFORMATION



### LETTER OF INFORMATION

**Title of the Research Study :** Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe.

**Principal Investigator/s/researcher:** Sheila Rumutsa: Masters in Management Sciences (HRM)

**Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s:** Dr David Makwerere: D-Tech In Peace Building

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

Zimbabwe has a history of violence, usually associated with pre- and post-election periods. Therefore this study is intended to promote political tolerance and to reconcile broken communities through community peacebuilding.

Greeting: How are you

**Introduce yourself to the participant:** I am a PHD student at DUT doing research for my Doctorate degree in Public Administration – Peace Studies.

**Invitation to the potential participant:** I would like to invite you to participate in the research

**What is Research :** Research is defined as a systematic search or enquiry for generalized new knowledge. During the course of my research I will explain acronyms and technical terminology so that you all understand and you are welcome to ask as many questions as you wish so that you all understand my study. Additionally, you are entitled to discuss my study with your family and friends and are under no obligation to commit at this stage. For this purpose, you are allowed to take a copy of the Letter of Information document t home.

Outline of the Procedures:

This study is part of the requirements for the completion of my PHD degree at DUT. This study is entirely funded by DUT therefore you are not expected to pay any financial contribution or to benefit in monetary term from this study. You are only one of the 30 potential participants in Epworth. You are therefore purposively chosen and requested to voluntarily participate in the study. I will ask you questions related to election violence in Epworth. If you choose to be part of the study you will:

1. Be interviewed.
2. Participate in a focus group discussion (FGD) of 6 participants to further discuss the issues raised in the questions guide and then develop and implement the training programme with me.
3. You may be part of a group as a volunteer participant during the implementation of the intervention strategy.

**Risks or Discomforts to the Participant:**

This is very low risk study and there are no discomforts to you expected.

**Explain to the participant the reasons he/she may be withdraw from the Study:**

You should participate voluntarily. You have the right to withdraw from the enquiry at any time and for any reason without any adverse effects.

**Benefits:** There will be no benefits for participating in the study.

**Remuneration:** There is no remuneration for you and no form of inducement will be offered for participation in this study. But, snacks will be provided to the participants.

**Costs of the Study:** Participants are not allowed to cover any costs of my study.

**Confidentiality:** Anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed through the use of acronyms. Access to data will be limited to study personal and information collected will be locked in a safe place and destroyed after five years. You will be told about the concepts of Anonymity and confidentiality that will be applied to this study and if participants would like to be named, then they will be named as agreed.

**Results:** (Explain how the researcher plans to disseminate the results of the research. Explain if any significant new findings developed during the course of the research how it will be conveyed to the participant.)

**Research-related Injury:**

Should there be any study related injury, the psychologist skills will assist the researcher in remediating to the situation.

Storage of all electronic and hard copies including tape recordings:

All written and audio data will safely be kept by the researcher for a period of five years as stipulated by the university rules. Thereafter, the written data will be shredded and the audio data will be deleted and destroyed.

**Persons to contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:** Please contact the me on 0027 605506118, my supervisor Dr David Makwerere on 00263 772596562 or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Linganiso on 031 373 2577 or [researchdirector@dut.ac.za](mailto:researchdirector@dut.ac.za).

## APPENDIX B: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN EPWORTH



Member Of Parliament's Office

Epworth

Zimbabwe

21 May 2020

Dear Honourable.

RE: PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH IN EPWORTH

My name is Sheila Rumutsa, I am currently registered for a PHD in Peacebuilding at the Durban University of Technology. I would like to interact with members of your community in your area in a study that I am conducting. Below are the details of my study so that you have a clear understanding of what it is about.

The title of my study is **“Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe”**.

Political violence is a major concern internationally, nationally and within our communities. I want to determine the causes, extent and the consequences of post-election violence in Epworth and together with the residents develop, implement and evaluate an intervention strategy to reduce violence in your community. Participation is voluntary and no harm will befall participants during and after the study has been carried out. For this study, I am guided by the code of ethics of Durban University of Technology to ensure confidentiality of information provided to me by the participant. I do hope that I will be granted access to work with the community members in your area. Should you have any problems or queries then please contact me on 0027 605506118, my supervisor Dr David Makwerere on 00263 772596562 or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the

Director: Research and Postgraduate Support Dr L Linganiso on 031 373 2577 or  
researchdirector@dut.ac.za

Yours Faithfully

.....

Sheila Rumutsa

Student: 21143531

Phone: 00263 60 550 6118

Email: [srumutsa@gmail.com](mailto:srumutsa@gmail.com)

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT LETTER



### CONSENT

**Full Title of the Study:** Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe. Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study.

• I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Sheila Rumutsa

Names of Researcher/s: Sheila Rumutsa

, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance

Number: 0027 31 373 2375,

• I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of

Information) regarding the study.

• I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.

• In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.

• I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.

• I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

• I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may

relate to my participation will be made available to me.

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Participant      Date      Time      Signature      /      Right

Thumbprint

I, Sheila Rumutsa herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Researcher      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Witness (If applicable)      Date      Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)      Date      Signature

# APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR VICTIMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

My name is Sheila Rumutsa and I am studying a PhD Degree in Peacebuilding with Durban University of Technology. I am undertaking an action research study titled '**Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe.**' The study is being conducted in Epworth.

Ethical Note

Would you agree to be interviewed for the study? The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall or average information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be kept totally confidential. Should you wish to discuss this further please feel free to contact me or my supervisor Dr David Makwerere on +26377259656 or david.makwerere@gmail.com .

Interview Questions

The specific interview questions were:

- I. In your view, how has the Epworth region been exposed to political violence in the past two years?
  - ii. What effect has political violence had on;
    - a. The attitudes of members of communities in the Epworth region?
    - b. The behaviour of members of communities in the Epworth region?
    - c. The conflict structure within the Epworth region over time?
  - iii. How do you think the above effects can be addressed?
  - iv. What is your understanding of Political tolerance?

v. Are there ways in of promoting political tolerance in Epworth? If yes name them and explain their effectiveness?

vi. In your view, what contribution do you make in community peacebuilding in the Epworth region?

vii. What challenges do you face in engaging in community peacebuilding within the Epworth region?

viii. What do you suggest addressing these challenges.

ix. Are you aware of reconciliation initiatives of the following entities;

a. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)?

b. The government?

c. Donor agencies?

d. Media (including social media)?

Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX E: SAMPLE TRANSCRIPT EXCERPTS AND CODING

### A.1 Interview Excerpts

#### Interview with Community Leader

**Interviewer:** What were the main challenges that the community faced due to political violence?

**Respondent:** “Our biggest problem was fear. People were scared to even talk about politics. Some families had to leave their homes because they supported the opposition. There was no trust among neighbours.”

**Code Assigned:** *Fear, Political Polarisation, Displacement, Lack of Trust*

#### Interview with Peace Rabbits Participant

**Interviewer:** How did the Peace Rabbits project affect your view of community relationships?

**Respondent:** “At first, I didn’t trust some of the people in the group because we supported different parties. But as we worked together, I realised we all wanted the same thing—to provide for our families. Now, we even help each other outside the project.”

**Code Assigned:** *Trust-Building, Economic Cooperation, Social Integration*

### A.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Excerpts

#### FGD with Local Youths

**Facilitator:** What role do young people play in peacebuilding in Epworth?

**Participant 1:** “Many young people are used by politicians to cause violence. But if they had jobs or projects like Peace Rabbits, they wouldn’t be so easily manipulated.”

**Participant 2:** “I think youth should be given leadership roles in peace efforts. Right now, it’s mostly the older people who make decisions.”

**Codes Assigned:** *Youth Manipulation, Economic Empowerment, Leadership Inclusion*

#### FGD with Women’s Group

**Facilitator:** How has the Peace Rabbits project helped women in the community?

**Participant 1:** “It has given us financial independence. Before, many women depended on their husbands, but now we have our own income.”

**Participant 2:** “It also brought us together. We used to be divided by politics, but now we work as one team.”

**Codes Assigned:** *Women’s Empowerment, Economic Independence, Social Unity*

### A.3 Thematic Coding Summary

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Codes Assigned</b>	<b>Related Findings</b>
<b>Political Polarisation</b>	Fear, lack of trust, displacement	Reduced through economic cooperation
<b>Economic Empowerment</b>	Financial independence, business collaboration	Strengthened by Peace Rabbits initiative
<b>Social Integration</b>	Trust-building, working as a team, youth involvement	Fostered by shared community goals
<b>Youth &amp; Leadership</b>	Manipulation, need for inclusion, peace advocacy	Youth should be involved in decision-making

# APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION FOR VICTIMS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

## Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study:

I am studying for a PhD Degree in Peacebuilding with Durban University of Technology. I am undertaking an action research study titled **'Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe.'** The study is being conducted in Epworth.

## Ethical Note

Would you agree to take part in the focus group discussion (FGD)? The FGD will take approximately one hour. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons, and without prejudice or any adverse consequences. The information you give will only be used for research purposes and will be aggregated with other responses and only the overall or average information will be used. Your identity and individual answers will be kept totally confidential. Should you wish to discuss this further please feel free to contact me or my supervisor or.

## Instructions

- i) Group members to introduce themselves
- ii) Respect each other and allow everyone to contribute.

Male	Female

The specific focus group discussions questions were:

- 1.What are the major causes of political violence in Epworth?
- 2.Can you explain the forms of political violence in Epworth?


3. What are the major perpetrators of violence in Epworth?
4. What are the consequences of political violence you have experienced in Epworth
5. To what extent has the violence affected citizens?
6. What is your understanding of Community Peacebuilding?
7. Do you engage in any Community Peacebuilding?
8. Were there any peacebuilding programmes or interventions made towards healing or reintegration of victims in the Epworth region? If yes please explain, if no what recommendations do you suggest?
9. What has been the major challenges in post-reconstruction and peacebuilding in Epworth?
9. What do you suggest in addressing these challenges you mentioned above?
10. Do you have anything else you feel I did not ask that may be helpful in my research?

Thank you for your time

# APPENDIX G: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

**Republic of Zimbabwe**  
**EPWORTH CONSTITUENCY**

Parliament of Zimbabwe  
Box CY 296 Causeway, Harare, Zimbabwe  
TEL: +263 4 799 1813  
Constituency  
Charamba Dr. P.O. Box Hatfield, 8028



epworthindependent@gmail.com  
CELL: +263 778479564  
Facebook: Epworth Constituency  
Twitter: @epworthofficial

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26 November 2020

41 Boxer Street  
Northriding, Johannesburg  
2188

Dear Ms. Rumutsa

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN EPWORTH**

Reference is made to your letter in which you requested for permission to carry out a research on "Implementing community peacebuilding in an electoral battlefield: Epworth, Zimbabwe".

Accordingly, please be advised that you have been granted permission to conduct out the research in Epworth, Zimbabwe.