

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

**STORYTELLING AND ELECTORAL CONFLICTS: A COMMUNITY
APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING – CHONGWE, ZAMBIA**

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**STORYTELLING AND ELECTORAL CONFLICTS: A COMMUNITY APPROACH TO
PEACEBUILDING – CHONGWE, ZAMBIA**

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DECLARATION

I **Lee Mainga HABASONDA** make the following declarations about this piece of academic work titled, **Storytelling and Electoral Conflicts: A community approach to peacebuilding- Chongwe, Zambia.**

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful wife Marjorie, my elder son Casper “Mwanawembira”, our little twin sons Banji “Sekeramai” Chiluba and Mpimpa “Murwira pachena” Hadungu, the daughters Duduzile, Bukata and Mildred. This thesis is also in honour of my late parents, Andrew Maxwell Magulanyanga Habasonda “Mwanaa mulumi a Muleya” and Margret Mutinta Mujazya Habasonda.

The long hours I spent on the computer reflecting and recasting ideas to produce this piece of work were time-consuming and yet transformative. It was surprisingly a sufficient push, to be disrupted just to listen and answer questions from the smallest of our twins why I was always working on the computer without playing with him. This has left a lasting memory of how inspiration even from the least of the member of the family can lead one to pursue greater heights.

I believe that this piece of work adds insights and some scholarly perspectives and reflections on peace praxis. It should hopefully help, albeit in a small way, to make the electoral processes around the globe just a little friendlier, peaceful, just, inclusive and community-centred for some fellow human beings. Through this journey, I have learned to be humble and be willing to consider alternative worldviews. I have learned that the call to peace is not about the official peace narratives of institutions but largely the daily personal experiences of people.

This dissertation is indeed a reflection and culmination of my desire for a just and peaceful world which I envisaged many years ago while growing up amid the liberation wars of Southern Africa. As a peace activist and scholar, I further dedicate this piece of work to all peace practitioners and scholars everywhere on earth. This thesis is an epitome of my commitment to hold the values of peace in my heart forever.

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ABSTRACT

Using an action research approach, this study explores storytelling as a community-based peacebuilding approach for use by the Conflict Management Committee (CMC) in Chongwe constituency in Chongwe District of Lusaka Province focusing specifically on electoral conflicts.

Although there are currently electoral conflict management and peacebuilding mechanisms that exist, previous work has not specifically addressed the role that storytelling can play in the management of electoral conflicts. Part of the study was to implement a storytelling community intervention and illuminate the potential that storytelling holds for application by the electoral CMCs as an Indigenous method of conflict management. This is in view of the fact that insufficient attention has been paid to the role that Indigenous peace infrastructures such as storytelling can contribute to peace during elections.

Through qualitative methodology and purposive sampling of 38 subject participants, the research uncovers the lived experiences of conflict parties during and after elections. The study used the 2021 Zambian general elections to establish a baseline for examining cases of electoral mediation. The study revealed themes on the nature and prevalence of community electoral conflicts, practice, role and effects of storytelling at the CMC, Hybridisation of CMC electoral mediation and oral storytelling models to Improve the process of electoral conflict mediation, and understanding context and conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding for electoral conflicts in Chongwe constituency.

The results show that although storytelling was underutilised in the electoral mediation process at CMC, as a strategy and relational approach, it is an effective local tool for both CMC electoral conflict management and community peacebuilding. This is despite the vagaries of the digital age and the predominance of the liberal peace paradigm. The study demonstrates that storytelling can contribute to improvements in individual, relational and organisational functioning to resolve electoral conflicts. The study argues that a complementary arrangement by the modern and traditional mediation approaches to form

a hybrid model promises a comprehensive and inclusive approach to electoral conflict management by the CMC.

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ACRONYMS

ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data
AED	Academy for Educational Development
ANC	African National Congress
AR	Action Research
ART	Action research team
BSAC	British South Africa Company
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
CMA	Center for Mediation in Africa
CMC	Conflict Management Committee
COG	Commonwealth Observer Group
CSO	Civil society organisations
DUT	Durban University of Technology
ECC	Electoral code of conduct
ECZ	Electoral Commission of Zambia
EMB	Electoral Management Body
EUEOM	European Union Election Observer Mission
FGD	Focus group discussion
FISP	Farmer Input Support Programme
HTR	Healing Through Remembering
ICT	Information and communication technology
IPADA	International Conference on Public Administration and Development Alternatives
IREC	Institutional Research Ethics Committee
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
IT	Information technology
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MMD	Movement for Multiparty Democracy
NCMC	National Conflict Management Committee
NGO	Non-governmental organisations

NPC	National Peace Council
NPP	National Progressive Party
NRC	National registration card
NURC	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
PAR	Participatory action research
PF	Patriotic Front
PLWD	people living with disability
SCI	Sports Conflict Institute
SCT	Social Cash Transfer
SMS	Short message service
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UFP	United Federal Party
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIP	United National Independence Party
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UP	United Party
UPND	United Party for National Development
UPP	United Progressive Party
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
ZANC	Zambia African National Congress

PART I: INTRODUCTION

“Non-violence is a weapon of the strong... The law of love will work, just as the law of gravitation will work, whether we accept it or not.” (M. K. Gandhi 1930/2002: 46)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets the foundation for the thesis by giving an introduction and background to the study. It provides an appreciation of the nature of electoral conflicts and the practice of electoral conflict resolution by Conflict Management Committees (CMCs) in Zambia. It explores traditional oral storytelling and how it can improve the quality of electoral conflict mediation if it is integrated as part of Zambia’s CMCs before, during and after elections. It uses the Chongwe district CMC as a reference point. The chapter briefly explores the intersection between electoral conflict mediation process and storytelling as a community peacebuilding approach. The chapter also explains the basis for complementarity between national-level electoral conflict management mechanisms and Indigenous or local approaches to conflict in order to bring about electoral justice.

The main research problem for the study was to explore the under-utilisation or lack of exploitation of the potential and actual application of storytelling as a peacebuilding tool during electoral mediation by the CMCs. Oral storytelling is an Indigenous practice that can be capitalised upon by the CMC during electoral conflict management and peacebuilding sessions to reduce electoral conflicts and reconcile communities.

This study was carried out on the assumption that if storytelling was given more attention during and after mediation of the parties to the conflict in the community, the benefits would accrue to more people and make electoral peacebuilding truly community-owned and more sustainable. The concern about the current mediation approach is that the community in which the conflict occurs is not involved in resolving the conflicts as the

matter is taken to a central place (District Council offices where CMCs operate from) where it is addressed and stories that are told to CMC are limited to the conflict parties who are consequently reconciled before the Committee. This excludes the involvement of the larger community where the conflict takes place. As a result, the approach seems to take away from the intention that CMCs are a community-response mechanism for electoral conflicts.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possibilities of improving the quality of the CMCs' mediation through an action research approach. The action research was a storytelling peacebuilding intervention in Madido ward of the Chongwe constituency working in collaboration with the Chongwe CMC. The assumption from the outset was that storytelling was a useful and effective avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding because it is a well-understood practice in the communities. Storytelling was seen as a way to strengthen community participation within the electoral mediation process, Thus the consideration of the various ways in which the study could investigate how to strengthen the community focus and bring the CMCs back to their original intention by applying an already existing method which is useful, easily accessible and located within the community (Senehi, 2008) and the CMC process itself. Storytelling was preferred because it is a cultural and context-specific approach aware of local dynamics, environments, and cross-cultural ways of knowing (Bleiker & Brigg, 2010; Richmond, 2010). Furthermore, storytelling was selected for this study because it is partly used in the CMC mediation process, and within the Zambian context, it is embedded in the local culture thus a potential means of community peacebuilding.

Storytelling is another approach that can potentially support peacebuilders and communities in conflict to develop the range of their communication, ways of knowing and understanding as they seek to move towards peaceful free and fair elections. By gaining a deeper understanding of how stories function in elections and peacebuilding contexts, this thesis seeks to develop new storytelling-based theory and contribute to the body of research on Indigenous approaches to building peace. It also encourages practitioner enquiry, reflection and collaboration as components to further define the field and expand practice.

The study adopted a purposive sampling method to gather qualitative data. The data was collected using focus group discussions via semi-structured interviews, personal narratives, case record review, key informant interviews and observation to identify the areas where storytelling could be more valuable in resolving electoral conflicts. The research targeted a population sample of 38 study subjects. The data was thematically analysed and from the main topic of the study, themes and sub-themes were identified and examined in detail. The researcher together with selected community members designed, implemented and evaluated the storytelling community peacebuilding intervention. In this research a qualitative, interpretive approach in a collaborative process was used to create storytelling and peace workshops on electoral conflicts, as well as to observe and collect data throughout that process. A significant piece of the research focuses on the fieldwork, both in the preparation and execution of the research. This research thesis employs a practice-based approach with an enquiry cycle.

1.2 BACKGROUND

1.2.1 Electoral Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Zambia

CMCs in Zambia were introduced in 2001 to respond to management of electoral conflicts at community level during elections (Kabemba, 2002, Jackson, 2013). The formation of the CMCs was occasioned by the rising cases of electoral conflicts especially violence which escalates during elections and takes a long time to resolve through the court system (Goldring and Wahman, 2016; Magasu, 2022). At the stage of formation, CMCs were a pilot project without permanent structures. In 2006, they became permanent structures to mediate and resolve the persistent electoral conflicts in a practical and timely manner (Electoral Act No. 12 of 2006).

The formation of these committees was premised on the idea that local communities will be able to report breaches of the electoral code of conduct by community members and then get them mediated by the committee with a view to reconciling them and preventing further violations of the code (Electoral Act No. 12 of 2006). The committees are intended to be local peacebuilding mechanisms before, during and after elections.

CMCs were established at both national and district levels. At the national level, the committee is called the National Conflict Management Committee (NCMC) while at the district level they are called District Conflict Management Committees (DCMCs). Currently there are 116 district CMC offices that were set up to tackle different local electoral issues (Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2024). Their membership consists of a variety of representatives from electoral stakeholders, who include political parties, state security agencies (Zambia Police, Anti-corruption Commission, Drug Enforcement Commission, Human Rights Commission) and several civil society organisations (CSOs). These entities were appointed to the committees because they are stakeholders in the electoral process in one way or another. The main aim is to solve electoral disputes through mediation or conciliation in the communities in each district. Members of the committees are paid an allowance for every sitting that they attend to mediate electoral conflicts.

At the district levels, committees range from 8 to 15 members depending on the number of active political parties and NGOs. The district CMCs do not handle every electoral dispute but handle those disputes which can bring about violence. Examples of such disputes are those relating to destruction of campaign posters, disruption of political rallies, use of abusive language during the campaign and abuse of government resources (Electoral Act No. 12 of 2006). The more serious crimes such as assault with bodily harm, serious destruction of property, arson and sabotage would be the responsibility of law enforcement officials.

The CMCs mandate is to mediate conflicts related to violations of the electoral code of conduct (ECC). Violations of the ECC are stipulated in the subsidiary legislation of the Electoral Process Act as the electoral conduct regulations (2016). The ECC governs not only the behaviour of political parties, their agents and supporters during electoral campaigns, but also that of the various mass media and election observers and monitors (Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2016).

The main idea of the CMCs was to act as a preventive mechanism to avoid electoral conflicts from escalating. Specifically, the CMCs were established to play the following roles:

- a) prevent and manage electoral conflicts:
- b) resolve electoral disputes that have arisen through mediation or conciliation; and
- c) ensure that stakeholders adhere to the ECC.

The CMCs operate on the principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality. This is intended to enable all stakeholders to have confidence in the committees.

The electoral legislation provides that the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ) has the responsibility to appoint committee members and each committee's chair. However, vice chairs are elected internally by the committees themselves. The Electoral Act also gives the Electoral Commission approval to use part of its budget to compensate committee members every time a session is convened. The Act further provides that neither the chair nor the vice chair of a committee can be a political party representative.

Furthermore, in response to concerns about the operational practices of the CMCs, local magistrates, who initially served on the CMCs and were frequently appointed as chairpersons due to their expertise in conflict resolution, were eventually removed from the district CMCs. This was done to avoid conflicts of interest, as there was a risk that the same magistrates might later preside over the same cases in court.

Although the system was geared toward conflicts between political parties, citizens could bring disputes based on alleged violations of the code to their district CMCs. The CMCs have to wait for an individual or group to submit a formal written complaint outlining an alleged violation of the ECC before intervening in a conflict. Once a committee receives an official complaint, it has to hold a mediation session within 24 hours to attempt to bring the two parties to a mutually acceptable resolution (Electoral Act No. 12 of 2006). At this point stories from both parties are heard and considered. The committee then addresses the issue, persuades the disputants until the two parties reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

The mediation practice entails that If the district committee is unable to handle the case, it would forward the matter to the national conflict management committee – or to the police if it involves an offence of a criminal nature. The mediation sessions are held during

every electoral cycle mainly in the pre-election phase of the electoral process towards the actual poll day.

However, noteworthy is that CMCs have no power to compel parties to participate in conflict resolution, nor do they have the power to introduce sanctions. A study of the Lusaka district CMC by (Magasu et al., 2018) observed that there was lack of a legal framework in the management of electoral conflicts and in the enforcement of the Electoral Act. To this effect, they recommended for the improvement of the performance of CMCs through introducing electoral fast track courts, increasing educational awareness activities on electoral conflicts, increasing access to CMCs and strengthening the legal mandate of the CMCs. The study did not address itself to the community peacebuilding approach in order to make the committees community owned and accessible but focused on legal, geographic and financial barriers.

CMCs created the first formal non-legal democratic procedure in Zambia to issue complaints against political candidates and even against employees of the ECZ itself. This represented an important step for Zambia in managing conflict in the electoral process (Jackson, 2013).

1.2.2 Nature of Electoral Conflicts

The types of electoral conflicts that generally occurred in the 2021 general elections included police disruption of mainly opposition political rallies, inter-party tearing down of campaign bill boards/posters/materials, burning or destruction of opposition campaign gear, disruption of rallies and meetings by political party opponents, use of hate speech, destruction of property, physical assaults, threats, and intimidation (News Diggers, May 5, 2021).

The electoral conflicts that manifested in the 2021 general elections appeared similar to those that were witnessed in the 2016 general elections. Mukunto (2019) identified the forms of violence witnessed in 2016 as molestation and intimidation, seizure of public property, public disorder, vandalising of party property, lawlessness and aggressive rhetoric by young party cadres - acts which were a continuation in the 2021 general elections.

In terms of the motivation for participating in electoral conflicts and violence, Habasonda (2018) contends that violence between rival political groups and state police in Zambia, is usually undertaken towards a political-economic end. The police do it to gain favours from the politicians while rival groups are rewarded in cash or kind by their political party leaders. This view seems to agree with Mukosa et al. (2020) who examined the challenges that are faced by the unemployed youth and how they have been forced to engage in crime and political violence in order for them to make a living. Other authors such as Goldring and Wahman (2020), however, propose that violence is often a manifestation of turf war and a tool to maintain and disrupt political territorial control.

Gondwe (2021) discusses the pervasive online incivility, hate speech and online political campaign messages and their contribution to electoral conflicts and political violence while Ndulo (2020) suggests that the unacceptable levels of political violence were due to intolerance of views contrary to those of the ruling Patriotic Front Party. Ndulo (ibid.) further observed that those perceived to be opponents of the government were attacked, assaulted and their meetings disrupted while a highly compromised police force unashamedly looked on. Ndulo also noted that perpetrators of the violence openly carried weapons and stated publicly in the presence of the police their intent to harm their opponents. Fumpa-Makano (2019) used participatory action research to highlight causes of inter-party political violence in Lusaka and point out that the motivating factor was to intimidate opponents and their supporters which in turn enabled their party to advance and increase their chances of winning elections. It is therefore clear that most of the electoral conflicts are largely inter-party. In view of these electoral conflicts, efforts by the Electoral Management Body (EMB) have been ongoing to reduce electoral conflicts and violence at national and community levels.

1.3 RESEARCH CONTEXT

At independence in 1964, the British colonial authorities did not leave behind a strong democratic tradition. Instead they bequeathed the new State with a plethora of laws designed to subjugate a colonial society and privilege the few. Since then, the country has continued to grapple with both the colonial and one-party State vestiges that have

persisted and still characterise Zambia's democratic dispensation. The weak institutionalisation of political parties with lack of clear ideologies renders it hard to practise democratic politics. As a result, the political system is laden with patrimonial networks of personal benefits. Further, conceptualisation of opposition politics including criticism from civil society and citizens as a legitimate component of democratic governance is a constant challenge that is contributing to politically related tension and electoral conflicts.

Zambia on the other hand has managed peaceful transitions; first, from a one-party system of governance to multiparty system of governance in the early 1990s and second, within the multiparty context. Since 1991, Zambia has achieved three transfers of power – from United National Independence Party (UNIP) to the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) (1991), from the MMD to the PF (2011) and from the PF to the United Party for National Development (UPND) (2021) (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022; Mahvinga, 2021).

However, deeper democratisation has been affected by the hybridisation of democracy whose statutes are a combination of the British parliamentary system and the American constitutional democracy. The foregoing and a lack of comprehensive constitutional reforms have undermined the democratisation process (Munalula, 2016). The Constitution remains top heavy with a substantial amount of power vested in the Republican President. The Constitution thus continues to allow the incumbent to enjoy considerable advantages, which in turn gives a significant electoral advantage to the ruling party. This is often precursor to increased incidences of electoral conflicts.

Since the multiparty era and the ongoing democratic efforts, there have been indications of an increasingly antagonistic form of politics, intensifying the significance of ethnicity and political affiliation, and elections have become increasingly violent (GRZ, 2019). The political party cadres, "motivated" by money, alcohol and other incentives they receive from their political benefactors, have become militant, lawless and violent in their operations. Thus, elections are associated with inter-party conflicts in communities. A crucial aspect of inter-party electoral conflict is the manifestation and propagation of diverse and often diametrically opposing conflict narratives, territorial control, destruction

of property, disruption of traffic, political intolerance and physical and verbal clashes by youths of the political parties in conflict.

For the past 10 years Chongwe has been among the constituencies that have reported cases of electoral malpractices to the CMC for mediation (ECZ, 2022). Because of its urban and rural traits, the constituency is usually one of the major political battlefields between the ruling party and the opposition political parties. To this end, the constituency is always affected by electoral disputes some of which are reported to and handled by the CMC at Chongwe district. Proximity to Lusaka urban district, which is the capital city, makes Chongwe a hotspot for electoral conflicts. The main opponents in the electoral conflicts in 2021 were the ruling party, the Patriotic Front (PF) and the main opposition, the UPND. The two parties were engaged in violent clashes and hate speeches, including disruption of each other's rallies, meetings or events. This behaviour by the PF and UPND led to the suspension of political campaigns and activities in Lusaka and some parts of the country on 15 June 2021 by the ECZ. (ECZ, 2021). The suspension was only lifted after a period of two weeks.

Madido ward of Chongwe constituency and district was the study community. It was selected because the conflict parties were all resident in the same ward and their case was handled by the CMC. The ward provided the required environment for the study. Madido ward is a suburban area located North west of Lusaka city.

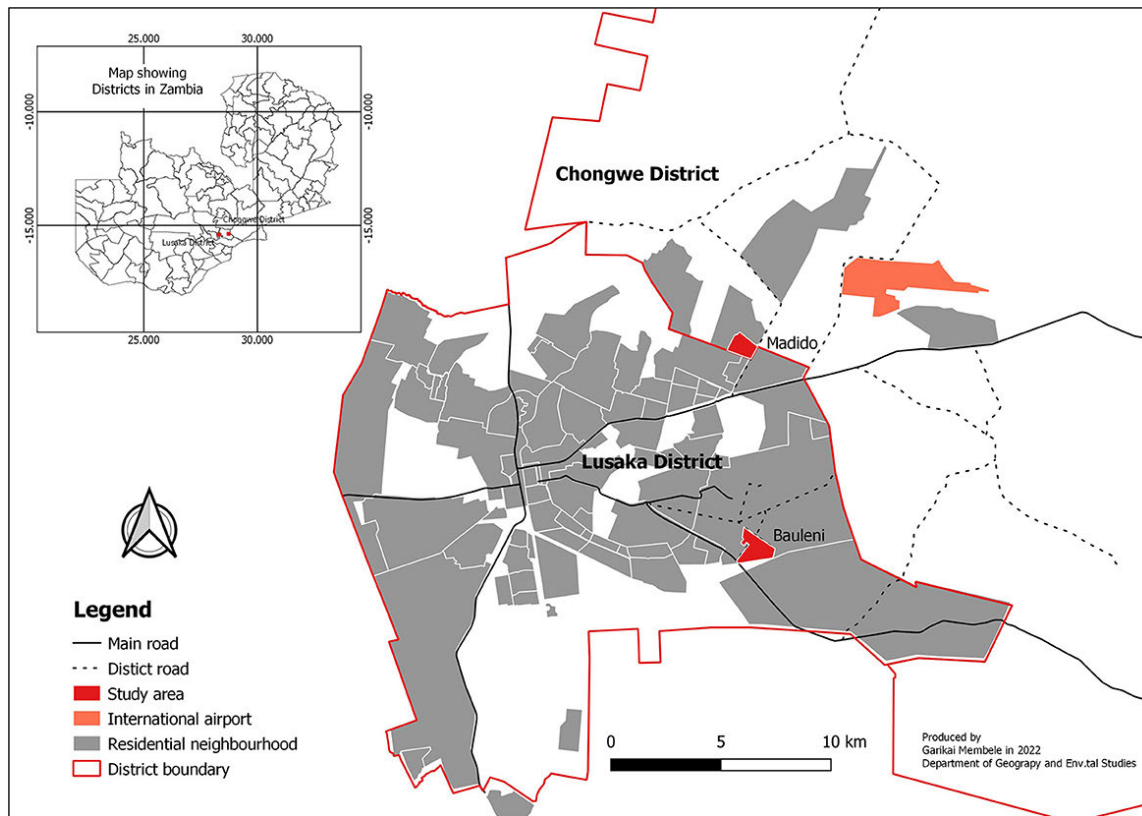


Figure 1.1: Map of Zambia showing the location of the Chongwe district and Madido ward

Source: Bwalya Umar, Kapembwa, Kaluma, Siloka and Mukwena (2023:5).

It has a medium-sized population characterised by low levels of income with a population that is generally poor. The residents are a motley of traders, marketers, blacksmiths, vegetable farmers, small shop owners, local food suppliers, street vendors and transporters etc. The community members share market spaces and sanitation facilities.

Madido ward community members are politically organised in sections. Each community section has at least ten households. Political parties use this unit informally to take stock of who supports them in a particular area. The sections form branches. The various branches form the ward. The ward is the smallest operational unit for the ECZ to carry out elections. The ward is represented by an elected official referred to as a councillor. The predominant ethnic group is Lenje and Soli. However, the communities use chi Nyanja and English which are the widely spoken languages in the adjacent greater city of Lusaka.

The researcher used the political sections to undertake the study. The community section for the accused at the CMC predominantly supported the governing PF party at the time while the section for the complainant predominantly supported the opposition UPND. Each section has some form of hierarchy for each party in the area. These sections were chosen as the sub-units for the community because they were the closest to the conflict and had an idea of the community dynamics and relationships.

Despite the existence of CMCs to resolve electoral conflicts, conflicts during elections within the communities have continued. The situation does not seem to change much despite the original intention by CMCs to reduce electoral conflicts. This study investigated ways of improving the quality of electoral conflict mediation by the CMCs using storytelling. Traditional oral storytelling is one of the Indigenous community-based approaches to building peace (Anyeko & Hoffmann, 2020).

1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The CMCs were primarily established to prevent and resolve electoral conflicts by reconciling conflict parties in the communities during elections in Zambia. However, despite their presence and efforts, electoral conflicts have continued to rise. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED) sets show increased fatalities in the period 2012 to 2021, an indication that there was an escalation of violence in Zambia during this period. The escalation of political violence is demonstrated by other writers (Wahman & Goldring 2016, Mukunto, 2019, Ndulo, 2020) and Election related reports (CCMG, 2021, Zambia Election Analysis Project, 2021, Freedom House, 2021) all who raise concern on the emerging trend and discuss specific political violence incidents although they do not necessarily show variations in the statistics as they affect levels of violence between 2016 and 2021 elections.

This study perceives the problem of CMCs as having a weak community focus and the underutilisation of storytelling as a community peacebuilding tool during mediation. The concern is that the community in which the conflict occurs is not involved in resolving the conflicts since the matter is taken to a central place where it is addressed and stories that are told to CMC are limited to the conflict parties. This excludes the involvement of the

larger community as only parties to the conflict attend the sessions and are the ones reconciled before the Committees. This means that the mediation process does not take place in the familiar settings of the complainants or the accused persons and it becomes a very formal process, thereby losing its community focus and ability to prevent or resolve conflicts effectively.

Currently, in the mediation process, each party to the conflict tells its side of the story to the CMC based on the complaint that is submitted in writing about allegations of violations of the ECC. The decisions of the CMC are based on these stories. Understanding the extent to which storytelling is applied and considered as a peacebuilding tool during the mediation process was at the heart of this study. An electoral conflict involving a few individuals impacts the wider community, as it occurs within the community's context and extends its influence, often having deeper roots and broader effects on the community as a whole. Thus, if the storytelling and stories were shared during the mediation process by the whole community where the conflict occurs, it could lead to the involvement of the communities. To this extent the resolution of an electoral conflict between individuals by the CMC appears not only insufficient but clearly does not get to the root of the problem located in the community. It is therefore imperative for the community to be involved in solving their own problems. The promise of community involvement in conflict resolution is that informal processes of 'justice from below' might better reconcile community interests, improve relationships and promote social change (Asenjo Palma, 2019).

However, prior studies have not been conducted to properly integrate storytelling and stories as a community peacebuilding mechanism into the electoral mediation processes by the CMCs in Zambia. The closest study was Magasu et al. (2018) who recommended for the improvement of the performance of CMCs through introducing electoral fast track courts, increasing educational awareness activities on electoral conflicts, increasing access to CMCs and strengthening the legal mandate of the CMCs. Their study did not address itself to the community peacebuilding approach to enhance the CMCs but focused on legal, geographic and financial barriers.

The following section provides the research objectives.

1.5 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this action research was to investigate how the Chongwe district CMC could use storytelling as an effective community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Madido ward, Chongwe constituency.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appear before the CMC in Chongwe district.
2. To analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district.
3. Through action research, to implement the intervention of a storytelling peacebuilding model with the Chongwe district CMC in the communities where the conflicts occur.
4. To carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected communities.

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted a number of theories that interlink storytelling and peacebuilding practice and are also valuable to the management of electoral conflicts. Specifically, three theories were applied in this study. The selected three theoretical perspectives are the social learning theory, transformative theory and group contact theory. In addition, the storytelling approach was selected as the local community peacebuilding mechanism for purposes of demonstrating its role in improving the quality of the CMC electoral mediation process when analysed through the lenses of the theoretical framework. Both the theories and storytelling are discussed below in detail:

1.6.1 Social Learning Theory

The social learning theory by Bandura (1977) was applied to understand how learning if any, took place in the context of the conflict under study. The theory asserts that most human behaviour is learned through observation, imitation and modelling. In his argument for observation as a form of social learning, he identifies the “verbal” instructional model,

which enhances learning if certain explanations and descriptions are presented. This was evident during the action research implementation as social learning served as a perfect framework for the study. Storytelling was able to affect the listeners in a way that allowed for learning through non-verbal means particularly in the affective domain.

Bandura also identified “symbolic” models, where characters (fiction/non-fiction) in movies, television programmes and books could lead to learning. Today, online media would be included. This means that communities could learn from watching a television programme, listening to online media sources or from reading a book. Community members can visualise how the characters react and how they feel and in turn, teach them how to react and feel when confronted by similar life situations. Storytelling provides an ideal way for participants to immerse themselves in the thoughts and emotions of the narrator, enabling them to learn from the experiences of others. The theory proved to be particularly valuable in conducting the online pilot test and the electoral conflict mediation during the research.

1.6.2 Conflict Transformation Theory

The conflict transformation theory by John Paul Lederach (1997, 2003) was used to understand and appreciate the role of conflict transformation in the electoral process in order to achieve the desired change. According to Lederach (2003), 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 and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships.

His transformational approach aims to understand a specific conflict episode as part of a larger pattern, rather than in isolation. From this perspective, change is viewed both in terms of immediate issues and the broader context. This approach aligns well with understanding the conflicts that arise during the electoral cycle, which the CMCs strive to address.

For Lederach, conflict transformation pursues the development of change processes which explicitly focus on creating positives from the difficult or negative and encourage

greater understanding of underlying relational and structural patterns while building creative solutions that improve relationships. In using this theory, storytelling was identified as a positive attribute to enhance electoral conflict management.

With regard to the conflict under study, the framework using storytelling, helped to focus on the conflict change process and enabled the researcher to establish patterns that pointed to possible solutions and the re-establishment of harmonious relations beyond the actors who appear before the CMCs.

1.6.3 Group Contact Theory

The study also used the group contact theory in which prejudice is involved in the conflict. This framework espoused by Allport (1954) was used to understand how electoral conflicts would be handled in the face of prejudices between the complainants and their communities on one hand and defendants and their communities on the other. Allport proposed the group contact theory as a means of reducing prejudice, meaning people previously divided by prejudice work together learn to overcome their prejudices. The theory was relevant in that at the heart of the research was the intention to find a way in which conflict parties with their electoral prejudices could cooperate in solving electoral problems.

Because prejudice is complex and deep-rooted within most people, contact with the “other” is needed to unlearn all the false attitudes and to examine one’s own behaviour. Allport identified six components of contact: mutual interdependence; common goals; equal status of all the members; having informal, interpersonal contact; multiple contacts with the “other”, not just once-off; and changes in social norms. The theory postulates that most conflicts involve prejudicial attitudes and transforming them into inclusivity, accepting diversity as something beneficial and interesting and not something to fear, is vital in peacebuilding. The theory is relevant to the resolution of electoral disputes because it enables us to apply it in understanding how conflict parties, that have been brought into contact to face each other and interact over contentious electoral issues, can change disposition. The process of contact and interaction, particularly when using

storytelling, assumably tends to change perceptions and reduces prejudices making it possible for cooperation and listening to each other.

By sharing stories, conflict parties are able to sympathise and empathise with one another, thus providing potential for cooperation without necessarily liking each other. Thus storytelling provides the space or platform for such possibilities. The study therefore applied the theory to consider and understand the electoral disputes during the study period. The section that follows briefly discusses the storytelling approach to conflict management and peacebuilding as well as the linkages to the above theories.

1.6.4 Storytelling and Stories as a Conflict Management and Peacebuilding Approach

Traditionally, storytelling was employed by many Indigenous Zambian communities to manage conflicts across the whole social spectrum at interpersonal, family, clan, community, and intercommunity levels (Gavrielides, 2017). Magak et al. (2018) argue that many folktales in the traditional setting revolve around conflict resolution and peacebuilding but also acknowledge that stories equally generate conflicts. Although storytelling is cultural in Zambia and plays a significant role in family socialisation particularly in rural areas, it is limited in its application especially in electoral politics. Stories pertaining to electoral politics are conveyed through print and electronic channels mainly as media propaganda. Coburn (2011) describes storytelling as a peacebuilding method but distinguishes it from narratives, yet both serve the purpose of transmitting the culture, morals, traditions and ethos of a particular group including beliefs about peace or violence. In this study, nonetheless, storytelling and narratives are used interchangeably.

Storytelling is also an auspicious method of analysing conflict and peace dynamics in society. This is because it helps communities to understand new meanings and concepts as well as complex issues through its interactive, participatory and immersive techniques (Ataci, 2017). Linabary, Krishna and Connaughton (2017) posit that storytelling serves as a community-based participatory research method to encourage a relational orientation and the co-construction of meaning, as well as inspire transformation among local citizens, particularly in conflict situations and peacebuilding contexts.

Oh et al. (2020) investigated the effect of interactive storytelling from both theoretical and practical perspectives and concluded that interactive storytelling provides users with two-way, reciprocal communication with the story by allowing them to control its narrative flow. This sense of control, they argue, is significant in resolving conflicts as it empowers both parties.

According to Oliver (2002), community-based approaches such as storytelling seek to empower local community groups and institutions by giving the community direct control over decisions, planning, execution and monitoring, through a process that emphasises inclusive participation. Haider (2009: 7) also argues that to have community support and to achieve holistic peacebuilding, local actors, including the marginalised, should be involved. Mandikwaza (2018) demonstrates how *nhimbe*¹ platforms in Zimbabwe promote community peace and social cohesion by empowering communities to become tolerant, mend individual and community relations and, ultimately, reconcile their past disputes. Anyeko and Hoffmann (2020) also argue that storytelling can be a powerful tool for peacebuilding, and demonstrate how a storytelling project helped women traumatised by war in Northern Uganda develop a sense of agency – to call for their rights, to pursue justice and to make sense of their experiences.

While storytelling may seem by definition small-scale and therefore insignificant, it has the potential to be empowering because it is profoundly accessible (Senehi 2002). First, storytelling invites a paradigm shift; it catalyses a transformation. Second, because it requires no special equipment or training, storytelling is technically and intellectually accessible, and therefore potentially empowering. However, stories operate within a context of ideological, economic and power constraints which must be considered in their application.

Sometimes, there is silence or unawareness around conflict issues. Groups sharing a certain difficult situation or set of experiences may literally establish a community-base, power-base, and knowledge-base through sharing their stories (Plummer, 1995). Senehi (2002) distinguishes between constructive storytelling and destructive storytelling.

¹ a traditional Shona practice of working together as a community to help each other in daily tasks such as harvesting, weeding fields, constructing a house, gathering manure or other tasks.

Constructive storytelling is associated with positive peace; destructive storytelling is associated with its antithesis. Destructive storytelling is associated with coercive power (“power over” rather than “power with”), exclusionary practices, a lack of mutual recognition, dishonesty and a lack of awareness. Destructive storytelling sustains mistrust and denial. Constructive storytelling is inclusive and fosters collaborative power and mutual recognition; creates opportunities for openness, dialogue and insight; a means to bring issues to consciousness; and a means of resistance. Dieter (2016) puts emphasis on voices that were not listened to, ignored and not acknowledged during the conflict.

Using students at Ball university, Warren-Gordon (2020) demonstrates that storytelling is intended to create understanding and empathy and that stories provide tools, a platform and inspiration for individuals and communities to share their experiences, connect across differences and begin crucial conversations. Storytelling through critical social learning works to redistribute power, allowing community partners to have a voice, and incorporates a social change component leading to the development of trust and authentic relationships (Warren-Gordon, 2020). Authentic relationships enable communities to co-exist and tolerate each other during all forms of conflicts including electoral conflicts. Warren-Gordon (2020) further proposes that this approach deepens relationships between community members and other stakeholders as they are able to share long-range goals and community values. It is this view that has motivated this study with the assumption that it is exactly what CMCs require to successfully resolve electoral conflicts and build community peace.

McKenna (1997, cited in Senehi, 2002) states that all stories have the purpose of “transformation, conversion or change.” Stories are about envisioning what should be, in order to shape social thought and action to bring that about. But stories are also often tied to geographic places which have cultural and symbolic significance for persons and particular communities (Lane, 1988). Some authors emphasise the importance of storytelling from the listening perspective. Storytelling is dyadic in that the listening aspect of storytelling is also an essential element (Ann and Carr, 2011).

Storytelling in the context of truth commissions, dialogue groups, or interpersonal communication can be a means of facing history and healing in the aftermath of inter-

communal violence (e.g., Bar-On, 2000; Minow, 1998). Rohse (2013) explores the role that stories can play in the process of conflict transformation but does not apply it to the African context. She cautions that storytelling or stories can hide power relations and stereotypes and they can be manipulated by the dominating groups to maintain the status quo and keep them in power. However, local methods in Africa have been used such as the *gacaca* in post-genocide Rwanda and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa after the apartheid era (Wielenga, 2017) and proved worthwhile.

In previous studies, it was noted that one way in which participants in deliberative discussions manage their differences is to tell stories (Black, 2008; Ryfe, 2006). Yet, many researchers have not closely examined the community conflict dynamics involved in such storytelling. While many authors have written about storytelling and its different roles, the same has not been applied in the context of the current study and the nature of the conflict under exploration. Thus, this study is significant because it adds different perspectives to the storytelling discourse by way of making a contribution to new knowledge in peacebuilding practice for local electoral conflicts.

The study was conceived in light of the continued limited formal democratic spaces available for all political parties and citizens in Zambia to address their electoral problems and the increasing violence during the successive electoral cycles. Evidence from various studies shows that storytelling could have a role in creating dialogic spaces (Black, 2008, Böhme, 2020, Heinemeyer, 2020). Such spaces are crucial for members of the public and political parties to discuss their electoral disputes. Other researchers have argued that storytelling and stories are a participatory method in the context of community peacebuilding (Ataci, 2017, Charles and Fowler-Watt, 2023, Linabary, Krishna and Connaughton, 2017, Senehi, 2008). This study interrogates the value that community-based storytelling can have in the mediation processes by the CMCs in Zambia.

Hearing the stories of the other and learning more about their concerns and anxieties relating to the electoral process by the communities in Chongwe district can change the perceptions of the represented communities on both sides and transform the conflicts and offer lessons for similar conflict situations in the country and elsewhere. The spaces for such engagement with the other side have not taken advantage of storytelling and stories

but rather focus on winning the conflict. This has narrowed the opportunities for learning about each other's concerns in order to address the differences in the electoral process at community level.

All the above attributes of storytelling are interlinked to the theories that have been used in this study. Social learning theory developed by Bandura (1977) was perceived as an appropriate model through which to understand how the communities could teach and learn from storytelling and its mental images to become part of the peacebuilding efforts. Effective use of storytelling is part of the social learning theory as it is just another way to make learning memorable. The theory suggests that when people start talking about something, they usually relate it to their personal experiences and when shared with other people, they connect with it, too. This provides opportunities for collaboration and encourages knowledge sharing and support among learners or community members.

The study was also complemented by the transformative theory by Lederach (2003) which addresses the creation of change in organising social structures, from families to complex bureaucracies. Storytelling is an effective tool for transforming negative energy into something constructive, especially in settings where oral tradition is strong. The entire process of storytelling can carry the whole community to an awareness of history with a strong appreciation of their individual and societal resilience. The experience of telling stories enables a community to plan and implement the course of action that people want to undertake, and further affirms their being active participants in social healing and community-building (Al Fiertes, 2012).

The study further employed the group contact theory by Allport (1954) which postulates that most conflicts involve prejudicial attitudes that need transforming into inclusivity and accepting diversity as something beneficial and interesting, not something to fear. Storytelling allows conflict parties to share the space of each other in a verbal, visual and affective manner when they share stories. Understanding the attitudes that arise due to group contact is a vital link to the storytelling peacebuilding model.

Furthermore, the above theories are also interrelated to each other in that for transformation to occur, there is a need for learning and contact between parties to a conflict. The storytelling approach links them in a logical manner.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

1.7.1 Research Approach

The study was an action research (AR) where there was collaboration and participation by those involved in the electoral conflicts in Madido ward of Chongwe, CMC mediators and the researcher. It is an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The communities of the complainant and the defendant as well as other stakeholders were mobilised to take part in the conversations around the electoral conflicts that occurred in the 2021 general elections in Chongwe. The study assesses the experiences and perceptions of how the CMCs mediate the selected cases of electoral conflicts with the use of storytelling in the process. The study depended on the 2021 elections for purposes of establishing the baseline for the electoral conflicts mediated by the CMC in Chongwe and used it to create contact and relationships with the CMC.

1.7.2 Research Design

The research design was qualitative and took place in an uncontrolled and natural setting. Alberto and Guiditta (2019:431) state that qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. Qualitative research was preferred because of its ability to collect in-depth data from small group settings (Creswell, 2013). The design involved collection of both primary and secondary data.

1.7.3 Sample Size and Target Population

The study employed purposive sampling and selected 38 participants in the Chongwe constituency. The selection was based on having participated in the CMC mediation sessions and whether one was an eligible voter coming from the communities of the conflict parties. The study also selected from key informants who have knowledge and understanding of the operations of the CMCs and electoral conflicts. Chongwe constituency had a population of 94 677 registered voters in 2021.

Table 1: Study sample

Method of data collection	Population description	Population	Required sample
Focus Group Discussions	Complainant's Community members	05 x 8= 40	01 x 8= 08
	Defendant's community members	05 x 8=40	01 x 8=08
	Joint group of complainant and defendant members communities	10x 80	01x 8=08
Personal Narratives	Complainants	03	01
	Defendants	03	01
	Neutral observers	05	01
Key informants	CMC members	10	02
	Journalist	10	01
	Policemen	03	01
	Election monitors	10	02
	Political analysts	05	02
	Human right commission rep	05	01
Observation	Others	05	01
Case record review	Received Complaints at CDCMC	03	01

	Total		38
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The voters' register was used to identify the potential participants and their contacts. Participants were identified through the complainant and defendant's communities and an equal number of members in each of the two communities was invited to participate based on non-probability sampling. Consent was obtained and participants signed consent forms. It was also at that point that their contact details were obtained.

Other participants were identified based on their special knowledge or involvement with the mediation process in the Chongwe or another district's CMC. Their contacts were obtained from ECZ and CDCMC.

Once the participants were identified, the researcher approached the participants directly. A letter of information was given to them and they were asked to decide on whether or not they wished to participate voluntarily. The participants were initially referred to the researcher by the CMC for purposes of forming the AR Team and by members of the community. During the meetings, light refreshments of soft drinks and biscuits were provided.

Storytelling intervention sessions were carried out after follow-up of the selected mediated cases in the communities. It was a continuation of the conflicts that were taken for mediation. For this study, however, the selected case was the only one out of the three reported which was resolved and closed. Community leaders and others close to the conflict were approached. The data which was collected was about how the conflicting communities in Madido ward perceive the mediation processes by the CMCs and their possible role to help build peace for everyone instead of only the affected parties. The advantage of storytelling was that it was conducted in an informal and familiar manner which enabled participants to interact and express themselves freely. Representatives of the community for the action research were chosen on the basis of their knowledge of the conflict, location and proximity to the affected parties.

1.7.4 Data-Collection Methods

As stated above, the study used qualitative methods of collecting data. The data-collection methods that were used were focus group discussions, key informant interviews, personal narratives, a case record review and observation.

The researcher conducted three focus group discussions (FGDs). The first and second FGDs comprised eight participants each from the complainant (first) and defendant member's communities (second). The third FGD comprised representatives chosen from each community to tell their side of the story in a joint session of the two communities. This happened at the intervention level. The FGDs were held in the communities of the complainant and defendant while the joint FGD was held at a neutral place outside the two communities. The venues in the communities were central and easy to access. In this study the big tree near the market provided the meeting venue. The duration of the FGD interviews ranged between 60 and 120 minutes. The FGDs were largely designed to answer objectives one and two of the study which sought to explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling including the nature of community electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appear before the CMC and to analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC.

The key informants were purposively sampled because of their position, special knowledge or history about the electoral conflicts, processes, rules and regulations. Nine key informants were interviewed from the selected clusters in the target population above. These were one-on-one interviews via physical contact or digital platforms. The interviews with key informants were separate and the participants did not participate in the FGDs. This approach enabled the researcher to triangulate the data collected objectively after the field research. This method was designed to address objective two of the study which was to analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC.

In-depth personal narratives of the complainant, the defendant and a neutral party were arranged and documented to understand and appreciate their feelings and perceptions of the mediation process by the CMC. A case record review of the conflict was carried out as a follow up to ascertain whether co-existence and reconciliation was achieved through

the CMC mediation efforts that were carried out. These two methods were used to respond to objective one and two of the study.

Through the discussions and interview sessions, the researcher took field notes and recorded the data using a recorder.

A review of literature provided insights into documented evidence about the storytelling approach to peacebuilding in the electoral process. The researcher also used the observation method to understand the dynamics in the mediation process and communities. The researcher observed the process, situation, behaviours, patterns of interactions, setting of place and looked out for verbal and bodily reactions of participants to the stories of others including how communities took positions about the issues under discussion. This method, alongside FGDs, responded to objective three, which used action research to implement the storytelling peacebuilding intervention in the community. The observation method helped significantly to locate where the storytelling technique would effectively fit in. Furthermore, the observation method, together with the FGDs were also used to respond to objective four which was designed to carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected communities.

1.7.5 Precautions against Covid-19

The researcher took all reasonable measures to adhere to Covid -19 WHO and Zambian guidelines in place at the time of data collection to ensure that the study did not risk the participants in the study. The researcher also observed social distancing, hand sanitising and masking among other measures. Where it was not possible to carry out face-to-face meetings, electronic means to facilitate the consent process and data collection were employed such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Teams or Skype.

1.7.6 Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse the data that was collected from FGDs, key informant interviews, personal narratives, case record review, observations or textual sources. The data was grouped into themes and then interpreted for meaning. This

method helped to understand general themes in the data and how they are communicated. According to Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) thematic data analysis focuses on examining themes and explores explicit as well as implicit meanings within the data. The qualitative data from the interviews was systematically organised and arranged in order of importance and based on the interviewee's ranking of the importance of storytelling technique in their efforts to prevent or manage electoral conflicts in their community. This analysis started with unstructured data; and then organised the data and interpreted meaning in order to attain detailed and comprehensive understanding of the approach to community peacebuilding in the context of CMCs.

1.7.7 Action Based on Data

Using the information from the data collected and reviewed from current literature, the researcher designed a plan of action. The plan included the formation of two community groups representing the complainant and the defendant, through a follow up of a case mediated by the CMC. Once the two communities had been engaged and had narrated their stories, each community was asked to choose representatives to be part of a single joint "CMC community" that would hear the stories from each side that was represented. This was the community the researcher worked with in conjunction with the CMC. The action was intended to persuade CMC members that the mediation process must end with the community rather than individuals involved alone. It is this goal that the study intended to achieve. During the implementation of the intervention, the researcher documented and collected data on its performance.

1.7.8 Evaluation of the Outcome

The researcher assessed the effects of the intervention to determine if improvement through community cooperation on electoral conflicts had occurred. In terms of the outcome, the researcher was able to ascertain whether the data collected clearly provided the supporting evidence and identified what changes could be made to the action to elicit better results.

1.8 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.8.1 Delimitation of the Study

This study was carried out in Chongwe constituency and focused on purposively selected participants coming from different backgrounds. The selection considered factors such as eligibility to vote, diversity across language, education, gender, religion, political affiliation or other characteristics.

Before the main study was undertaken, the researcher carried out a pilot study to test the data-collection instruments. The participants were purposively selected to enhance the balance of representation in the meetings. The participants were directly approached just as was the case for the actual study. None of the participants interviewed during the pilot stage were part of the main study.

1.8.2 Limitations

The study only focused on those complained of and their accusers and the communities they hailed from. As a result, the findings may not be generalised to the other parts of the country although lessons will be learned for application to other areas.

1.8.3 Validity and Reliability

To ensure consistency and accuracy of the data collected, data triangulation from the various sources stated in the research design was undertaken. This was done so that the information collected was tested for reliability and validity. In qualitative research data, validity refers to the integrity and application of the methods undertaken and the precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data, while reliability describes consistency within the employed analytical procedures. (Long & Johnson, 2000).

The researcher conducted follow up meetings with stakeholders in the study and ensured that their narratives were consistent. This was done to check the validity and reliability of the data. Bi-monthly follow-ups were undertaken for this purpose. In short, triangulation, prolonged engagement with data, persistent observation, member checks and referential adequacy procedures were applied to enhance the credibility of the study data.

1.8.4 Ethical Considerations

The study also addressed ethical issues as highlighted in this segment. Ethical approval was given by the Institutional Ethics Committee of the Durban University of Technology. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the merits, the participant's rights and the processes involved in the research. The researcher sought a gatekeeper's letter from the ECZ for purposes of collaboration on this study. Participation was voluntary; therefore, no incentive was provided for participation, and participants were informed that they could drop out of the study with no explanation. In order to protect the identity of the participants, data was handled in a professional manner by giving pseudonyms to all study participants. In addition, data collected, that is, recordings and transcripts are stored safely in password folders so that those who are not meant to see it will not have access at all. However, anonymity and confidentiality among the action research team was not ensured since they were working together and needed to know each other. All written and audio data is safely kept by the researcher at his home in a locked cupboard for a period of five years as stipulated by the university rules. Thereafter, all the collected materials whether written or audio will be destroyed.

1.8.5 Inclusion and Exclusion

Participants included in the study were those who met the selection criteria. Participants excluded were those who did not fulfil the needed criteria. This was more about eligibility to vote or not

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Zambia has repeatedly experienced escalating levels of political and electoral violence before elections. Despite the efforts, inter-party electoral conflicts such as hate speech, pulling down opponents' campaign materials, and physical clashes continue to characterise the electoral process. This study attempts to provide significant insight into the possibility of integrating storytelling as a community-based platform in the mediation and reconciliation process of these conflicts by the Chongwe CMC in Chongwe constituency. The study is important as it has contributed to the achievement of the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. (United Nations, 2016). The study was significant in that it contributes to new knowledge and peace practice with regard to electoral conflicts in Zambia and elsewhere.

The study was justified because it is based on exploration of a practice which is Indigenous and culturally sustainable in Zambia. Storytelling is anchored in traditional Zambian values and was easy to implement through AR since it is part of the societal practices.

Through storytelling, this thesis sought to contribute to strengthening and diversifying the CMC approach to the current practice of electoral conflict management and peacebuilding in Zambia. The thesis investigated how storytelling as a local community resource can contribute to the improvement of the quality of electoral conflict mediation and peacebuilding using the CMCs. By investigating how storytelling can play a role in electoral conflict mediation and peacebuilding, this thesis focuses on space and relationality through embodied interactions in local community story-based peacebuilding efforts in Madido ward in Chongwe district of Zambia. The research was premised on exploring utilisation of storytelling as a mediation tool for electoral conflict resolution and community peacebuilding by the Chongwe District CMC in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. The research problem for the study was a weak CMC community focus and the under-utilisation or lack of exploitation of the potential and actual application of the storytelling aspects of mediation which can be capitalised upon by the CMC during electoral conflict management and peacebuilding sessions to improve the quality of electoral conflict mediation by CMCs. Storytelling activates several ways to discern, create and understand space, relationality and dialogue. Through these personified ways of knowing, storytelling adds diverse approaches and knowledge to increase the range of peacebuilding practice and research. Storytelling activities offer creative opportunities for diverse participants to engage in peacebuilding efforts through both verbal and non-verbal forms of embodied learning. These activities allow individuals to explore their own identities and those of others involved in conflict, both in a theoretical, abstract sense and

through physical, experiential engagement. Learning through empathy and sympathy while giving expression to the emotions is increasingly a valued approach in peacebuilding, yet there are gaps in understanding and practice.

With a sample of voters, electoral stakeholders and the CMC, the researcher explored their perceptions of how they used storytelling during the CMC sessions and whether it can be improved. The researcher believed that a better understanding of the storytelling phenomenon would allow CMCs to diversify their electoral conflict mediation, thereby improving the quality of community peacebuilding, reconciliation and transformation practice.

Ultimately this study contributes to new knowledge and practice about community peacebuilding on electoral issues by the CMCs. This is true considering that the study focuses on an aspect of CMC electoral conflict mediation – storytelling – which is casually treated in the process and yet critical for the electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding discourse in the context of Zambia.

1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

1.10.1 Part I: Introduction

Chapter 1 provides the background to the study, the aims and objectives of the study and the overview of the entire thesis.

1.10.2 Part II: Review of Related Literature

Chapter 2 addresses the conceptual issues and theoretical frameworks around which the study was anchored. It explores some terminologies and their usage in the study. The chapter also discusses the available peace infrastructures in the electoral process. It further addresses the liberal peace approach.

Chapter 3 explores the political context of elections and provides an overview of conflicts in the electoral process and system in Zambia. The chapter specifically focuses on the 2021 general elections to examine the conflicts and the practice of electoral conflict management.

Chapter 4 discusses storytelling as a tool for community peacebuilding. In particular, it focuses on its context, purposes, power and limitations. The chapter briefly reviews storytelling as social constructivism and goes on to provide examples where storytelling has been applied for purposes of peacebuilding. This chapter further discusses the practice of storytelling and its significance as a traditional practice in community peacebuilding.

1.10.3 Part III: Research Methodology

Chapter 5 describes the research design, methodology, and data-collection methods that were employed in this study as well as the measures that were put in place to ensure reliability and validity of the data collected. This study was a qualitative study based on action research.

1.10.4 Part IV: Results and Discussion

Chapter 6 explores data presentation and analysis on the themes relating to community electoral conflicts, storytelling and CMCs.

Chapter 7 discusses data relating to usage of storytelling to improve the process of electoral conflict mediation by the CMCs and ponders the remodelling of CMCs as well as examination of the prospects of integrating storytelling into electoral conflict mediation.

Chapter 8 explores data presentation and analysis on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding and the risks attendant thereto.

1.10.5 Part V: Action Intervention

Chapter 9 presents the storytelling action intervention and its linkage to the mediation by the CMC. The chapter describes the community in which the research was undertaken, the selection of the participants and the ethical considerations, the implementation of the intervention activities and possible reasons why this intervention strategy was preferred including the immediate outcomes of the intervention.

1.10.6 Part VI: Conclusion, Reflections and Recommendations

Chapter 10 provides the summary of the whole study, research process, conclusion and presents some recommendations and areas for further study.

PART II: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Mother Theresa

This study seeks to determine the extent to which stories can be effectively applied to manage electoral conflicts and help community peacebuilding. The study focuses on CMCs in Zambia to demonstrate the theoretical underpinnings of the storytelling model and how it interacts with electoral conflict management in practice. This part of the study reviews the literature by other scholars and writers relating to the study.

The literature review is organised under the following chapters:

Chapter 2 addresses the conceptual issues and theoretical frameworks around which the study was anchored. It explores conflict management, resolution and transformation, contact and social learning theories and their applicability to the study on utilisation of storytelling during the resolution of electoral conflicts in the context of the CMCs. The chapter also discusses relevant concepts, paradigms and the available infrastructures of peace for resolution of electoral conflicts and their praxis.

Chapter 3 explores the electoral system and process in Zambia and the context in which electoral conflicts occur. The chapter traces the evolution and nature of electoral conflicts and political violence through Zambia’s three Republics. It specifically focuses on the 2021 general elections to examine the conflicts, practice of electoral conflict management and the utilisation of storytelling as a means of resolving conflicts.

Chapter 4 discusses storytelling, its understanding, context, purposes, power and limitations as a tool for community peacebuilding and management of conflicts and provides examples where it has been applied. It discusses the dichotomy of storytelling and its significance as a traditional practice in community peacebuilding. The chapter discusses community peacebuilding through storytelling in the context of peacebuilding from below.

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The intention of this chapter is to introduce the conceptual issues and theoretical paradigms that inform and undergird this study. The chapter highlights the relevant concepts and paradigms used in this study and reviews the available infrastructures for peace in respect of electoral conflicts.

In examining the peacebuilding literature, several concepts are discussed but those in this chapter relate to their application in this study. Peace theorists in the current era stress the concepts of social harmony, non-violence, justice, security, and order in line with transformative peacemaking and peacekeeping (Webel & Galtung, 2007; Ndeche & Iroye, 2022). This study, however, emphasises its own concepts in line with community peacebuilding for purposes of clarity.

Three theoretical views emerged as relevant to the study. These are conflict transformation, intergroup contact and social learning theories. According to Leshem and Halperin (2020), the management of conflicts or peacebuilding theories is based on the relative strengths of three meanings or interpretations of peace, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, corresponding to “the end of war” (negative peace), “harmonious relationship” (positive peace), and “justice” (structural peace). The latter two conceptions are more relevant to this study.

A number of other theoretical constructs could have been appropriate for this study, such as Galtung’s theory of conflict, violence and peace (Galtung, 2005; 2009; 2018), Conflict theory (Marx & Engels, 1848) or theory of justice (Rawls, 1971; 1999). These have not been applied because their utility in AR studies is limited by their inability to turn the theories into more discernible action which is a critical element of this study.

In contrast, conflict transformation, intergroup contact and social learning theories enable researchers not only to analyse multi-layered subtleties of conflict, justice and harmonious relationships in societies but also create different perspectives of local and national conflicts in ways that are empowering and transforming such as in storytelling.

2.2 CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

2.2.1 Why Resolve Electoral Conflicts?

According to Mbugua (2006), the rationale for resolving electoral conflicts is not to compel the parties to conform to the same political ideologies, persuasions or worldviews. Neither is the rationale to compel disputing parties to adopt similar perspectives and approaches to political issues, or articulate similar political viewpoints. The rationale for resolving electoral conflicts is to encourage stakeholders in the electoral process and conflicting parties in a particular polity to co-exist peacefully despite their different worldviews, political biases and ideologies. This would enable elections to be free, fair and peaceful, thereby enabling community development. It is this view of why we need to resolve electoral conflicts that has guided this study.

2.2.2 Understanding Conflict Management, Resolution and Transformation

To begin with, conflict management can be defined as the process of dealing with (perceived) incompatibilities or disagreements arising from, for example, diverging opinions, objectives, and needs (de Wit, 2024). According to this author, “effective conflict management techniques limit or prevent undesirable effects of conflict, while enhancing potential beneficial effects, without necessarily solving the conflict. It is the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence”. This perspective advocates for methods to address conflict rather than removing it (Magasu, 2022). On the other hand, conflict resolution is the process of bringing disputes to an end and removing the identified causes or triggers of conflicts and their forms of expression (Nnaemeka, 2019). Nnaemeka adds that the fundamental aim of conflict resolution is the achievement of peace between parties to disputes.

Lederach (2014) has distinguished conflict resolution from conflict transformation but argues that both conflict resolution and conflict transformation claim to be process-oriented. He says resolution, however, sees the development of process as centred on the immediacy of the relationship where the symptoms of crisis and disruption take place whereas transformation envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity to engage a broader context, to explore and understand the system of relationships and patterns that gave birth to the crisis. It seeks to address both the immediate issues and the system of relational patterns.

Transformation actively pursues a crisis-responsive approach rather than one that is crisis-driven. The impulse to resolve leads toward providing short-term relief to pain and anxiety by negotiating answers to present problems. Those answers may or may not deal with the deeper context and patterns of relationships which caused the problems (Lederach, 2014).

Resolution has tended to focus primarily on methods for de-escalating. Transformation involves both de-escalating and engaging conflict, and even escalating in pursuit of constructive change. Constructive change requires a variety of roles, functions and processes, some of which may push conflict out into the open (Lederach, 2014).

According to Lederach (2014) transformation includes, but is not bound by, the contributions and approaches proposed by resolution-based language. It goes beyond a process focused on the resolution of a particular problem or episode of conflict to seek the epicentre of conflict. An episode of conflict is the visible expression of conflict rising within the relationship or system, usually within a distinct time frame. It generates attention and energy around a particular set of issues that need a response. The epicentre of conflict is the web of relational patterns, often providing a history of lived episodes, from which new episodes and issues emerge. If the episode releases conflict energy in the relationship, the epicentre is where the energy is produced. Transformation addresses both the episode and the epicentre of conflict.

This understanding and expression of the terms by Lederach are adopted in this study and is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of conflict resolution and conflict transformation

Conflict Resolution and Conflict Transformation: A Brief Comparison of Perspectives		
	Conflict Resolution Perspective	Conflict Transformation Perspective
The key question	How do we end something not desired?	How do we end something destructive and build something desired?
The focus	It is content-centred.	It is relationship centred.
The purpose	To achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crisis.	To promote constructive change processes, inclusive of, but not limited to, immediate solutions.
The development of the process	It is embedded and built around the immediacy of the relationship where the symptoms of disruptions appear.	It envisions the presenting problem as an opportunity for response to symptoms and engagement of systems within which relationships are embedded.
Time frame	The horizon is short-term relief to pain, anxiety and difficulties.	The horizon for change is mid- to long-range and is intentionally crisis-responsive rather than crisis-driven.
View of conflict	It envisions the need to de-escalate conflict processes.	It envisions conflict as an ecology that is relationally dynamic with ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change).

Source: Lederach (2014)

2.2.3 Psychology of Learning

This concept elicits why different methods of learning evoke different levels of understanding and emotions. In this study, it helps to appreciate the use of storytelling as both a learning and healing process in peacebuilding. Written words alone are insufficient because what is hoped for is that deeper understanding of what is needed, the deeper concepts of justice, forgiveness and apologies are evoked with storytelling. Visual images evoke different emotions than audio alone. Storytelling combines both visual and audio:

the person telling the story can see the other, and the listener sees the storyteller. Both provide non-verbal cues as to what they are thinking. The assumption here is that the non-verbal cues say more than the verbal, and this must be taken into account when engaging storytelling as a peacebuilding method.

2.2.4 Categories of Resolving Conflicts

According to Nnaemeka (2019), methods of conflict resolution can be broadly categorised into two: proactive and reactive. Proactive methods deal with preventing the occurrence of conflict while reactive refers to responses to conflict situations. He suggests that proactive methods include good governance, trust and confidence building, communication and inter-party collaboration whereas reactive methods respond to an event that has taken place such as the complaints that are made to the CMCs. These methods are mediation, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, mini-trials, litigation, crisis management or law enforcement and expert determination. This study leans towards proactive methods of resolving conflicts.

2.2.5 Mediation

In terms of the current study, mediation has more relevance to the study in that the CMCs mediate between or among the disputants under the auspices of the ECZ.

Mediation is a third-party intervention process that aims at helping the parties to a dispute reconcile their difference, reach a compromise and attain settlement of their conflict (Nnaemeka, 2019). In mediation, a neutral third party tries to help disputants resolve disagreements and negotiate settlement. Mediation focuses on the interests, needs and rights of the parties to the conflict. The mediator manages the interaction between the parties and facilitates open communication and dialogue. Usually, parties to a conflict accept that they have a conflict situation and are willing and committed to resolving it. The mediator then provides assistance and creates an enabling environment for parties to the dispute to iron out their differences (Nnaemeka, 2019). In this study, the mediator is the CMC.

As mediation takes centre stage in the realm of the CMCs' work, operating under the auspices of the ECZ, it intertwines with the art of storytelling, first from the disputants and then the mediator who weaves narratives that guide the parties toward reconciliation. Amidst the tension of conflicting interests, the CMC should play the role of a storyteller, crafting a narrative of understanding and compromise. Through this narrative, the mediator becomes a conduit for the parties' voices, guiding them through the intricacies of their dispute with tales of common ground and shared aspirations to reach a compromise and attain settlement of their conflict.

Ideally, as the mediator delicately manages the dialogue, the disputants find themselves immersed in a story of mutual recognition, where their interests, needs and rights are illuminated. With each exchanged tale, the mediator fosters an environment where communication flows freely, unearthing the underlying narratives that fuel the conflict (Morgan, 2019). In this narrative-driven mediation, the parties acknowledge the conflict, yet embrace the opportunity to co-author a new chapter of resolution (Corbitt, 2023).

Mediation is a voluntary process. The mediator does not impose any resolution on the disputants but they make what is called a mediator's proposal which may be accepted, modified or rejected. Mediation facilitates resolution of conflicts through opening avenues for reconciliation by neutral third party (Jewett, 2019)

Wils et al. (2006) and Nganje, (2021) argue that for mediation to contribute to positive change, third-party interventions must seek to: constructively transform conflict systems; support processes of comprehensive social change; allow local actors to drive social change through an inclusive approach; and deal with the power asymmetries that hamper a transformation in relationships between actors in the political system. This in turn would bring about justice. While the aim of the CMCs in Zambia is to achieve the above, they seem to focus on reactive conflict resolution which ends the dispute by reconciling the disputants in the short term. This study inclines itself towards proactive responses to electoral conflicts.

2.2.6 Justice

Justice is an intrinsic part of peace. However, while parties to a dispute may accept the resolution of an electoral conflict by the CMC, the process is always laced with notions of whether justice has been meted out. The concept of justice is fundamental to human behaviour and the functioning of institutions. It serves as a cornerstone of social order, establishing a framework within which individuals and communities can co-exist harmoniously based on trust (Cugueró-Escofet, 2021). Trust in institutions, particularly electoral bodies and governments, is closely tied to perceptions of justice. Unjust practices, especially in the electoral process, can undermine the perceived legitimacy of elected authorities, leading to resistance and instability in society.

Justice is intimately linked to the protection of human rights and the promotion of equality. Elections, as a fundamental expression of democratic principles, require fairness to avoid violations of the right to participate in governance. Societies that prioritise justice are more likely to achieve long-term stability and sustainable development. In the aftermath of elections, ensuring a just resolution to disputes and addressing any irregularities promptly can help prevent social unrest and violent conflicts. The concept of justice is intertwined with the fabric of human behaviour and institutions, contributing to the overall wellbeing of a society (Sznycer et al., 2023). In this study, justice is the promotion of free and fair elections through upholding the provisions of the ECC by all stakeholders in the electoral process.

2.2.7 Reconciliation

Reconciliation often denotes restoration, which suggests a return to the status quo ante, that is, the state of affairs before the wrong or conflict in question (Radzik & Murphy, 2023). The term reconciliation makes reference either to a process or to an outcome or goal.

For purposes of this study, reconciliation is a series of actions that characterise an improvement in the relationship between two or more parties who were previously in conflict. A relationship with another party consists of patterns of interaction, the attitudes

one tends to take toward that party, and the expectations of and beliefs about the other that one makes. Reconciliation has as its goal improved relationships.

2.2.8 Apologies

In this study, apologies are understood as possibly the greatest explicit way in which wrongdoing can be acknowledged. A well-formed apology requires at least acknowledgement of both the fact of wrongdoing and responsibility by the wrongdoer, as well as an expression of regret or remorse (Tavuchis, 1993). Ideally, the wrongdoer should directly address the victim although this is not possible in all cases, as when victims have passed away. However, apologies can be made to indirect victims, such as the families of the deceased, as well as apologies performed before broader interested communities.

Apologies are important, not merely as acknowledgements of past wrongdoing or gestures of respect to victims, but also as providing evidence of a positive change in the wrongdoer or in the wrongdoers' group. Parties who have come to take responsibility for and repudiate past wrongful actions are better candidates for renewed relationships of cooperation and trust (de Greiff, 2008).

2.2.9 Forgiveness

The common conceptions of forgiveness by many contemporary philosophers are that the resumption of relationships disturbed by wrongdoing often requires a moral reassessment of the wrongdoer by the victim, and that such a reassessment involves relinquishing resentment or some other form of morally inflected anger (Murphy & Hampton 1988; Murphy, 2003), or behaviour, such as seeking revenge (Griswold, 2007; Hughes, 2016; Zaibert, 2009).

Forgiving those who wrong us often helps us move beyond strong negative emotions which, if allowed to fester, could harm us psychologically and physically. Forgiveness benefits wrongdoers, as well, by releasing them from the blame and hard feelings often directed toward them by those they wrong or helping them transcend the guilt or remorse

they suffer from having done wrong, thereby allowing them to move forward in their lives (Radzik & Murphy, 2023).

In this study, it implies having no hard feelings towards the offender as an individual as well as between the communities where the disputants live.

2.2.10 Peacebuilding

Drawing from Galtung's ideas of "negative" and "positive" peace, peacebuilding often demonstrates formal processes such as peace negotiations, nation-building, and elections (Galtung & Jacobsen, 2002; United Nations System Staff College, 2011). The UN document *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) defines peacebuilding as an "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid relapse into conflict" (United Nations, 1992:11). In this study, peacebuilding entails the avoidance of similar electoral conflicts in the subsequent electoral cycles through community responsibility, participation, accountability and ownership of the electoral processes.

2.2.11 Storytelling

Storytelling involves the oral sharing of personal, biographical, traditional and historical stories as a way to develop greater understanding about the values, history and traditions that motivate individual and group behaviour and customs (Senehi, 2002). In this regard, storytelling must be understood as a custom and tradition which is connoted within the set rules and standards in the electoral mediation process.

2.3 ELECTORAL CONFLICTS AND PEACE INFRASTRUCTURES

In order to understand and address the various types of electoral conflicts, there is need to assess the available infrastructures of peace which can respond to these conflicts. As Lederach (1997: xvi) points out, the creation of "enduring infrastructure[s] across all levels of society ... that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society while maximising the contribution from outside" is critical for lasting peace in the community.

Providing a foundation for the preceding statement, Funk (2012:398) highlights that the transition between the discussion on electoral conflicts and infrastructures for peace (I4Ps) is rooted in “understanding peace as a locally constructed reality, viewing culture as a resource rather than as a constraint or afterthought, and recognising that outsiders are most likely to make positive contributions when they act as facilitators or midwives rather than headmasters”. Peace is therefore understood as a locally constructed reality highlighting the importance of acknowledging culture as a resource in peacebuilding. The value of storytelling, deeply embedded in local cultures, emerges as a means to understand and address conflicts, including those related to electoral processes. That is why it has been selected for this study.

Building upon the understanding of the above conceptual issues, the discussion now shifts to infrastructures for peace (I4Ps) in the context of conflict in the electoral processes and systems. By recognising the significance of local narratives and cultural dynamics in shaping peacebuilding efforts, the exploration of I4Ps in the electoral sphere becomes a natural progression. This transition underscores the need to develop mechanisms and networks that facilitate collaboration among diverse stakeholders, using local knowledge and cultural insights to promote peaceful electoral practices. Thus, the link between the two points lies in the recognition of local perspectives and narratives as foundational elements in both understanding conflict dynamics and designing effective peacebuilding strategies within electoral contexts.

2.3.1 Infrastructures for Peace

Infrastructures for Peace (I4Ps) are diverse in form and purpose. They can be established at any stage of a peace process and across all levels of peacebuilding. Two primary approaches govern their formation – top-down and bottom-up – with an additional hybrid approach that combines elements of both (Richmond, 2013). In the bottom-up approach, initiatives and committees naturally emerge from the grassroots level, facilitated by local communities and CSOs (Verzat, 2014). This method ensures the active involvement of those directly impacted by conflicts, fostering sustainable and community-driven solutions. Conversely, the top-down approach involves governments establishing peace-related institutions, policies and platforms on a national scale, offering resources and

institutional support (Davis, 2016). The effectiveness of this approach hinges on factors such as inclusivity, responsiveness and collaboration with local communities. Hybrid approaches strategically amalgamate top-down and bottom-up strategies, capitalising on the strengths of both governance levels (Mac Ginty, 2010). By striking a balance between national-level policies and grassroots initiatives, these hybrid approaches contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding process.

Infrastructures for Peace are perceived to be nationally owned and driven institutions, processes and policies that help design, support and enhance social resilience to violent conflict (Giessmann, 2016). Giessmann observes that most definitions however include reference to a dynamic set or network of skills, capacities, resources, tools and institutions that help build constructive social relationships and enhance resilience of societies against relapse into violence. Jean Paul Lederach originally introduced the concept of “infrastructures for peace” in the 1980s. In his work, “Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies”, his conceptualisation of infrastructures for peace initially emphasised the imperative of structural transformation. He viewed infrastructure not as a static framework but as a dynamic process – a functional network that transcends divisions and societal levels, creating effective collaboration among key stakeholders to achieve optimal outcomes.

For Hopp-Nishanka (2016), I4Ps as a concept are deeply rooted in the school of conflict transformation. The original idea of Lederach is connected both to his thinking on conflict transformation and process-orientation as well as to his thinking on the role of local agency (Chandler, 2013; Lederach, 1997). It was premised on his assumption that sustainable peace can only be the result of a deep and structural conflict transformation, including a transformation of the socio-economic root causes and political drivers of the conflict (Giessmann, 2016; Lederach 2005).

It must be noted from the outset that the use of the term "infrastructure" does not necessarily relate to physical constructions, but rather refers to institutions, processes, policies, as well as constructive relationships. Kumar (2011) proposed I4Ps as a network of interdependent systems, resources, values and skills co-owned by government, civil society and community institutions that promote dialogue and consultation, prevent

conflict and enable peaceful mediation when violence occurs in a society (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2013). Another definition of the concept includes that of van Tongeren (2013:45) who defined I4Ps as “cooperative, problem-solving approaches to conflict” within societies, based on dialogue and non-violence. He further called for the development of “institutional mechanisms, appropriate to each country’s culture, which promote and manage this approach at local, district, and national levels” (ibid.). He argues that there is good basis to assume that I4Ps are more than institutions alone, let alone a determined set of institutions. Whereas some scholars have focused on the cultural/domestic foundations of I4Ps (Hopp-Nishanka, 2013; Odendaal, 2013), others have emphasised the institutional capacity of the concept (Van Tongeren, 2011; Ryan, 2012). Odendaal (2013:7), on the other hand, defines them as “locally created systems [responsible] for coordinating and supporting peace processes”.

I4Ps gained extensive attention and intellectual interest only following post-election violence in Kenya (2007) and Ghana (2008), when national governments and CSOs began pioneering official implementation of a concept for national I4P in both countries (Giessmann, 2016). Peace infrastructures can take several organisational forms, as they are moulded by local culture, established traditions and needs of a specific context.

Various infrastructures for peace play essential roles in preventing and resolving conflicts. Local Peace Committees, formed at the community level, comprise representatives from diverse backgrounds and focus on mediating disputes, addressing local tensions and fostering dialogue among community members. National Peace Platforms, organised by civil society groups, bring together stakeholders like NGOs, government officials and community leaders to advocate for peace-related policies, address national issues and promote collaboration across sectors. Government Departments or Ministries of Peace, established by governments, work on developing and implementing strategies for peacebuilding, ensuring a unified approach to conflict resolution.

Conflict analysis and early warning systems, developed by specialised organisations or government agencies, collect and analyse data to identify potential conflict triggers, enabling timely intervention. Programmes for the development of conflict management skills, implemented by various entities, equip individuals, including insider mediators, with

the necessary skills for effective resolution and negotiation. Policies and Initiatives for a shared culture of peace, led by governments, NGOs and international organisations, focus on fostering understanding, tolerance and cooperation among diverse communities, emphasising shared values and common goals. Together, these infrastructures form a comprehensive framework for building and sustaining peace at various levels of society (Brand-Jacobsen, 2013; Giessmann, 2016; Odendaal, 2012; Richmond, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Siebert, 2013).

Both Lederach (1997) and Giessmann (2016) agree that sustainable peace and effective peacebuilding depend not only on political will, but also on the availability of a structural capacity for peacebuilding – one that is based on carefully coordinated planning, conscious valorisation of local efforts, individual and institutional empowerment as well as transparent implementation and evaluation. Evidence so far indicates that I4Ps have been a key part of the communitarian approaches to peacebuilding, providing spaces for relevant participants in conflict-affected communities in Kenya and the Philippines to discuss and resolve their disputes (Adjei, 2022; Chuma & Ojielo, 2012; Kovács, 2018), at the same time facilitating constructive relationship-building among chieftaincy and political rivals in Ghana and Nepal (Odendaal, 2012; Suurmond & Sharma, 2013) among many others. The case for I4Ps is built on the argument that building peace in communities requires a long-term, systematic commitment to conflict transformation and that, the main resources needed for peacebuilding are located within the community and not introduced from the outside. For a number of scholars and practitioners, I4Ps are also about giving peacebuilding or reconciliation efforts an address (Hopp-Nishanka, 2016).

In Zambia for example, I4Ps in terms of electoral conflicts are anchored on CMCs which are the local peace committees which started off as an experiment in 2001 but have now developed into more enduring structures and conduits for “peace delivery”. These committees are located in all 116 districts of the country for the purpose of addressing electoral conflicts at community level.

I4Ps generally fall into two main categories – formal and informal – based on their legal foundations within a state. This distinction indicates whether they are constitutionally or legally established. Additionally, their level of engagement or relationship with the state

reflects whether they rely on the state for their mandate, funding, and administration. Whereas formal peace infrastructures are more structured and often created/recognised through the legal and political framework of a state, informal peace infrastructures tend to emerge organically from the grassroots with less structure and organisation (Adjei, 2022). In some cases, formal I4Ps are created by states themselves to perform certain functions in their interest (Harris, 2019; Van Tongeren, 2013). These type of I4Ps, which are often highly institutionalised, are led by government officials and are fully dependent on the government for their mandate, funding and legitimacy (Adjei, 2022).

In the case of the CMCs in Zambia, they are semi-dependent formal I4Ps. These I4Ps, despite having the constitutional backing or the recognition of the state, tend to have some level of independence from the state in the conduct of their activities. In fact, they are a creature of the EMB – the ECZ. They are a collaborative arrangement between the state agencies, political parties and NGOs and religious groups.

In contrast to formal I4Ps, informal I4Ps are not organised or recognised by the state. They have no legal or constitutional backing, and typically lack the kind of structure or institutional presence that formal I4Ps have (Kovács, 2020). Informal I4Ps often emerge organically from the grassroots, but they can also be created by CSOs as well as local or traditional authorities (Avruch and Jose, 2007; Chivasa, 2019; Odendaal, 2013). It is noteworthy that a common advantage of peace infrastructures whether formal or informal is their ability to centralise the role(s) locals play in transforming the underlying causes of conflict (Odendaal, 2013; Richmond, 2014).

Adjei (2022) suggests that peace infrastructures are set up to achieve two main benefits: the first is to give more structure and consistency to a community's efforts to address ongoing and potentially violent conflict. In essence, as Hopp-Nishanka (2013:3) argues, I4Ps are able to "give peace an address" and provide an organisational structure/framework within which communities can coordinate and strengthen their internal efforts to promote peace and prevent conflicts from becoming violent. The second benefit of I4Ps is taken from Frazer and Ghetts (2013), who state that it is to expand the base of peacebuilding contributions and ensure that peacebuilding activities take place in a more inclusive and participatory manner.

The push for I4Ps by the UN and other international organisations as a kind of common template for countries to address their internal conflicts has been criticised on the grounds that I4Ps risk becoming part of the toolkit of liberal peacebuilding and being used as a means to promote standardised state-building processes (Verzat, 2014). However, the central argument about I4Ps is that they fundamentally demand that all external efforts are grounded in the internal interests, needs, and values of the conflict-affected community (Adell, 2012; Adjei, 2022).

Infrastructures for peace are intended to give dialogue, consultation and conflict resolution and the respective stakeholders a set of rules of engagement and a space – though not necessarily physical. This alternative space often allows for creativity and for thinking out of the box (Kovács, 2019). Furthermore, the core of the concept of infrastructure for peace should be the quest for agency of the ‘local’, primary conflict and peace stakeholders – i.e. those actors who will form peace based on internal, domestic traditions and cultural practices (Adell 2012; Hopp-Nishanka, 2016; Richmond 2012). A number of I4Ps models have been applied by some scholars in the African context (Irene, 2024; Irene & Majekodunmi, 2017).

2.3.2 Storytelling or Narrative as an Infrastructure for Peace

In this study, storytelling or narrative are interchangeably applied. Storytelling is presented as one of the available infrastructures for peace in Zambia particularly in rural and peri-urban areas. Just like in many African nations, storytelling holds a revered place in the transmission of cultural values, traditions and historical knowledge from one generation to another. The oral tradition, characterised by narratives, proverbs and folklore, is deeply ingrained in the fabric of Zambian society (Cancel & Turin, 2013). This cultural affinity for storytelling creates a foundation upon which I4P structures can build to foster sustainable peace in the electoral process.

Within the realm of peacebuilding, storytelling serves as a powerful tool for preserving and sharing the collective experiences of communities (Doehring et al., 2023). By incorporating local narratives into the frameworks of I4Ps, the structures gain a deeper understanding of the root causes of electoral conflicts within Zambia. These narratives

often encapsulate the wisdom, values and historical context necessary for comprehending the nuances of disputes, enabling I4Ps to formulate more targeted and culturally sensitive interventions. This is because the need to tell one's story and be listened to, and to listen to another just as intently is part of this culture. It is only in the telling and listening that understanding and meaning-making can occur. Under these circumstances then, solutions should be easier to develop (Mezirow, 1996).

Moreover, storytelling enhances community engagement and participation, fostering a sense of unity and shared identity (Chan, 2021). I4Ps, which prioritise the involvement of communities in peacebuilding processes, can benefit from the emotionally resonant nature of storytelling. Through communal storytelling sessions, diverse voices within Zambia can be amplified, ensuring that the perspectives of all stakeholders are considered in the development and implementation of peace initiatives.

Conflict resolution and mediation, key components of I4Ps, can draw upon the rich tapestry of Zambian storytelling for guidance. Traditional stories often contain valuable lessons on reconciliation and cooperation, providing a cultural foundation for peaceful resolution methods (Cancel & Turin, 2013). By integrating these narratives into mediation practices, I4Ps can enhance their effectiveness in addressing conflicts and fostering enduring peace.

Furthermore, storytelling contributes to the establishment of trust and understanding among individuals and communities (Auvinen et al., 2013). I4Ps, designed to build and maintain peace, can leverage the emotive power of narratives to create empathetic connections between diverse groups within Zambia. This, in turn, facilitates the development of trust, a critical element for successful and sustainable peacebuilding endeavours. In navigating the cultural context of Zambia, the adaptability of storytelling proves invaluable. As stories evolve over time, they reflect societal changes and dynamics. I4Ps, recognising the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability, can harness the evolving nature of storytelling to tailor their interventions to the specific needs and aspirations of the Zambian people. By embracing the cultural significance of storytelling, I4Ps can deepen their understanding of local contexts, engage communities

more effectively and craft interventions that resonate with the rich tapestry of Zambia's oral tradition, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace and stability.

2.3.3 perspectives of other studies about storytelling in peacebuilding

Storytelling includes a range of approaches that allow people to express and listen to stories related to a conflict (Pickering, 2020). This can take various forms: it may involve community led oral history projects; intergroup talking circles; or exhibitions where artwork or objects are used to tell the story of the conflict's victims (Pickering, 2020).

Haidar and Farrukh (2023), in their study, posit that the classroom was developed as a venting space for students whereby storytelling helped students in confronting conflicts, deliberating causes and navigating solutions. Yet another view is that peacebuilding via storytelling using wordless books is explained as a social–emotional learning classroom practice. (Martínez-Alba and Pentón Herrera, 2023). This view hints at the emotional and relational aspects of peacebuilding which is central to the current study.

Historically, most conflict resolution and peace education happens through storytelling, including historical stories, proverbs, and religious-based stories (Neustaeter and Senehi, 2023). In their work on *Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution Education*, the two authors discuss the role of informal learning in social justice action and positive social change and use storytelling as an example. Other writers have observed that storytelling has been employed in human history and continues as a form of education as well as a means for restoration after harmful conflict (Timpson, etal, 2022). These authors argue that the skills of storytelling and performance in multiple sites of learning can help engage participants of all ages to understand many things, develop skills of conflict resolution, and advance peacebuilding, especially in the context of violent conflict and healing from trauma.

Vinogradova and Linville (2024) demonstrate that using digital means that sharing the stories of multilingual speakers and hearing their experiences in their own words is a powerful tool for peacebuilding—rooting out conflict and striving to create a happy, healthy, and prosperous community. These are insightful experiences that make storytelling a potent tool at the disposal of communities across cultures and geographical

locations. With these perspectives, the current study benefited from the various authors who have highlighted the use of storytelling in different contexts.

The following section explains another infrastructure for peace – the CMC – and how it resolves the electoral conflicts in Zambia.

2.3.4 Conflict Management Committees as electoral conflict management infrastructures for peace

CMCs are one of the available infrastructures for resolving electoral conflicts in Zambia. The CMCs are a creation of the ECZ. The Electoral Act 12 of 2006 gives power to the ECZ to set up CMCs to resolve electoral conflicts. These committees generally serve as the infrastructures for peace during elections along with other judicial institutions such as tribunals or courts.

The composition of an independent Electoral Commission and its operations in Zambia is provided for in the Electoral Act 24 of 1996. Using its mandate, the ECZ has established CMCs at national and district level. These committees are given powers to manage and resolve electoral conflicts in a judicious and timely manner. The aim is to attain peaceful elections and share resolutions by mediating conflicts that arise in the electoral process through the enforcement of the ECC which regulates the media, polling agents, political parties, monitors, observers and candidates during elections (Magasu, 2022).

Furthermore, CMCs attend to complaints if there are allegations of bias by electoral officers. CMCs have powers to advise the disputing parties to report the issue to the police where a crime has been committed during elections and advise the disputing parties in an election conflict and to revoke any accreditation of any election monitor and observer. The committees may impose punishments that the ECZ determines by statutory instruments (Code 2006, 17(1)).

Section 6 of the ECC (2006) basically restricts behaviour that might drive violence or interrupt the right to freedom of campaigning. Such behaviours include among others, bans on violent behaviour or inflammatory speech, the carrying or display of arms, making

false defamatory or inflammatory allegations, disrupting campaign meetings, defacing campaign materials, vote buying and bribery.

The procedure for conflict resolution is that any member of the general public can make a complaint in writing and address it to the area Town Clerk/Council Secretary or to the ECZ. The committee chairperson will then convene a meeting to the dispute within twenty-four (24) hours from the date of receipt of the complaint. The members would then choose a lead mediator to lead the mediation. Then the members of the parties to the dispute will be invited to attend the mediation session. The mediator would then help the parties to find an amicable solution. The agreed solution is then written down and signed by all parties. The committees largely apply the ECC when resolving disputes. Any person not satisfied with the mediation by the District Committee may appeal to the National Committee or to the Electoral Commission.

However, part of the rationale for this study was to interrogate the community role in the electoral mediation process. Normally, the disputants are invited to a mediation session without the presence of their communities and made to reconcile as individuals. If any members of the community attend the sessions it is because they are close family members or friends of the disputants. It would appear that this is a gap in the community peacebuilding aspiration. It is partly this gap that the study sought to fill by creating awareness around the fact that the story told during the mediation sessions should be shared with the communities affected. The process needs to involve community members as part of the mediation process. This would not only enhance community participation but also give ownership of the conflict resolution and transformation processes to the communities. Storytelling as it was practised in the Zambian society took place informally, whereas the method used by the CMC is formal. This means storytelling or narrative will have to be applied in an adjusted environment as it could face some challenges. The question that begs an answer is whether a well-understood practice of informal storytelling can be used in a formal setting and still obtain the same results. It is imperative therefore that the CMC would need to adapt to avoid a rigid application of an Indigenous and useful process of community peacebuilding that is being proposed in this study.

District CMCs should preferably include the various community sectors in conflict, and these should have the obligation of enhancing peace within their own context. The committees should ideally engage in inclusive processes for all actors, emphasise the importance of dialogue, encourage mutual understanding, cultivate trust and build constructive problem-solving and joint action to prevent violence (Bolton, 2020; Vernon, 2019).

District CMCs work on the premise that individuals in communities affected by electoral conflicts have greater incentives than any external actors to resolve such conflict. They are also thought to be well-positioned to build and sustain peace through their intimate knowledge of the local culture, as well as community relations and dynamics (Nganje, 2021). In this regard, the concept of Local Peace Committees, in the case of Zambia, the concept of district CMCs resonates with the “peacebuilding from below” discourse, which gained prominence in the 1990s and argued for local communities affected by violent conflict to be recognised as resources and not just recipients of peacebuilding efforts that are largely driven from the outside. The outside perspectives have largely shaped the conflict management discourse through the use of a liberal peacebuilding approach which the next section turns to.

2.4 LIBERAL APPROACH TO PEACEBUILDING

The understanding of liberal peacebuilding approach in this study is in line with that premised on good governance, human rights and rule of law (Cravo, 2017). It is also premised on stereotypical ideas that liberal and democratic societies are inherently more peaceful than other kinds of societies and that democracy and economic development are important ingredients for creating peace (Bräuchler & Naucke, 2017; Cravo, 2017; Hameiri, 2014). Liberal peacebuilding is rooted in the belief that local actors in conflict or war-torn spaces have weak capacities and may be illiberal, divisive and focused on sectarian gains at the expense of a common good (Hameiri, 2014).

Furthermore, liberal peacebuilding displays a tendency to see ‘others’ as a problem to be solved and putting the onus on Western experts to engineer and produce peace since the non-Western ‘other’ is incapable of producing and maintaining peace (Hameiri, 2014).

Strangely, and in spite of its obvious limitations, liberalism continues to be uncritically accepted as 'wisdom' in most policy circles including electoral conflict management.

Over time, the inability to promote the emergence of liberal democracies combined with outsiders' failure to make the liberal peace a reality, necessitated a rethink and reconsideration of the approach (Hameiri, 2014; Paris, 2010). For example, attempts at establishing liberal democracies and market economies following a liberal peacebuilding approach backfired spectacularly in Iraq and Afghanistan (Dodge, 2021; Suhrke, 2007). King (2016, cited in Tom 2018) argues that this failure was in part because market and political liberalisation policies conflicted with each other. Tom (2018) argues that it is illogical to expect weak and sometimes absent institutions to support economic and political competition in the same way that liberal policies operate in stable democracies. Therefore, as consideration is being made for the various peacebuilding alternatives, the liberal peace perspective must be understood holistically.

2.5 THEORIES

2.5.1 Conflict Transformation Theory

According to Lederach (2003), 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 and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships. In this regard, peace is seen to be primarily ingrained in the quality of relationships and the systems in which those relationships are embedded (Lederach, 2003; Mitchell, 2022; Taylor & Lederach, 2014). Miall (2004:4) defines 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".

Drawing on the above definitions, conflict transformation is assumed to be a comprehensive and wide-ranging process that involves altering not only the social relationships that exist between conflicting parties, but also the cultural and structural ties that bind them together or draw them apart in the community (Adjei, 2022).

Both Miall and Adjei push for the adoption of a comprehensive way that takes into account “the personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of conflict, but equally view conflict as a catalyst for positive change across all of these areas” (Shailor, 2015:1). However, for peacebuilding to be comprehensive, it must involve a long-term, systematic process to transform the underlying causes of conflict and increase understanding, equality and respect in the relationships between conflicting parties (Lederach, 2022). Applying this view, conflict is perceived as a potentially positive and productive force for change if harnessed constructively via sustained engagement and interaction.

In explaining conflict transformation, authors draw a particular distinction between the terms conflict resolution and conflict transformation. “Conflict resolution entails solving the problems that led to the conflict, ... transformation entails changing the relationships between the parties to the conflict ...” (Kriesberg, 1997:64). Both these aspects are critical for this study as the CMCs which are the focus of addressing the electoral conflicts are not only intended to end the conflict but also ensure that they respond to the continuous community need for harmonious co-existence.

Lederach (1997) argues that in conflict-affected societies characterised by deep mistrust and suspicion, relationships can only be transformed through reconciliation, which brings together the four often competing goals of peace, justice, truth, and amnesty (Adjei, 2022). Whereas peace “underscores the need for interdependence, wellbeing, and security,” justice emphasises the “fair and equitable treatment for all stakeholders,” and truth on the “ability or willingness to acknowledge wrongdoing and validate painful loss or experience,” while amnesty expresses “the need for compassion, letting go [wrongs of the past], and embracing new beginnings” (Lederach, 1997:29-30).

In order to attain reconciliation and transform conflicts successfully, Lederach (1997) proposes an integrated approach to peacebuilding that melds actors from all levels of society – at the top, middle and the grassroots. At each of these societal levels, peacebuilding actors (leaders) perform different roles that ultimately can be connected in a ‘holistic’ manner to veer conflict away from the propensity towards destruction to a constructive trajectory.

The theory advocates a holistic and broad peace process that advances justice through eliminating all forms of violence and addressing the root causes of conflict through bottom-up and durable constructions of long-term advocacy and strategic planning (Lederach, 2003). This fits in with storytelling approach which is based on Indigenous bottom-up approaches of community peacebuilding. Lederach cautions that conflict resolution connected to external peace interventions runs the risk of morphing into negative peace where the actual conflict is 'resolved' but the underlying root causes are not adequately addressed (Tshuma, 2022).

This theory helps scholars and other researchers to understand the nature of conflict and why some communities relapse into conflict immediately upon cessation of conflict more easily than others. The theory enables people to appreciate that it requires more than just resolution of conflicts or conflict management to transform political and social systems that breed and sustain conflict. In the current study, the theory helped appreciate the electoral conflict mediation process by the CMCs and the extent to which it embraced the goal of conflict transformation. The paradigm also provided a lens through which reflection on the application of storytelling as a viable tool to bring about transformation of electoral conflicts can be measured. For example, does storytelling alter relationships when placed in the context of the conflict transformation definitions given above?

2.5.2 Group Contact Theory

Intergroup contact theory dates back to the post-world War II period (Watson, 1947, Williams, 1947). However, Allport's (1954) hypothesis proved the most dominant by postulating the critical situational conditions necessary for intergroup contact to facilitate reduction of prejudice. Prejudice is a pervasive element in any conflict including electoral conflicts and their manifestation.

Allport (1954) held that positive effects of intergroup contact occur only in situations marked by four key conditions: equal group status within the situation; common goals; intergroup cooperation; and the support of authorities, law or custom. In his study, Smith (1994) found that contact meeting Allport's conditions reduced prejudice among both black and white neighbours, though there were group differences in contact effects.

A number of scholars have commented on the condition of equal status with regard to the intergroup contact theory stressing that it is important that both groups expect and perceive equal status in the situation (Cohen & Lotan 1995; Cohen, 1982; Pettigrew, 1998; Riordan & Ruggiero, 1980; Robinson & Preston 1976). This condition applies to this study in that political groups competing for power must see themselves as such to participate fully in resolving electoral conflicts that erupt during elections. Failure to perceive the situation on equal terms only serves to escalate the differences.

With regard to common goals, reduction in prejudice and hostility through contact requires an active, goal-oriented effort. The assumption here is that in striving to win, competing political parties need each other to achieve their goal. Focusing on goal attainment enables competing parties to maintain peace in their conduct and perceive the bigger picture of national stability and security. Although power dynamics within political parties often centre on competition, ideological disparities and the quest for influence, the notion of a political party earnestly committed to conflict resolution and unity is not only conceivable but also imperative for cultivating a more robust political milieu. Amidst a landscape often characterised by winner/loser mentalities, a party cognizant of the benefits derived from collaboration and shared objectives can set itself apart. This party might strategically position itself as a mediator or bridge-builder, recognising that a fractured political terrain impedes progress and erodes public trust. Actively championing conflict resolution and unity, such a party would not only attract voters seeking bipartisanship but also potentially enhance its influence in negotiations and policymaking. This strategy necessitates a nuanced comprehension of power dynamics, wherein the party acknowledges that sustained influence is better attained through cooperative endeavours rather than rigid partisanship. Essentially, a political party prioritising conflict resolution and unity would affirm that, in the intricate and interconnected realm of politics, the pursuit of shared goals is ultimately in the best interest of all.

However, attainment of common goals must involve the third condition of intergroup cooperation which is an interdependent effort without intergroup competition (Bettencourt et al., 1992). In relation to electoral conflict management, this underlies the essence of elections to meet the goals of justice and peace. The last condition which is support of

authorities, law or custom concerns the contact's auspices. The understanding in this respect is that with clear social sanction, intergroup contact is more readily acknowledged and has more progressive effects. The support by authority for institutions is critical because it establishes norms of acceptance (Parker, 1968). This condition is equally relevant to the study at hand as authority already exists in the implementation of the CMC mandates.

According to Pettigrew (1998), optimal intergroup contact entails time for cross-group bonds to develop. He demonstrates that past work has focused chiefly on short-term intergroup contact – the very condition that Sherif's (1966) Robbers' Cave field experiment found minimally effective. Pettigrew, while agreeing with Allport argues that to reduce prejudice and generalise to other outgroups there is need for a fifth condition for the contact hypothesis. He suggests the contact situation must provide the participants with the opportunity to become friends. Such opportunity infers a close interface that would make self-disclosure and other friendship-developing mechanisms possible. The mediation process in this study enables this contact for conflict parties to make friendships and start afresh.

Contact theory delineates four interconnected processes integral to attitude change through intergroup interactions. These processes, as identified by Liebkind (2004), encompass learning about the outgroup, altering behaviour, fostering affective ties and engaging in in-group reappraisal. Learning about the outgroup involves gaining insights into the perspectives, values and experiences of the other group, thereby challenging stereotypes and promoting a more nuanced understanding. Altering behaviour refers to the adjustments individuals make in their actions and reactions during intergroup contact, emphasising the potential for positive behavioural changes as a result of such interactions. Fostering affective ties underscores the significance of building emotional connections across group boundaries, cultivating empathy and reducing intergroup anxiety. In-group reappraisal involves a reconsideration of one's own group identity and values in light of intergroup contact, facilitating a more inclusive and harmonious approach to collective identity. Together, these processes provide a comprehensive

framework for understanding how intergroup contact can effectively mediate attitude change by addressing cognitive, behavioural, emotional and identity-related dimensions.

In essence, the theory posits that the primary mechanism through which intergroup contact exerts its effects is by facilitating learning about the outgroup. The proposition suggests that when newfound knowledge corrects pre-existing negative perceptions of the outgroup, the contact experience is likely to diminish prejudice. While evidence supports this constructive process, potential alternative explanations persist, as noted by Ybring (2020), underscoring the need for continued exploration and consideration of other potential factors influencing intergroup dynamics.

Rothbart and John (1985) conclude that disconfirming evidence alters stereotypes only if (a) the outgroup's behaviour is starkly inconsistent with their stereotype and strongly associated with their label; (b) occurs often and in many situations; and (c) the outgroup members are seen as typical. These restrictions eliminate most intergroup contact situations.

Nonetheless, new information about an outgroup can improve attitudes. Stephan and Stephan (1984:238) found that contact allowed Anglo students to learn more about Chicano culture that in turn led to more positive attitudes toward Chicano classmates. On the other hand, they assert that "Ignorance promotes prejudice...".

The second process that mediates attitudes which Pettigrew (1998) discusses is changing behaviour. He observes that optimal intergroup contact acts as a benign form of behaviour modification. He posits that behaviour change is frequently the forerunner of attitude change and claims that new situations demand conformity with new expectations. Citing various authors like Aronson and Patnoe (1997), Jackman and Crane (1986) and Zajonc (1968) he also affirms that If these expectations include acceptance of outgroup members, this behaviour has the possibility of creating attitude change. "We can resolve our dissonance between old prejudices and new behaviour by revising our attitudes". He notes that this behavioural practice also profits from repeated contact, preferably in wide-ranging settings. Repetition makes intergroup encounters comfortable and "right."

Repetition itself leads to liking. Appropriate rewards for the new behaviour enhance the positive effects further.

The third process discussed in mediating attitude is generating affective ties. In this instance, emotion is the central issue. Emotion is essential to intergroup contact. Anxiety is normal in initial encounters between groups, and it can be a catalyst to negative reactions (Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Stephan, 1992; Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1989, 1992; Wilder, 1993a, b). These anxious, negative encounters can take place even without intergroup prejudice (Devine et al., 1996). Continued interaction largely reduces anxiety, and yet bad experiences can increase it. This view also argues that positive emotions aroused by optimal contact can mediate intergroup contact effects where empathy plays a critical role.

As in other research (Herek and Capitanio 1996), the prejudiced avoid intergroup contact (-0.137). But the path from friendship to reduced affective prejudice is significantly stronger (-0.210), a finding consistent with that of Powers and Ellison (1995). In short, like prejudice, contact involves both cognition and affection.

The last process that Pettigrew discusses is in-group reappraisal. Here, optimal intergroup contact gives insight into in-groups as well as outgroups. He points out that in-group norms and customs turn out not to be the only ways to manage the social world and this can reshape one's view of in-group and lead to a less provincial view of outgroups in general ("deprovincialisation").

At its core, the theory seeks to elucidate that the dynamics of intergroup relations are deeply embedded in the fabric of social institutions and broader societal structures. Consequently, the configuration and consequences of contact situations are intricately shaped by institutional and societal norms, as posited by Kinloch (1981, 1991). These norms play a pivotal role in determining the nature and impact of intergroup interactions. Importantly, the theory aligns with Allport's equal-status condition, which implies the presence of equivalent group power within the given situation. However, achieving such parity becomes a formidable challenge in contexts where a pervasive struggle for power intensifies larger intergroup conflicts. The theory, therefore, provides valuable insights

into understanding the dynamics of conflict management institutions within their contextual framework. By acknowledging the influence of power dynamics, it allows for a more nuanced comprehension of how these institutions operate and are situated within the broader socio-political landscape. In essence, the theory facilitates a comprehensive exploration of intergroup relations, revealing the intricate interplay between power struggles, societal norms and the efficacy of conflict management institutions. Thus, examining the storytelling approach within these contextual factors blends fairly well in understanding its role in electoral conflict management, resolution and peacebuilding.

The theory of change attributed to the storytelling peacebuilding method is focused on the potential of transforming participants' perspectives of the "other." Contact theory suggests that intergroup prejudice can be reduced when different group members have the opportunity to interact with one another, and storytelling enables the interaction to create meaning as these groups share perspectives. Intergroup contact theory is predicated on the idea that our dislike of the other, or hatred of the enemy, is based on inaccurate attribution of their character. The chance to meet someone who identifies with the "other," or as an outgroup member, provides an opportunity to remedy or rectify those inaccuracies, especially through storytelling and to find the humanity of that person/group despite their differences. Hence the theory helps us to appreciate the power dynamics of contact and sharing stories. Although this makes good sense, some authors have suggested that if the circumstances and support network shaping the contact are inadequate, the contact experience has the capacity to confirm a sense of dislike or hatred (Byron, 2016). This caution is important as it helps to direct the focus of the study to the relevant aspects of the theory.

2.5.3 Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory started out as an attempt by early scholars such as Robert Sears to combine psychoanalytic and stimulus-response learning theory into a comprehensive explanation of human behaviour (Grusec, 1994). The theory asserts that most human behaviour is learned through observation, imitation and modelling. The social learning perspective advances the view that peer and group interactions and communication are the strongest mechanisms for engaging in criminal behaviour (Akers, 2009). This is an

individual- level operationalisation of a greater issue, referred to as 'normative conflict,' in which groups of people in society disagree on the normative assumptions regarding rule of law and central values (Matsueda, 1988).

In explaining his social learning theory, Bandura (1997) stresses aspects of cognitive and information-processing capacities that mediate social behaviour. Basically, Bandura advances two important aspects in his social learning theory. The first aspect is that mediating processes occur between stimuli and responses. Bandura states that individuals do not automatically observe the behaviour of a model and imitate it. There is some thought prior to imitation, and this consideration is called mediational processes. This occurs between observing the behaviour (stimulus) and imitating it or not (response). It is therefore safe to suggest that acts of peace and violence during elections are consequences of the same process. The argument here is that social learning method takes thought processes into account and accepts the role that they play in deciding whether or not a behaviour should be imitated or not. As such, the social learning theory provides a more complete explanation of human learning by recognising the role of mediational processes (McLeod, 2016).

The second aspect is that behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observation. In this regard, identification occurs with another person (the model) and involves taking on (or adopting) observed behaviours, values, beliefs and attitudes of the person with whom you are identifying. In the process learning occurs. In his argument for observation as a form of social learning, Bandura identifies "verbal" instructional model, whereby if certain explanations and descriptions were presented, then learning was enhanced (Bandura, 1977). This is where the storytelling model that the study applies fits into the theory and enhances learning about electoral conflicts, their management and effects on the individuals and communities that are affected. Both aspects of the social learning theory by Bandura are relevant to this study as they provide insights into behaviours of aggressors and victims in the electoral process including how the context influences the behaviour of the actors.

Other studies have found a strong relationship between social bonds, social learning, and physical violence (Lackey & Williams, 1995; Menard & Grotspeter, 2011). Pritchett and

Moeller (2022) in their seminal work on whether social bonds and social learning theories help explain radical violent extremism, posit that it is the dynamics of the social group and mechanisms therein which contribute to the choice of violence. It is clear that the element of social learning whether in-group or outgroup still plays an important part. This understanding was critical to the case of electoral conflicts during elections in Zambia and helped to trace the causes of the breach by the ECC.

Advised by social learning theory, this study developed and evaluated a storytelling method to guide the design of electoral conflict peacebuilding strategies meant to address election related risks in the communities. The framework provides for understanding and carrying out processes of collective reflection of jointly articulated and context-relevant understandings of electoral-related security risks. This shared knowledge through storytelling at CMC is the basis to support local communities in the design of appropriate peacebuilding strategies that potentially contribute to sustainable peacebuilding.

2.6 FRAMEWORK OF STORYTELLING AS A PEACEBUILDING TOOL

There are several studies that have demonstrated how storytelling can be used as a peacebuilding tool, as this section briefly explains. Storytelling has been operationalized in various forms in peacebuilding across the world. In Northern Ireland, for example, it has been used as a mode of social reflection and dialogue on the historical experience and polarising legacies of the Northern Irish conflict in spaces that created new kinds of social relationships (Dawson, 2022). In addition, there was establishment of a storytelling ‘museum’ dedicated to the principle that: ‘Everybody’s personal history is part of a shared history’ (Dawson, 2022) and this forms the glue that holds society together. Storytelling has also been used as a means of coming to terms with the past in both its individual and its social aspects. The value of storytelling as a means of ‘dealing with the past’ has also been deployed as an alternative or supplement to formal processes of truth recovery and healing.

During the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions processes in (South Africa, 1996; Sierra Leone, 1999; Liberia, 2005; and Nepal, 2015), storytelling was used as a peacebuilding mechanism to promote its power of healing and giving of testimony, as well as to support

the healing process that comes with accepting the diversity of “truths” that exist in society. Some scholars have noted that storytelling makes sense of our everyday encounters and therefore serves the purpose of conflict analysis, research practice in conflict situations, and a peacebuilding tool for community harmony (Maiangwa et al, 2024). Yet others have demonstrated its application as a methodological process in peace building (Senehi, 2019).

In other instances, integrating storytelling-based practices, such as restorative justice dialogue and restorative education, has promoted an inclusive, cross-communal public discourse and facilitated bottom-up and inclusive peacebuilding practices (Ali Al-Hassani, 2021). Furthermore, storytelling is used as a teaching and learning instrument and a means of socialisation for community peace by creating counter storytelling communities that can promote more critical and thoughtful dialogue on conflict issues (Bell, 2019). It has also been applied as a strategic brand storytelling to leverage narrative for competitive value creation (Mills, 2025).

These above are but some examples of how storytelling and stories have been operationalized for peacebuilding.

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has highlighted some concepts and the conceptual issues in the study. It discussed the available peace infrastructure for resolving electoral conflicts and highlighted perspectives on the liberal peacebuilding paradigm and its influence on conflict management. The chapter discussed the theoretical underpinnings that informed the study and their relevance to understanding electoral conflicts and storytelling in the context of community peacebuilding. It also highlighted examples of how storytelling has been operationalised as a peacebuilding tool.

Having attempted to bridge theory with practical application, the next chapter provides an over view of the electoral process and the nature of electoral conflicts in Zambia and how they are managed and resolved. This excursion provides the foundation for understanding the application of storytelling in the electoral mediation process.

CHAPTER THREE: OVERVIEW OF CONFLICTS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND SYSTEM IN ZAMBIA

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A number of root causes of conflicts in the electoral process in Zambia can be identified. Some are serious forms of electoral violence while others are minor electoral disputes (COG, 2022). The 2021 General Elections were characterised by both intra and inter-party electoral violence, which affected the general populace in some parts of the country. The violence was mainly a result of increasing polarisation of issues along political, regional and ethnic lines. Although some candidates and political parties pitched some policy options, policy issues were largely relegated to the backseat. Other causes of electoral violence were the incitement of youths and political party cadres by politicians, unemployment, biased application of the public order act including a polarised media (The Carter Centre, 2022). The violence gave rise to fatalities among political cadres and ordinary members of the public in some instances.

The government and the Zambian population as a whole, continue to search for solutions to curb this growing undemocratic development. One of the solutions was to establish electoral CMCs to address electoral conflicts at community level. However, these mechanisms also have their own limitations to effectively carry out electoral conflict management and resolution. Academics and practitioners alike keep engaging with these developments in order to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections in the communities and the nation at large. This study is part of such an effort.

3.2 CONTEXT OF ELECTORAL CONFLICTS

Before attaining independence, Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, was under the colonial control of, firstly, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and later the British Empire for nearly 76 years (Crehan, 2002; The New York Times, 1964). The experience of

Zambia under the British colonial rule was one where citizens were subjected to authoritarian and undemocratic administration. These features were typical of foreign rule. The influence of the colonial government, which the BSAC and later the Colonial Office set up, is regrettably still pervading modern day Zambia's governance, legal, political and social cleavages in spite of recurring efforts to reform them (GRZ, 2019). The discovery of copper on the Copperbelt before independence equally played a pivotal role in exacerbating the evident cleavages today and in shaping the country's political dynamics. Economic inequality became pronounced as the benefits of copper wealth were not uniformly distributed. The disparities were evident in terms of regional development, with the Copperbelt experiencing more significant infrastructure improvements compared to other areas. Moreover, the wealth generated from copper did not effectively reach the broader population, leading to social and economic disparities. It also shaped the concentration of economic and political power within the government and a select elite contributing to the emergence of an unequal society deepening the disparities between the political elite and ordinary citizens (Sikamo et al., 2016). The copper mines were not only economic hubs but also centres of social and political power. The class that was controlling these mines, controlled the country. The British colonial era left a weak democratic tradition. In fact, they bequeathed the new state with a plethora of laws legislated to subjugate a colonial society and privilege the few (Sikamo, etal, 2016).

The struggle for control and ownership of these mines became a focal point in the broader push for independence and economic self-determination. Further, the struggle for freedom and democracy in the post-Second World War period was speeded and partly influenced by the independence status of India in 1947 and Ghana in 1957. Although in the colonial era, diverse methods of protest emerged in Northern Rhodesia, the quest for independence gained momentum in earnest in the late 1930s, coinciding with the mining industry's resurgence post the Great Depression. The Copperbelt miners emerged as pivotal figures in this movement, which primarily unfolded in urban settings rather than rural areas and did not adopt guerrilla warfare tactics (Crehan, 2002). The Zambia African National Congress (ZANC), led by Kenneth Kaunda, started in 1958 as a splinter group of the conservative African National Congress (ANC) formed by Mbikusita Lewanika and

later on led by Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula (Momba and Kalabula, 2007). From then on, the colonial state clamped down on the nationalist movement using the Public Order Act, detention without trial, emergency powers and the Penal Code. A year after its formation, the ZANC was banned and Kenneth Kaunda, its leader, was detained. While he was in detention, Mainza Chona formed the UNIP and was elected as its first president.

Kaunda's incarceration had a profound impact on his subsequent writings on humanism, where he employed a distinct interpretation of both pre-colonial and colonial history to bolster the strategy of UNIP for post-colonial governance. According to Kaunda, the enduring significance of traditional chiefdoms underlined a genuinely African model of unity, stressing consensual and communitarian decision-making (Larmer, 2006). He argued that the existence of such chiefly authority rendered rival political parties not only unsuitable but also potentially destabilising, acting as conduits for tribal conflicts (Larmer, 2006). These arguments culminated in the imprisonment of political opponents, violent response to political dissidents and the eventual proclamation of a one-party State in 1972 in post-colonial Zambia, depicted by UNIP as the eventual expression of popular will (Larmer, 2006). However, in reality, it served as a sole response to the mounting political opposition to UNIP.

When Kaunda was released in 1961, Chona handed over the presidency to Kaunda. On 24 July 1964, a state of emergency was declared by Sir Evelyn Hone, then Northern Rhodesia Governor, and this remained in force intermittently in post-independent Zambia until 1990 when there was a wind of change to restore multiparty democracy in Zambia (Bwalya and Sichone, 2018).

The nationalist movement engaged in acts of violence against the colonial state and European settlers as a response to the heightened repression which was compounded by the state of emergency. During this period, all the key contenders for power were very intolerant of each other. Confrontation between the police and the nationalists, and between UNIP and ZANC, were quite common. Nevertheless, from the time that political parties were formed, opportunities have been sought for competing parties to work together whenever common interest was at stake. A commonly cited example was the coalition government in 1962 when the ZANC decided to cooperate with UNIP instead of

a settler party, the United Federal Party (UFP), thereby creating way for Zambia's independence in 1964. To this end, it can be said that there are both unpleasant and sweet lessons that can be learned from the past which are relevant to today's endeavours at building a peaceful and democratic country (Bwalya and Sichone, 2018).

These nationalist movements ultimately achieved their goal, resulting in Zambia's independence in October 1964. Since its independence, Zambia has been hailed as one of the countries that has enjoyed the status of a beacon for democracy and peace on the African continent (Maseko, 2021). Despite being bordered by neighbouring countries that waged prolonged wars of liberation and civil wars, notably Angola, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Temu and Tembe, 2014, 135; Weiss, 2000, 1), Zambia was a stable place of refuge for many fleeing these wars. At the beginning of the 1990s, a number of African countries changed from one-party rule to war-lordism and civil war as the wave of democratisation swept across the world. Zambia on the other hand managed a peaceful transition from a one-party system of governance to multiparty system of governance in the early 1990s. Ever since, Zambia has attained three transfers of power – from the UNIP to the MMD (1991), from the MMD to the PF (2011) and from the PF to the UPND (2021) (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2022a; Mahvinga, 2021).

Among many of its neighbours, Zambia, alongside Botswana, Namibia and Tanzania, have been one of the few countries, by and large, that have had a relatively successful track record of conducting competitive multiparty political elections in the region (Ferreira and Liebenberg, 2006). The implication of this is that it is possible to conduct elections that are free, fair and peaceful. This gives hope for consolidation of democracy, peace and stability in the country. All the main political parties are rhetorically in agreement that the country should be governed as a democracy with multiparty elections. However, deeper democratisation has been slowed down by a lack of comprehensive constitutional reforms (Munalula, 2016). The Constitution remains top heavy with a considerable amount of power vested in the Republican President. The Constitution thus continues to enable the sitting president to have considerable advantages, which in turn gives a substantial benefit to the ruling party. Subsequently, there remains an imperative to

encourage better governance and reinforce democratic practices which ideally would reduce incidences of electoral conflicts.

Since 1991, the media landscape in the country has witnessed significant growth, marked by the establishment of numerous community radio stations, private TV channels and print media houses. Despite this expansion, a prevailing culture of self-censorship persists, stemming from the historical legacy of a one-party State and colonial rule. The media faces challenges in exerting substantial influence for positive change, partly due to limited capacity (Freedom House, 2021). The advent of social media has introduced a platform for citizen journalism, presenting both opportunities and challenges. While it enables widespread information sharing, it also introduces complexities, particularly in the context of the electoral process. The reliance on social media can contribute to issues of authenticity and often serves as a breeding ground for conflicts.

Furthermore, there is widespread salience of ethnic identities during election periods and sporadic violence between competing party activists although Zambia has never suffered from civil conflict. These ethnic identities are with distinct cultural, linguistic, and historical backgrounds and include, the Bemba, Tonga, Lozi, Ngoni, Lunda and Luvale, among others. During election periods, political actors often seek to mobilise support along ethnic lines, appealing to the ethnic identities and allegiances of voters (Posner, 2005; Merilainen, 2012). However, the Bertelsmann Stiftung (BTI, 2022:9) country report quoting the commission of inquiry on electoral violence and voting patterns in Zambia (GRZ, 2019:17) in the aftermath of the 2016 elections observes that, “overall, the use and spread of politically motivated violence is limited.” It notes that political elites, in general, tend to avoid using violence to secure political power.

Likewise, despite the emerging democracy, there are indications of the development of a progressively antagonistic type of politics that is intensifying the focus on ethnicity and political affiliation leading to increasingly violent elections (GRZ, 2019). The parliamentary and judicial arms of government remain in place; nonetheless, their roles are occasionally, although not systematically, hindered.

In terms of the effects of social cleavages, there are two significant related factors. These are the ethno-linguistic and urban-rural divisions. These urban-rural cleavages manifest in various aspects, reflecting disparities in development, access to resources and quality of life between urban and rural areas and the prominent stark contrast in infrastructure development. Urban centres like Lusaka, the capital city, tend to have better road networks, modern amenities and improved services compared to many rural areas. Additionally, access to education and healthcare facilities often highlight the urban-rural divide, with urban areas typically having better-equipped schools and healthcare institutions. Economic opportunities also play a role, as urban centres attract more investment, leading to higher employment rates and income levels, further exacerbating the rural-urban gap. Political representation is another dimension, where urban areas may have more influence and access to decision-making processes compared to rural regions (Mavetera et al., 2020).

Fortunately, several factors have militated against the adverse effects of these cleavages. Consequently, relations among the different ethnic groups have been largely cordial despite the inequality gap between the rural and urban areas. Other social cleavages are gender and religion. Gender inequality is a significant problem in Zambia's electoral process and system. Women still lag behind in terms of participation and leadership roles. However, religious cleavages have not played a major role in political participation or law, while the decline in the power of the trade unions has contributed to a reduction in class cleavages (GRZ, 2019). Previously, civil society demonstrated their capacity to be an effective vehicle for the defence of democracy. However, the limited organisational capacity of CSOs implies that "they have to struggle to maintain checks and balances on the government and many rely too heavily on foreign funding." (GRZ, 2019:16).

The economy is characterised by high unemployment levels, poverty and inequality whereas efforts to diversify economic activities are limited despite significant steps towards a liberal market economy. The economy remains deeply reliant on copper mining for foreign exchange. Fiscal indiscipline, unsustainable levels of public spending and poor economic growth have resulted in a significant deficit and mounting public debt

(Chibbonta, Mayondi and Mulenga, 2022). This has had an impact on social service delivery including electoral conflicts and choices.

Overall, the country continues to grapple with both the vestiges of colonial and a one-party State that have persisted and still characterise Zambia's democratic dispensation. The weak institutionalisation of political parties with lack of clear ideologies renders it hard to practise democratic politics. As a result, the political system is laden with patrimonial networks of personal benefits. This has led to the hybridisation of Zambia's democracy. Further, conceptualisation of opposition politics including criticism from civil society and citizens as a legitimate component of democratic governance is a constant challenge that is contributing to politically related tension and electoral conflicts.

3.3 EVOLUTION OF ELECTORAL CONFLICTS AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Since Zambia gained independence, youths affiliated with the ruling parties have traditionally been entrusted with roles in managing community affairs, including organising people and maintaining law and order. These responsibilities were initially granted as a form of recognition for their active participation in the party (Beardsworth et al., 2022). However, amidst a deteriorating economic climate, soaring unemployment rates, vulnerability and a dearth of economic opportunities, this privilege has evolved into an abuse of power. Party-affiliated youths have, unfortunately, transformed into a law unto themselves, becoming a source of political and electoral violence. Instances include their involvement in assaulting and harassing journalists from both private and public media organisations, as well as engaging in intimidation tactics against political opponents, voters, and the general citizenry (Mukunto, 2019).

Additionally, they allocate themselves land and build structures without permission from the relevant authorities. They protest against a government opponent or demand removal of public/civil servants without due regard to procedures. They set up trading stalls anywhere without control. They are so powerful that they intimidate citizens, opponents and even their own leaders and get away with it. However, the new administration, which

was ushered into power in 2021, is making efforts to reign in the situation although isolated incidences still persist.

This lack of control and discipline has been allowed and tolerated by successive governing parties (Bob-Miliar, 2012), such that anybody else is incapable of doing anything to change the situation. Unfortunately, this is also because the party cadres feel entitled to their actions on the basis that they helped those in authority to win power and they are the government, thus are free to act as though they are above the law (Bwalya & Sichone, 2018). Under these circumstances, ruling party cadres have built a culture to threaten, inflict harm or confront their opponents in protecting their party interests. In attempting to protect their democratic space, opposition political parties also fight back (Koko, 2013), especially during election periods and there is violence in the communities. This culture of violence by ruling parties has entrenched itself in Zambian politics and is often a cause of electoral conflicts.

The country's reversion to multipartyism in 1991 saw the emergence of party cadres – a reincarnation of the UNIP-era vigilantes. During the UNIP era in Zambia, which spanned from the country's independence in 1964 until the early 1990s, party cadres played a significant role in the political landscape. Cadres were essentially loyal supporters and members of UNIP who were actively involved in promoting the party's agenda and maintaining its influence at various levels of society. In essence, they emerged during the early years of independence, following the formation of the UNIP in 1959, and were at the forefront of the country's fight for liberation from British colonial rule. As the independence movement gained momentum, UNIP sought to mobilise and organise grassroots support to consolidate its political power (Beardsworth et al., 2022). The concept of cadres, was borrowed from socialist and liberation movements of the time and adopted to create a dedicated cadre of activists committed to advancing UNIP's agenda. The cadre system was established as a means of fostering loyalty, maintaining political control and ensuring a direct link between the party leadership and the general populace. These early cadres were often drawn from trade unions, political party structures, student organisations, and community groups, and they played a crucial role in galvanising support for UNIP's vision of a unified and independent Zambia.

With the attainment of independence in 1964, cadres continued to be an integral part of Zambia's political landscape, serving as foot soldiers for UNIP's governance and community mobilisation efforts. Over time, however, the cadre system evolved and its influence extended beyond its initial objectives, leading to both positive contributions to community development and negative consequences, including political violence, monitoring and, at times, suppressing dissent or criticism against the government by opposition voices during the UNIP era (Mukunto, 2019). Spanning to today's politics, the cadres have arguably been recruited for a good cause: to serve as foot soldiers during campaigns and mobilisation of other party activities. However, this has not been the case as the cadres, "motivated" by incentives they received from their political benefactors such as money and alcohol soon became militant, lawless and violent in their operations (GRZ, 2019).

Commentators observe that the country saw the first major incidence of political violence since its return to multipartyism in 2005 during a by-election in Mapatizya Constituency in Kalomo district of Southern Province (Zambia insights, 2010). In that election held on 9 June 2005, along with another parliamentary by-election in Kalulushi district on the Copperbelt, the opposition UPND then, adopted the infamous Mapatizya Formula, a violent militia-style political activism in which its cadres attacked government vehicles, impounded food and other logistical supply convoys and harassed government ministers and electoral officials every time they suspected electoral malpractice and unfair campaign methods by the ruling party (Zambia Insights, 2010). Another opposition party at the time, the PF, also appeared to have adopted the same strategy in the Kalulushi by-election on the Copperbelt, where its cadres disrupted a campaign rally for the MMD, the then ruling Party in Chambishi Township, resulting in violent clashes (ibid.). The violence in the two by-elections (Mapatizya and Kalulushi), later replayed itself in the Milanzi and Mufumbwe parliamentary by-elections in Eastern and North-Western provinces, respectively, with equally devastating consequences (Lusaka Times, 2010) where several injuries were recorded. By and large, the nature and evolution of electoral conflicts to date have followed the discussed trajectories above. The section that follows focuses on developments in the first Republic.

3.4 FIRST REPUBLIC (OCTOBER 1964 – DECEMBER, 1972)

When Zambia gained independence in 1964, it adopted a multiparty democracy with three (3) political parties, namely UNIP, ANC and the National Progressive Party (NPP). UNIP garnered the majority of votes in Parliament and consequently formed the government. Kenneth Kaunda, its leader at the time became the first President of Zambia. Kaunda's leadership was shortly challenged by some of his colleagues (Pettman, 1974). Nalumino Mundia, the then Minister of Education, was the first to break away and formed the United Party (UP) in collaboration with Lozi politicians from the ANC. The support base for the UP were the Lozi-speaking people who were unhappy with the sharing of resources by the new government (Pettman, 1974). When the UP was banned and its leaders detained in August 1968, the UNIP government used the same colonial era statutes that the British had used to restrict Kaunda and other ZANC leaders, including the Public Order Act (GRZ report, 2019). Thereafter, UP members shifted their support to ANC and Nalumino Mundia became ANC Deputy-President (Bwalya & Sichone, 2018).

However, the ruling UNIP also had its internal challenges. In 1968, ethnic groupings rocked the party. At the national congress for the party, the key party positions were contested by ethnic groups from different regions. One such position was that of Vice President. Simon Mwansa Kapwepwe, a Bemba and serving Foreign Affairs Minister, challenged Reuben Kamanga, a Tumbuka from Eastern province, who was both the party and Republican Vice-President. On February 5, 1968 at the UNIP National Council meeting held at Chilenje community hall in Lusaka, the power struggle became so acrimonious that Kaunda in disgust, temporarily abdicated his position as Republican President stating that he was not ready to lead a nation of tribalists. He was, however, persuaded to rescind his decision several hours later (Bwalya & Sichone, 2018).

The party then appeared to be united behind Kaunda as it prepared itself for the first post-independence general elections in 1968. However, more cracks resurfaced soon after the elections with Kapwepwe resigning his two positions as party and Republican Vice-President on grounds of what he perceived was a systematic marginalisation of Bemba speaking people from government appointments and that his colleagues in both the party

and the government had never accorded him the respect and courtesy befitting his position (Pettman, 1974, Bwalya and Sichone, 2018). Kapwepwe subsequently, in 1971, resigned from UNIP and formed his own party - the United Progressive Party (UPP) with several senior party and government officials following him. UPP which drew support mostly from Bemba people became an instant threat to UNIP's popularity with Kapwepwe winning the Mufulira Parliamentary by-election on the Copperbelt held on 21 December, 1971 (Pettman, 1974).

In 1969, a referendum was held to allow Parliament to amend the independence constitution and introduce less strict conditions to alter the constitution. This subsequently paved the way for the legislation of the one-party State with UNIP as the only registered party. The new constitution consolidated the centralisation of executive and legislative powers in the presidency (Pettman, 1974). All appointments to the public service and parastatal companies were made by the Republican President and this feature continues to characterise the current political dispensation (GRZ, 2019).

President Kaunda and the main opposition ANC leader Harry Mwaanga Nkumbula, on 4 February, 1972, signed the famous Choma Declaration, which made Zambia a one-party State with UNIP as the only registered legal party. After the pact was signed there was peace amongst the party supporters from rival political parties that had engaged in violent confrontations. The pact further entrenched peace and unity in Zambia under the "One Zambia One Nation" motto in which President Kaunda, among many policy options, adopted a system of tribal balancing. Under this policy, appointments to leadership positions in the Party and Government were equitably distributed amongst the political elite from different parts of the country (Pettman, 1974). Although this reduced the tribal rivalry, it was an expensive venture that contributed to economic decline which characterised the second republic (Bwalya & Sichone, 2018; Pettman, 1974).

3.5 THE SECOND REPUBLIC (SEPTEMBER, 1973 – 1990)

During the second Republic in Zambia there were many economic and social challenges that were not addressed by the one-party State such as the difficulty of doing business, the sense of fear among citizens and the abuse of power by those in authority, while the

media was dominated by government propaganda (GRZ, 2019). Since the party was supreme, UNIP officials were dominant in all aspects of life such as managing State Owned Enterprises and controlling the distribution of food and other essential commodities, maintaining law and order in the villages through vigilantes, and controlling markets and bus stations where they invariably installed their own reign of terror on innocent passengers and other fellow citizens (Bwalya and Sichone, 2018). Some of these malpractices have persisted to date. Despite elections being held regularly, UNIP party did not allow the president to be challenged. However, elections to National Assembly were more competitive except that some candidates were vetted by the Central Committee (ibid.). While the one-party State generally appeared stable, due to the power-sharing arrangement between the political elite, there were simmering conflicts which periodically erupted into riots and other acts of militancy and civil disobedience. Over time, the opposition to one-party domination, coupled with international pressure forced Kaunda to concede to the demand for re-introducing of multiparty democracy which culminated into the birth of the third republic (Erdmann & Simutanyi, 2003).

3.6 ONSET OF THE THIRD REPUBLIC

The onset of the third republic was occasioned by the repeal of Article 4 of the Republican Constitution to allow for multiparty democracy. This paved the way for Zambia's first post-independence multiparty elections held in October 1991 which the opposition MMD won with over 76% of the vote under the leadership of trade union leader Frederick Chiluba, defeating incumbent President Kaunda and ending his 27 years in power (Erdmann & Simutanyi, 2003). The results of the 1991 elections were testimony that more than anything else the elections were driven by a desire for change. Due to its national appeal and the demand for change, the MMD had supporters from all walks of life and for the first time since independence, white Zambians and Zambians of Asian origin became full participants in politics as members of the party and even MPs and Ministers. Tribalism was not initially evident in the MMD but like in UNIP, once competition for Government positions and other privileges emerged, the ruling elites started moving away from their multi-racial, multi-ethnic and non-tribal politics. Consequently, electoral and political conflicts manifested once again.

When the MMD rule ended in 2011, the PF Party took over power under the leadership of Michael Sata. Political, regional and ethnic polarisation was now more evident as the party only had support in one half of the country. Little effort if any, was made to integrate the losing block of the country in appointments and leadership positions. Unfortunately, President Sata died in 2014 and he was succeeded by Mr Edgar Lungu who ruled until 2021 when he lost power to Mr. Hakainde Hichilema of the UPND. Under Mr Lungu, electoral conflicts were occasioned by lack of respect for the law, and discrimination based on party and ethnic affiliation. As a result, political violence worsened. These are probably the most important factors which led his party to lose power.

3.7 THE 2021 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN ZAMBIA

The 2021 general elections were highly competitive. The campaigns were fraught with a polarised and divisive political environment in which sporadic political violence, mainly perpetrated by supporters of the two main rival parties, PF and UPND, threatened to spill over into sustained violent upheaval, either prior to or after the election (EUEOM, 2021). The campaigns by the two major presidential candidates focused more on personalities and extant political tribalism compared to policy issues. The campaign was devoid of dialogue, thus weakened the messages of peace initiatives. Although the use of “tribal” language was publicly acknowledged by the EMB, it did not provide any effective remedies (EUEOM, 2021).

The weak economy, heightened by COVID-19 and lack of employment opportunities created enabling conditions where a number of young men were recruited as party cadres – principally of the UPND and the PF (EUEOM, 2021). The highest levels of unemployment are observed among the youth, particularly in the age groups of 12 to 19 (41.7%), 20 to 24 (36.1%), and 25 to 29 (17.9%) (Population Council and UNFPA, 2018). While the unemployment rate in the 12 to 19 age group is somewhat expected, considering that some may still be in school, it is noteworthy that some individuals in this bracket are actively seeking employment without success (Population Council and UNFPA, 2018). Conversely, the lowest unemployment rates in Zambia are found among older demographics, specifically those aged 55 to 59, with a rate of 6.2%, and individuals

aged 65 and older, where the unemployment rate drops further to 2.8% (Population Council and UNFPA, 2018). Therefore, for most youth party members, the promises of jobs, as well as other in-kind benefits, in return for undertaking certain tasks and duties for political parties became a lucrative path (COG, 2021). One of the duties associated with being a party cadre was to intimidate political opponents and engage in violence related to electoral campaigns (EUEOM, 2021). Party cadres targeted local radio stations that provided a platform for civil society and opposition leaders and harassed civil servants on suspicions of their political affiliation to the opposition (COG, 2021).

According to the CCMG election report (CCMG, 2022), over 70 incidents of election violence were recorded during the campaign period, with the PF and UPND responsible for the acts in the ratio of 2:1. The report noted that the Zambia Police had regularly neglected to arrest the perpetrators but applied excessive force on various occasions against opposition campaigners especially UPND party members and supporters (CCMG, 2021).

Although a wide range of activities relating to campaigns, including, roadshows, door-to-door canvassing and large-scale gatherings, happened across the country during the election period, they occurred against the background of COVID-19 campaign regulations. Unfortunately, the ruling party weaponised the pandemic by banning rallies and roadshows, thereby preventing opposition from campaigning.

President Lungu announced 21 days of national mourning on 17 June, following the demise of former President Kenneth Kaunda. The period that followed saw a major decline in campaign activities and election related incidents. However, verbal invectives related to ethnicity continued.

Freedom of assembly and movement were curtailed as they were subjected to arbitrary restrictions, leading to the violation of international and regional standards. There was no clear distinction between the ruling party and government as a wide range of state led development initiatives, social protection and relief programmes were employed in the campaign (COG, 2022). The beneficiaries of Social Cash Transfer (SCT) increased significantly in the months prior to the polls. Similarly, even the Farmer Input Support

Programme which should have been implemented shortly before the rainy season was undertaken during the campaign period (COG,2021). A month before elections, ZMK 15 million was allocated by the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unit to empower street and market traders. Further, senior civil servants were extensively involved in the PF presidential campaign while the government initiated the civil service debt swap programme three weeks before the elections(COG,2021). None of these abuses by the incumbent were addressed by ECZ or the EMB (COG, 2022). This state of affairs caused consternation among opposition campaigners who resorted to self-help whenever an opportunity availed itself. This contributed to a tense political environment.

Another aspect of the 2021 elections was the deployment of the Zambia Defences Force to beef up police capacity in response to political violence in Lusaka. This exceptional security measure on military deployment by the government was not consultative and increased uncertainties among the population. The soldiers filled the streets while equipped with heavy weaponry. Citizens worked under a certain level of fear and tension during this time. However, the military remained neutral.

State-run broadcasters covered and reported on all official visits undertaken by the President and Vice-President in such a way that it was similar to campaign coverage and provided the ruling PF with disproportionate free exposure, leading to the violation of international and regional standards. On the other hand, campaign coverage on commercial media was predominantly paid for by political parties to the disadvantage of the less well-off opposition and smaller parties. This also contributed to anger and disdain for the law by the opposition.

It was within the above environment that cases of electoral conflicts were reported to the CMCs across the country. The main cases were insults, tearing campaign posters and threats (Chongwe District CMC, 2022).

3.8 ZAMBIA'S ELECTORAL SYSTEM AND PROCESS

3.8.1 Overview

In Zambia, general elections are held every five years with the last elections having taken place in August 2021. Other elections are held when there is a vacancy occasioned either by death or resignation of the office holder or other circumstances prescribed by the constitution. The Zambian electoral process is governed by the Constitution and other subordinate laws. These include the Electoral Process Act 2016 and the ECZ Act 2016. The Constitution establishes four categories of elections, that is, presidential, parliamentary, mayoral (and/or council chairperson) and ward council level. Prior to any of these elections, communities usually experience electoral conflicts of varying degrees between and among political parties.

In first Republic and the period since the multiparty dispensation of 1991, elections in Zambia have been associated with inter-party conflicts in communities. A crucial aspect of inter-party electoral conflict is the expression and propagation of varied and often diametrically opposing narratives of conflict by the rival political parties. Each conflict narrative by a political party has its own interpretation of the nature of the conflict, its causes and the parties to blame for the conflict (Kuppens & Langer, 2020). Besides, these narratives are usually used to rationalise a party's involvement in the conflict, while at the same time delegitimising opposing parties' actions and motives (Bar-Tal, Oren & Nets-Zehngut, 2014). These narratives of conflict are often "pervaded by stereotypes, prejudices, mistrust, hatred, anxiety, and overall negative feelings towards the opposing groups" (Kuppens & Langer: 2020, Salomon & Cairns, 2011).

Studies which explore the influence of narratives on the practice of electoral mediation remain an ongoing subject of enquiry. The mediation of electoral conflicts in Zambia is carried out by CMCs set up in each district by the ECZ.

3.8.2 The Electoral System

The conduct of elections is provided for under the Constitution of the Republic of Zambia. The Constitution provides that elections shall be held every 5 years after the last general

election, on the second Thursday of August (Constitution of Zambia Amendment Act, 2016). The 2021 general elections were the seventh since the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1991. Candidates contest for positions of the president, members of the National Assembly, local government councils and mayors or council chairs in the general elections.

The president is elected by citizens directly for a five-year term. The constitution provides that he/she can serve a maximum of two terms in office. The electoral system provides for a majoritarian system, where the winning candidate must receive more than 50% (50% +1) of the valid votes cast. A single preference is expressed by each voter on the ballot whereby the president is elected in a single national constituency. In case a presidential candidate does not receive more than 50% of the valid votes cast in the initial ballot, the law provides that a second ballot is held within 37 days of the initial ballot, where the only candidates shall be the presidential candidates who obtained the highest and second highest number of valid votes cast in the initial ballot; or, in the case of presidential candidates having attained an equal number of the valid votes cast in the initial ballot, the highest votes among the presidential candidates that stood for election to the office of president (Constitutional Amendment Act, article 101, 2016).

The parliament of Zambia comprises the president and the National Assembly, which has 156 elected members and a maximum of eight non-constituency members of parliament who are nominated by the president. Parliament also has the vice-president who is a running mate and leader of business in the house, the speaker and two deputy speakers (COG, 2016). The two deputy speakers are not supposed to represent the same political party and must belong to different genders. The 156 members are elected from single member constituencies for a five-year term based on the first-past-the-post system and a simple majority vote. The president has powers to nominate up to eight members, where the president deems it appropriate in order to enhance the representation of special interests, skills, region or gender in the National Assembly. The nominees to the aforementioned positions must meet the minimum qualifications for members of parliament. Elections for councillors, mayors and council chairpersons are also conducted under a first-past-the-post-electoral system.

The Republic of Zambia has established the ECZ as its autonomous EMB. The ECZ, is established by the Constitution under Article 229. The Constitution of Zambia provides that the Commission must “implement the electoral process; conduct elections and referenda; register voters; settle minor electoral disputes, as prescribed; regulate the conduct of voters and candidates; accredit observers and election agents, as prescribed; and delimit electoral boundaries.” (Constitution of Zambia, article 229). In the presidential election, the chairperson of the Commission is the returning officer. The ECZ is operationalised under the Electoral Commission Act No. 25 of 2016. The Electoral Commission of Zambia Act provides for the membership, functions, operations and financial management of the ECZ and for matters connected with, or incidental to, the conduct of elections. The ECZ consists of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson and three other members appointed by the president, subject to ratification by the National Assembly (Electoral Commission Act No. 25, 2016).

3.8.3 Electoral Process

To be eligible as a voter in Zambia, a person must have a national registration card (NRC) and a voter registration card. To qualify to register as a voter, a person must be a Zambian citizen, be at least 18 years of age and possess a NRC. Once a person is registered they are issued with a voter’s card. The NRC is issued by the National Identity Unit within the Ministry of Home Affairs while the ECZ issues the voter registration card. Voter registration in Zambia is based on a digital capturing of a voter’s biometric and biographical data, photo and thumbprint. The Electoral Process Act No. 35 of 2016 prescribes continuous voter registration. For the 2021 general elections, the ECZ compiled a new voter register.

Based on the final register of voters compiled by the ECZ, the number of registered voters for the 2021 general election was 7 023 499, an increase of 325 127 (4.9%) compared to 2016(ECZ, 2021). Disaggregated by gender, 3 751 040 (53.4%) were female and 3 272 459 (46.6%) were male (ECZ, 2021). Voters aged between 18 and 35 on the 2021 register represented 54% of all registered voters (ECZ, 2021).

To meet the qualifications for a presidential candidate, the following must apply;

- i. one must be a citizen by birth or descent;
- ii. be ordinarily resident in Zambia;
- iii. be at least 35 years old;
- iv. have obtained, as a minimum academic qualification, a Grade 12 certificate or its equivalent;
- v. declare assets and liabilities, as prescribed;
- vi. pay the prescribed election fee;
- vii. be fluent in the official language – that is, English;
- viii. and be supported by at least 100 registered voters from each province.

Under Article 36 of the Constitution, a person born outside Zambia is a citizen by descent if, at the date of that person's birth, at least one parent of that person is or was a citizen by birth or descent (Constitution of Zambia Amendment Act, Article 36, 2016). For the 2021 elections, 16 presidential candidates contested the polls. Only one candidate was a woman (ECZ, 2021). Each of the presidential candidates was required to name a person as their vice-presidential running mate.

Some of the above requirements for presidential candidates also apply to parliamentary candidates. These are the nationality, registration and education criteria. In this instance however, candidates must be supported by at least 15 registered voters in the constituency in which they are contesting the election. Candidates may be sponsored by political parties or stand as independents. For the 2021 elections, there were 857 parliamentary candidates, of whom 21% were women (EUEOM, 2021). At the local council level, similar nationality and education criteria as stipulated for parliamentary candidates apply. Furthermore, the Constitution provides that candidates should be at least 19 years of age, a citizen or holder of a resident permit, or resident in the district in which they are contesting and present a certificate of clearance showing payment of council taxes (Constitutional of Zambia Amendment Act, Article 153(4), 2016). During the 2021 elections, at the mayoral and council chairperson level, there were 6 130 candidates running for 1 858 seats (EUEOM, 2021). Around 10% of candidates were women (EUEOM, 2021).

3.9 COMPLAINTS, APPEALS AND ELECTION PETITIONS

Electoral dispute resolution mechanisms during elections in Zambia are provided for under the legal and electoral framework. There is a system of appeals through which every electoral action or procedure can be legally challenged by parties and candidates. Legal or political appeals related to electoral issues can be submitted before judicial or political agencies. Section 113 of the Electoral Process Act No. 35 of 2016 mandates the ECZ to manage electoral conflicts and resolve disputes. In order to execute its mandate, the ECZ established CMCs as administrative mechanisms to address electoral conflicts at national and district levels. The Committees are made up of “a chairperson appointed by the Commission; a vice-chairperson; one representative from each registered political party; representatives of CSOs; and representatives of such government ministries and institutions as determined by the Commission, such as the Zambia Police Service (ZPS), the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and the Drug Enforcement Commission (DEC)” (Electoral Commission of Zambia Act No. 25, 2016).

The National and District CMCs have powers to mediate electoral conflicts; advise the conflicting party in an election conflict; and recommend the revocation of accreditation of any monitor or observer to the Commission (ECZ Act No.25, 2016). The Committees also determine allegations of alleged bias against electoral officers appointed by the Commission (ECZ Act No.25, 2016). Although the Committees poses overriding powers and responsibilities to mediate electoral conflicts, they have limitations (COG, 2021). The Committees have no judicial powers, cannot disqualify the candidature of any individual taking part in the elections, cannot declare or announce the results of the elections, cannot order the recount of votes in case of a dispute over election results and cannot fine or imprison an offender (Jackson, 2011, Magasu, 2018). These powers lie with the Commission and the criminal justice system, respectively.

Further, the Electoral Process Act No.35 of 2016 incorporates a Code of Conduct which is in force throughout the electoral process. The code binds political parties, candidates and their supporters to carry out their electoral activities in accordance with the code. All offences liable for prosecution are outlined in the Electoral Process Act. Among the

offences are corrupt and illegal practices and other election offences – namely, bribery; impersonation; undue influence; illegal practice of publishing false statements in respect of candidates; illegal practice in respect of nomination of candidates; illegal practice in respect of public meetings; illegal practices relating to the poll; breach of secrecy; offences by election officers; offences by printers and publishers; obstruction of officer; and attempts to commit offences(Electoral Process Act, 2016).The outlined offences are punishable by a fine of up to 500 000 penalty points and/or imprisonment not exceeding seven years(Electoral Process Act No.35, 2016).

According to the ECC, CMCs must resolve or encourage amicable settlement of disputes within 24 hours from date of receipt of the complaint. Election petitions may be presented for all elections. Presidential election petitions are to be presented to the Constitutional Court (Electoral Process Act No.35, 2016). A voter, candidate or the Attorney-General may present a presidential petition. The petitions must be submitted within seven days of the official declaration of results, and the Constitutional Court has 14 days after the filing of the petition to hear the petition. This rule was amended in 2021 to address the situation where the 14 days' time lapsed in 2016 without parties hearing the substantive matter (Constitutional Court (Amendment Rules) of 2021, statutory Instrument No,29 of 2021). According to the electoral process act, the judgement of the Constitutional Court is final.

With regard to National Assembly election petitions, these are presented in the first instance to the High Court. The attorney-general, an aggrieved candidate or a registered voter may present a National Assembly petition. Parliamentary petitions must be submitted within 14 days of the official declaration of results. The court of first instance has 90 days to hear a petition. Decisions of the High Court may be appealed to the Constitutional Court. All petitions are heard in open court. In case of local government elections, petitions are presented to ad hoc tribunals established by the chief justice (Electoral Process act, No.35, 2016). These tribunals are presided over by a magistrate and two legal practitioners appointed by the chief justice (Electoral Process Act No.35, 2016). The law provides that an election petition must be heard within 30 days of filing. The decision of a local government elections tribunal may be appealed to the

Constitutional Court (COG,2021). The decision of the Constitutional Court is final and binding in all instances (COG, 2021).

Highlighted above, is the intricate web of electoral challenges faced by Zambia, emphasising the contextual nuances and the evolving nature of electoral conflicts and political violence. Evident in the chapter, is that Zambia grapples with historical legacies, economic challenges and democratic issues that contribute to electoral conflicts and tensions. The struggle for political power is embedded in these challenges that are partly driven by the design of the electoral process and system.

The next chapter turns to the transformative power of storytelling, unveiling it as a potent tool for community peacebuilding and conflict management with the capacity to contribute significantly to fostering harmony and understanding within communities during elections.

CHAPTER FOUR: STORYTELLING AND COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explores how local conflict management mechanisms in Zambia can be effective structures as part of a larger peace architecture involving community electoral conflicts. Electoral conflicts are usually a result of elections taking place in a community. The study attempts to broaden the understanding, usefulness and significance of storytelling in enhancing community involvement in the process of peacebuilding from below. It investigates storytelling in electoral conflicts using the practice of CMCs.

However, before delving into the details relating to storytelling and electoral conflicts, the study reviewed literature related to storytelling and its role in peacebuilding and conflict management in general. The sections below discuss the various aspects of oral traditional storytelling as a peacebuilding tool and how it differs from other conflict management methods. The first aspect is to highlight how storytelling is understood and explained by some scholars. This is followed by acknowledging the context and purpose of storytelling and its recognition as a community resource that can play a role in the management, resolution and transformation of not only general community conflicts but specifically electoral conflicts. Other aspects include dichotomy of stories, storytelling from a social constructivist approach in peacebuilding and evidence of its application.

4.2 UNDERSTANDING STORYTELLING

Drawing on Arendt's (1958) and Jorgensen's (2022) work, storytelling may be understood as the process by which actors reconstruct their experiences and appear in a collective space. Stories are expressions of authenticity to the extent that they disclose who people are and create what Arendt called a 'space of appearance'. She conjectures that authenticity is enacted when people have the ability and commitment to create stories

and inscribe themselves in history. Both authors argue that storytelling is enacted within and from spaces and by extension a means for political action.

Jorgensen (2022) draws three theoretical consequences from storytelling. First, he identifies storytelling as an ever-present possibility of a 'space of appearance' in which the subject is an originator of action. Second, he addresses the notion of storytelling as a spatial practice focusing on the way stories are shaped through interactions and collective engagements, or 'emplacement'. Third, he uses a material and embodied reconfiguration of Arendt's notion of action to demonstrate how material relations offer important affordances to change organizations. He concludes that because storytelling is both a process of engaging with ourselves and the power relations that we are part of, Arendt's notion of storytelling is helpful for understanding how and in what circumstances we can act politically in organizations. This interpretation aligns well with the study's aim to explore the value of storytelling as a peacebuilding mechanism for the CMCs which are essentially political organisations.

In understanding storytelling and stories, Hashem, in his thesis, posits that stories provide insight into self-formation, influenced by social, cultural and political context as well as inter-generational relations (Hashem,2021). Storytelling in this context is portrayed as an act of remembrance that reveals who-ness of the actor and affects, incites and calls for further action; however, the outcome of the initial act is not guaranteed(Hashem, 2021). Stories in different forms have been fundamental in appreciating the past, and illuminating the path to the future. Arendt suggests that stories reveal the significance of words and deeds with which "we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth" (Arendt, 1998:176). The storytelling process can be transformative for the listener, who gains access to alternative visions of not only past, but also future. Thus, Arendt's political thought rests on humans' capacity to act narratively and potentially transformatively and, in so doing, to insert themselves in the world by sharing their personal and collective narratives—in short, by storytelling. One central aspect of storytelling is simply using speech and action to show society who one is in a way that challenges stereotypical representations. Arendt's approach to storytelling with her claim

that 'publicity' – making public – is its validation is critical in all conflict situations including electoral conflicts.

Public storytelling can counter-hegemonic narratives to disrupt, disarticulate and expand dominant storylines, so that people may reimagine anew alternative ways of seeing and being (Erwin, 2021) and in the process bring about peaceful co-existence.

All these perspectives help to shape or reconfigure our understanding of how to manage human situations such as those presented at CMCs during election periods in Zambia.

4.3 CONTEXT AND PURPOSES OF STORIES AND STORYTELLING

In this study, the guiding objective for telling stories is largely to re-establish peace and harmony within the community. Within the African context, storytelling is embedded in culture. Walsham (2002) reinforces this by asserting that part of this cultural boundary is governed by shared symbols, norms and values within the social setting. Thus, storytelling must be understood as a custom and tradition which is connoted within the set of control mechanisms, plans, rules and instructions intended to govern morals, behaviour and human conduct. Seen from this perspective, community peacebuilding is affected by motley stories and other cultural factors linked to structural variables in society with the potential to instrumentalise or diffuse conflicts.

According to Prasetyo (2017), the content of storytelling narratives in community development has three basic structures: (1) how the context is constructed in the community. These structures are about the nature of past and current problems and how societal challenges are framed in the community. They also entail an idea about what desired future goal is described to proposed actions. (2) How actors are constructed in the community. Who are the individuals, organisational and sector-level actors driving and hindering change? (3) How the social change process is said to unfold in the community. These structures discuss what events, experiences or activities lead to the desired future and in what sequence. All of these necessary structures can be used to develop the role and the production of narratives in the community development process including peacebuilding. The figure 1 below demonstrates the story sharing dynamics.

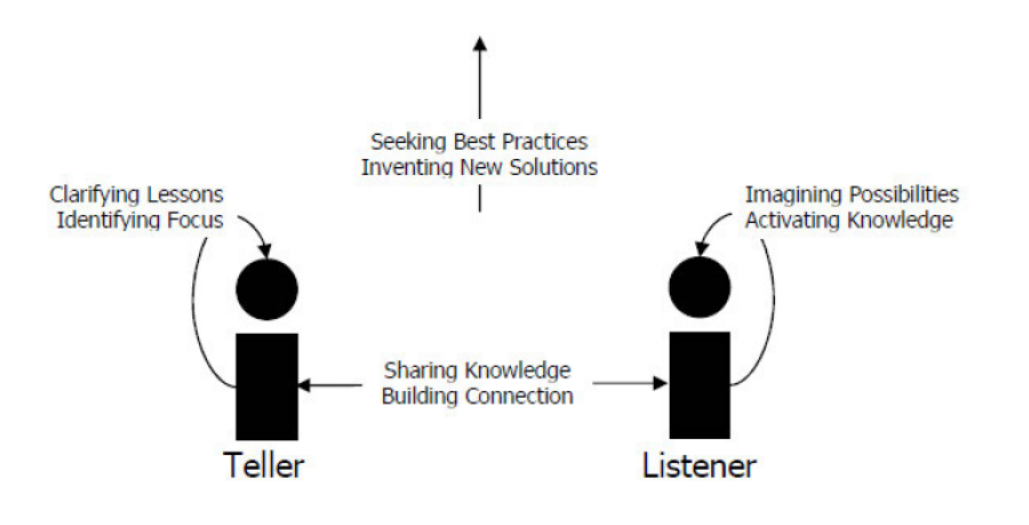


Figure 1: Story-sharing dynamics

Source: (Doty, 2003)

According to Doty, communities of practice do not “work” automatically. It takes effort and time to develop a real community, and some groups never actually make it. Taking time to tell a community’s stories is one way to do this. People want to share their passion for life and create a domain for sharing and learning about each other’s work and life experiences because they are intrinsically motivating. For this reason, the critical elements of a community of practice are how to provide the motivation for sharing and accessing a knowledge network, and address the barrier to knowledge transfer (Doty, 2003).

There are three underlying narratives of the storytelling: the story of self, the story of us and the story of now. The story of self could articulate what we are doing and why we care about it. The story of us encompasses hopes and concerns. And the story of now will help us translate our ambitions into action (Prasetyo, 2017; W.K. Kellogg Foundation:2010). Understanding these underlying narratives makes stories crucially important in people’s lives.

According to Cloke and Goldsmith (2021), every conflict story contains three separate versions: internal, external and core stories. The external story describes the events that took place, typically focusing on the other party’s evil deeds. The internal story addresses

the storyteller's position, usually a defence of his own actions or inaction. The external story is about the views of those who witnessed or indirectly experienced the actions being discussed. The core story involves an acceptance of responsibility for the conflict, revealing a deeper level of self-awareness than was evident at the first telling of the story (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2021).

In the typical conflict story, the storyteller portrays himself as an innocent, powerless victim and his opponent as an insensitive, powerful evildoer (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2021). The objective of this type of casting is to elicit sympathy for the storyteller, while the telling of the story serves to defend his position, to rationalise what he or she may have said or done. Although conflict stories are fictional in many ways, with the facts contained in them skewed beyond recognition, they are also designed to reveal larger truths. They provide accurate expressions of how the parties felt at the time, their needs and desires and interests (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2021).

Theologian and storyteller McKenna (1998, cited in Senehi, 2002:57) posits the view that each and every story has a purpose of conversion, change as well as transformation. Firstly, stories are meant to tell people the truth. However, these stories need to be told in such a way that an individual or the listener or an audience is able to decide as to whether what is being told is the truth. The one telling the story also needs to be sure that what they are narrating is the truth, and that it is the exact story which makes them come true. This is because stories are sometimes told as a process through which products are expected and, in this case, stories are told in an effort to encourage peace efforts.

For instance, sharing of stories in Indigenous and folk traditions has traditionally been a strong mechanism used by Africans to pass on their own cultural edicts, morals and traditions from one generation to another even in the absence of documented evidence (Coburn, 2011; Senehi: 2009).

In an era marked by political discord and societal upheaval (LibreTexts, 2019), the role of storytelling as a potent instrument for conflict resolution has become increasingly prominent. The idea that narratives can bridge ideological divides and foster

understanding is compelling, yet its efficacy stands in stark contrast to alternative methods employed in navigating political conflicts.

In the realm of conflict management, the dichotomy between conventional conflict management methods and the transformative power of storytelling is evident. Among the conventional conflict management methods, diplomatic negotiations stand as one of the grand methods that have stood the test of time (Marks & Freeman, 2023). Predominantly, diplomatic negotiations centre around identifying common ground, often prioritising strategic interests and making compromises (Meerts, 2015).

An illustrative instance of the limitations of this approach is evident in the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where diplomatic negotiations have faltered due to a focus on strategic interests and compromises without providing an avenue for the people to share their personal narratives and historical perspectives (S. Daniel Abraham Center for Strategic Dialogue, 2014). By contrast, storytelling emerges as a transformative approach that humanises conflicts by weaving together personal experiences and perspectives. This method goes beyond strategic considerations, fostering empathy and understanding among opposing parties (Sports Conflict Institute (SCI), 2023). A compelling example of the potency of storytelling is found in post-conflict Northern Ireland, where initiatives like "The Stories We Tell" of the Healing Through Remembering (HTR) project successfully brought individuals from both sides of the historical divide, protestant unionists and the Roman Catholic nationalists, to share their personal narratives. This shared storytelling not only created a profound sense of empathy but also played a crucial role in contributing to the healing of communities previously torn apart by conflict (HTR, 2005). Through such narrative-focused initiatives, storytelling proves to be a powerful catalyst for reconciliation, offering a nuanced and emotionally resonant alternative to traditional conflict management methods.

Additionally, in the discourse of storytelling and traditional conflict management, formal agreements and arrangements through mediation, arbitration and legal adjudication emerge as key in terms of managing conflicts and securing peace. They often centre around power-sharing or political settlements and focus on the current issues neglecting historical perspectives and may fall short in directly addressing profound issues of identity

and belonging (The Programme on Negotiation, 2023). This is evident in instances such as the power-sharing agreements in the Central African Republic, where the focus on political arrangements has not adequately attended to the complex interplay of identities within the conflict playing out in the country (Mehler, 2009). By contrast, storytelling emerges as a potent tool capable of articulating and validating diverse identities, thereby fostering a profound sense of inclusion.

Narratives possess the unique ability to highlight shared histories or cultural connections that transcend mere political differences (Bostanli & Habisch, 2023). An exemplar of the efficacy of storytelling in conflict resolution is found in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Liberia, which played a pivotal role in managing the conflict and ushering in an era of peace and stability (Long, 2008). Through the narratives shared in this commission, were not only individual identities acknowledged and validated, but the process also emphasised the interconnectedness of shared histories, contributing to a deeper understanding and fostering an inclusive foundation for sustained peace.

Indeed, the use of oral narratives to understand conflict development, resolution and transformation has gained traction as a potential tool and methodology both for pedagogy and scholarship in humanities and social sciences in recent decades (Barber, 2016; Federman, 2016).

It is clear from the above examples that storytelling can be a valuable tool in electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding depending on the context and purpose. The next section addresses the power of storytelling

4.4 THE POWER OF STORIES AND STORYTELLING

Stories are an essential element of social change because of the power they have to shape the way people think and feel about their worlds and how they interact within them. In the community peacebuilding and development processes, sharing stories or experiences can build trust, cultivate norms, transfer tacit knowledge, facilitate unlearning, and generate emotional connections (Prasetyo, 2017; Sole, 2002).

Storytelling teaches us how to address the different individual situations by making up alternative futures through storylines of change.

Furthermore, stories do not simply recount experiences but open up new possibilities for action. They reflect and at the same time create reality (Davies, 2002). According to Davies (2002), these principles of narratives of change are compatible with the community development initiatives which use the ability of words or story to convince individuals, to unite groups, frame reality and evoke imagination. Storytelling is “an effective strategy that incorporates the aesthetic ways of knowing into instruction” (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008:41).

There are some advantages of working with stories rather than with facts, opinions, or answers to direct questions (Kurtz, 2014). First, stories are for negotiation. Negotiation involves the position of stories and storytelling in social life, as a mechanism for the ritualised negotiation of truths. Kurtz also notes the functions of stories. He particularly highlights the social function. He posits that when a person tells a story in a group, that person is given both the platform and the attention of the group. Requesting people to tell you stories sends them the message that you have given them the platform and your attention. It sends the message “I am listening” rather than the message “I am interrogating,” and thus triggers a different social response (Kurtz, 2014:4). This gives the sharing of stories both a unique function in society and a unique advantage when one wants to understand feelings and beliefs.

Prasetyo (2017:4) draws attention to why stories are also important for emotional safety. “The separation between storytelling and what takes place in stories provides an emotional distance that creates the safety people require to disclose deeply held feelings and beliefs. A story is a socially recognised package in which people learn from a young age to wrap up their feelings, beliefs and opinions. When they tell and listen to stories, people often reveal things about their feelings or opinions on a subject that they would not have been willing or able to reveal when talking about the topic directly. People know that they can metaphorically place a story on a table and invite others to view and internalise it without exposing themselves to the same degree as they would if they stated those feelings, beliefs and opinions directly.”

Prasetyo (2017:5) further explains how stories provide a voice:

Most people are familiar with being asked for their opinions in standard surveys, and they get out their well-practiced poker faces for that game. Asking people to tell stories puts away that game and starts another one. The storytelling game is inherently one in which greater respect is afforded to both players.

Indeed, requesting people to tell stories honours them by legitimising their experiences as valuable communications. Honour and respect are linked by giving people the freedom to choose what story they will tell and how the story will take form. This can be very helpful in the divergent zone because it can allow members to express a wide range of opinions without fearing their opinion will overwhelm the group's discussion (Kaner et.al., 1996)

The power of storytelling is also manifest because it enables engagement. People tell and listen to stories in part because it helps to refine our model of the way the world works so we can predict what might happen next (Prasetyo, 2017). The story pulls them in and engages them until it has completed its course (Gill, 2016). The other aspect of storytelling is articulation, which enables storytellers to sometimes reveal feelings and beliefs of which they themselves are not aware. When the answer to a direct question is, "I don't know," asking for a story may provide the contextual triggers that bring out the tacit knowledge and relevant experience required (Hassan & McKee, 2021). After the story has been told, the storyteller may still not know the answer to the direct question. However, the answer lies in their story, and if you ask them about the story, the answers will form into meaningful patterns.

Another way in which stories are powerful is interpretation. When people are asked to tell stories, and then they are asked questions about their stories, you are asking them to interpret rather than opine. This displacement allows people both the freedom to say prohibited things – it's about the story, not about me – and the safety to accept fault or place blame. People tend to have stronger reactions to hearing stories, with regard to the emotions they show, than they have to hearing factual information. "I've noticed listeners tend to fidget less and lean in more when a story is being told than when someone is giving opinions or relaying information" (Prasetyo, 2017:6). He then concludes that this makes asking people to interpret their own stories a useful means of surfacing their feelings about important issues.

The ability of storytelling to create imagination also makes it powerful. When a topic is complex and many-layered, the best course is to increase diversity, generate many ideas, think out of the box, and prepare for surprise (Prasetyo, 2017). Asking a diverse range of people to tell you what they have done and seen enlists their imagination along with your own. This both broadens the net of exploration (by opening the inquiry to the varieties of human experience) and increases its flexibility (by capturing multidimensional content which can be plumbed again and again as needs emerge). In contrast, direct questioning, though precise, is narrowly focused and produces a unidimensional content that can provide only one answer.

The other aspect of storytelling that demonstrates its power is authenticity. When the goal of a project is communicative, stories convey complex emotions with more ground truth than any other means of communication. Direct questioning may generate more precise measurements, but a story elicitation ensures greater depths of insight and understanding into complex topics and complex people. The act of listening to a story told by another person creates a suspension of disbelief and displacement of perspective that helps people see through new eyes into a different world of truth (Penrose, 2020)

Furthermore, stories are powerful because of their contextual richness. When you ask direct questions, it is easy to guess wrongly about what sorts of answers people might have and even about what sorts of questions might lead to useful answers. This is often a problem when exploring complex topics. Asking people to talk about their experiences can sometimes lead to useful answers even if the wrong questions were asked, because the contextual richness of stories provides information in excess of what was directly sought. In fact, being surprised by the questions posed (and answered) by collected stories is a standard outcome of narrative inquiry (Doty, 2003).

Another attribute of storytelling is redirection (McKee, 2017). A well-constructed story elicits results in fewer non-response behaviours (answering without considering, manipulating the survey to promote an agenda, trying too hard to do what seems to be expected, and so on) than direct questioning. These behaviours do not go away when people tell stories, but they are both reduced and more obvious when they do occur. Because telling a story pulls in both teller and listener, the reluctant pay more attention,

those with agendas reveal their true thoughts (even while promoting their agendas), and performers have a harder time guessing what they are supposed to say (and switch to telling the best story they can). Non-responses are easier to spot in narrative results, because the texts of the stories themselves provide clues to why people gave the answers they did (McKee, 2017). The next section discusses oral traditional storytelling as a form of peacebuilding considering the various advantages that are highlighted above.

4.5 ORAL TRADITIONAL STORYTELLING AS A FORM OF PEACEBUILDING

Oral traditional storytelling has been part and parcel of African societies since time immemorial. In various African societies, storytelling is grounded in antecedents of customs, tradition and culture deployed varyingly as entertainment, sources of wisdom and educational material as well as in resolving conflicts.

The practice of storytelling as a form of peacebuilding has taken many different shapes and has been motivated in various ways. For some projects, the main objective is to facilitate processes of catharsis and healing for individuals and communities; for others, it is about establishing, sharing and restoring lines of communication across existing divides. Some include efforts to document events and experiences for the rectification or amplification of the historical record, while others try to integrate the storytelling practices with efforts to achieve forms of legal justice (Kelly, 2005).

In peacebuilding, stories depict personal, cultural and life experiences that give meaning to our lives and connect us with whatever is happening in our present and past lives. Much more importantly, storytelling is understood as a very vital psychotherapeutic mechanism in relation to healing and transformation. Coburn (2011) advances the idea that through the use of stories in literature and oral tradition, our beliefs, ideals, opinions and perspectives of ourselves and others are continually being shaped, adjusted and transformed. This view is reiterated by Winslade and Monk (2000) who affirm that storytelling is an interface of perspectives of others and ourselves.

Coburn (2011) further submits that storytelling has gained traction as an important mechanism for peacebuilding especially within intercultural, inter-communal, organisational and interpersonal conflict spectrums. For instance, people in these situations tell stories of a personal, traditional and historical nature to obtain knowledge about the values, history and traditions that stimulate individual attitudes, behaviours and customs. This is important in encouraging acceptance of and adherence to key aspects of trust, communality, empathy and appreciation of the different characteristics and experiences of people.

Storytelling in conflicts recognises that in most cases, if not always, intractable conflicts are deep-seated in hidden and guarded narratives which are seldom shared openly by parties involved. Thus, storytelling provides diverse perspectives that unlock the unsaid stories and provide possibilities to explore new meanings.

For all humans, storytelling is effectually referred to as telling a story. The difference, though, when it is brought to the fore in peace work, is that it is not the narration of an imaginative tale – although some curricula may be broad enough to include it – but rather the rendition of one's own true story.

Essentially, storytelling is an excellent example of decolonising peace. The idea of decolonising peace arises from the idea of a decolonisation of the mind; from the cognitive and emotional understanding that people do not necessarily require expert outsiders and their resources to shape their daily lives, or more importantly, to bring them peace. (Fontan, 2012; Iglesias, 2020). Therefore, storytelling can be considered as an effective tool for decolonising the mind of someone because at the end, individuals arrive at an emotional as well as cognitive awareness of how powerful they are as a tool for change. What is needed of people is to tell their own stories and speak their own narratives (Coburn, 2011).

Stories in peacebuilding have been proven to arouse the emotions of the teller and the listener through their imaginative prose and offer the possibility of empathic responses (Coburn, 2011). Lederach (2005) reinforces the foregoing advancing the notion that peacebuilders need to be afforded the benefit of the art of imagination because it gives

them the dexterity to navigate and deal with the messy and intricate rigours of real conflict. Storytelling provides a way to engage the imagination, helping the hearer to picture the situation as if they had lived through it.

Storytelling renders itself as a low-hanging fruit for application to peacebuilding because of its easy availability. Many storytellers emphasise that we are all natural storytellers (Coburn, 2012). In addition, the skills of storytelling are easy to learn. For example, storytelling does not require expensive equipment, extensive training or a special environment (Coburn, 2012). The beauty of stories lies in their effectiveness at conveying meaning to all people, empowering those who have little access to resources, as storytelling is participatory and inclusive (Coburn, 2012).

Stories can be framed in mythical or traditional narratives or told as biographical experiences. Thus, a teller can choose how to convey the meaning most effectively and choose the level of self-disclosure that may be safe (Coburn, 2012). By sharing stories, people on different sides of a conflict may be able to develop greater self-awareness about their own cultures and backgrounds, enabling an understanding of some unhelpful metaphors, perspectives and stereotypes that are used. Storytelling may also elicit the sustaining values of a group or individual so that these are transparent. In turn, storytelling may be a useful way to promote these desired values when they have become evident.

In a book titled 'The Evaluation of Storytelling as a Peacebuilding Methodology', Irish Peace Centres (2011) state that storytelling serves the following purposes; among them are: People get involved because they are seeking justice, therapy and keeping memory alive in order that it makes a contribution towards some type of movement towards justice, others trying to put on the public record an acknowledgement of what happened in the past. They feel that their version of history and events is not getting the public attention that they deserve, and they want acknowledgement for their version of history. In light of all these purposes of storytelling that take place within a community setting, the next section addresses stories and community peacebuilding.

4.6 COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

Stories are an essential element of social change because of the power they possess to shape the way people think and feel about their worlds and how they interact within them. In the community peacebuilding and development processes, sharing stories or experiences can build trust, cultivate norms, transfer tacit knowledge, facilitate unlearning and generate emotional connections (Prasetyo, 2017; Sole, 2002).

Despite the predominance of linear, teleological-based approaches stemming from top-down financial support trickling down to local efforts, community peacebuilding has gained international support (Ervin, 2015). Its emergent characteristics are benefiting from the rapid access to SMS (short message service) technology and expanding networks, contributing in turn to the growing interest in systemic peacebuilding (ibid.).

However, the challenge until more recently was lack of theories, frameworks and processes that were able to capture the creativity and innovations emerging at the local level as well as the need to learn from them and connect them to the larger system for sustainable contributions to peace writ large. Such an innovation would include community peacebuilding through stories or storytelling.

Community peacebuilding entails a sustainable process of stimulating and facilitating the capacity of the community to “self-organise” (de Coning, 2016:173), articulate its own problems, identify complex issues, use its own knowledge of realistic solutions and draw on its unity (Akande, Kaye & Rukuni, 2021.) Such organic evolution of efforts is connected to the notion of local community participation which is “the inclusion of the local context, local communities and agencies” (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015:825). The assumption is that when people are involved in a participatory and consultative process, conditions are created for a collective solution to be reached and they are thus able to resolve their own conflicts.

Communitarian peacebuilding calls for a broader participation of local actors in peacebuilding activities and stresses the “importance of tradition and social context in determining the legitimacy and appropriateness” of peacebuilding activities (Donais,

2009:6). In this study, storytelling is a tradition which fits into the Zambian social context. Communitarian peacebuilding emphasises the need for a comprehensive, multi-level (top, middle, grassroots) approach to peacebuilding (Lederach, 1997), while upholding the “right of societies to make their own choices, regardless of the degree to which those choices correspond with international norms” (Donais, 2009:6). Ultimately, the communitarian peacebuilding logic is driven by two main aspirations: (i) the need to centralise local agency and power in peacebuilding; and (ii) the motivation to build a set of social, community, ethnic and institutional structures that promote peace within a framework of local ownership and understanding (Funk, 2012; Paladini-Adell, 2012).

Vernon (2019:3) defines local peacebuilding as “initiatives owned and led by people in their own context”. It includes small-scale grassroots initiatives, as well as activities undertaken on a wider scale. The concepts of ownership and capacity are particularly relevant to implementing peacebuilding. According to Bush (2011:115):

Peacebuilding is not about the imposition of solutions, it is about the creation of opportunities. The challenge is to identify and nurture the political, economic and social space within which Indigenous participants can identify, develop, and employ the resources necessary to build a peaceful, prosperous and just society.

In other words, peacebuilding will succeed if citizens of the affected society assume responsibility for implementing peace (‘ownership’). Similarly, they need to be willing to sustain the peacebuilding process by relying on local resources, both human and financial (‘capacity’).

Storytelling could help our efforts to change the way we improve our community or organisation. The story itself constitutes the opportunity for exploring how to engage people in meaningful and lasting change (engagement paradigm). Storytelling, as an approach and a method, can help community leaders to connect people and each other, such as creating a compelling purpose, honouring the past and present, building connections and relationships, listening to their voices and making the whole system in the community visible (Axelrod, 2000).

Community peacebuilding needs a story as narratives to unite and deal with cultural diversity at the grassroots. These efforts are rooted in community institutions that engage

in motivating the participation of members in building their social capital and restoring their dreams, hopes and faith. Just as the communities and their organisations keep sharing their history (and stories) that bind them together and motivate them to act (Warren, 2001), so the narratives of peaceful electoral conduct and change itself will always be crucial for social change and community peacebuilding.

Storytelling is also seen from the social constructivist perspective in the discourse of community peacebuilding- a subject matter which is discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

4.7 STORYTELLING AS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

The idea that our world is socially constructed, and therefore we have the power to change our world by changing our language and social structures, is key to elicitive, adaptive and emergent approaches to peacebuilding. Stories are socially constructed through language and therefore enable society to bring about social change including peace.

French philosopher Michel Foucault heavily influenced social constructivist thinking in the 1970s and 1980s, and shed light on how discourses create structures that both empower and entrap us. According to this view, discourse includes the vocabulary and societal structures, such as laws, rules and cultural norms that make up a subset of common-sense knowledge. Discourse incorporates not only the meaning and usage of words in conversation regarding what is recognised to be true (Foucault, 1995), but the place that meaning holds in society, and the societal structures that hold the meaning in place. He discusses the ways in which people allow themselves to be controlled by subtle forms of power, derived from ordinary, common-sense knowledge and held in place by a discourse in which a person is engaged.

He argues for strategic altering of a discourse towards healthy relationships requiring attention to the multiple dimensions and systems and structures that hold the discourse in place. It also requires attention to the factors that influence those dimensions, systems, and structures and careful cultivation of a shared narrative between the parties involved.

Understanding the power of discourse and communicative relationships from a systems perspective and having access to altering destructive discourses is a critical element of effective peacebuilding at the grassroots level. This requires participatory, elicitive, systemic and adaptive peacebuilding processes that can respond as needed to support individuals and communities in transforming a discourse. Storytelling is such a catalyst for transforming such a discourse.

The main concern of social constructivism is the meaning as well as understanding to be the features that are central to human activities, whose beginnings are in shared agreements as well as social interaction regarding how these symbolic forms are viewed (Lock & Strong, 2010). Storytelling is specific to place and time, ways in which meanings are produced, as well as the interpretation of events. All these are inherent to the socio-cultural discourses, and they produce stories through which people are able to understand themselves. This subjectivity is central to storytelling because there is always a voice present.

Because storytellers form part of the story, they engage in involuntary narration while they provoke the reflexivity that is present in their audience who are actively engaged. Thus, for storytelling to be effective, informative, as well as a catalyst for change, it therefore needs to be confidentially connected as well as directly available to story audiences including their emotions (Bush, 2011). Storytelling is particularly empowering because of the fact that it is easily accessible (Senehi, 2002). The closeness between listener and the storyteller is more likely to engender feelings of community, closeness, as well as security (ibid.) including post-storytelling commitment which is very crucial to the process of storytelling. Power dynamics are likely to be more cooperative and balanced in situations where there is direct access between the listener and storyteller, which results in the production of meaning as well as shared knowledge through feedback and critique.

Being an approach of social constructivism that is legitimate to inquiry, storytelling has a utilitarian nature that is capable of addressing social conflict as well as peacebuilding. Storytelling therefore acts as a means through which personal as well as collective experiences can be relayed including the collective aspirations. Therefore, by engaging

in storytelling, people instinctually shape their realities, by drawing a sense of selfhood, and drawing meaning from life itself (Mead, 1934).

According to Gottscall (2012), in effect, humans can be considered as storytelling animals. Depending on the audience and the narrator, storytelling is very instrumental in shaping as well as constructing perception. Therefore, as a form of communication, storytelling translates the culture of a community by employing language, which is the most complex symbolic system of a society. Language is used by groups in society to indicate shared and varying understanding and meaning of power, identity, values and history.

Further, storytelling invokes and relies on archetypes, collective myths, linguistic forms, symbols and expressions of motive, without which its meaning “would remain incomprehensible as well as uninterpretable” (Ewick & Silbey 1995:4). Storytelling is usually interpreted as narrative, although narrative has been characterised by several scholars as a method of storytelling and inquiry as the phenomenon of that inquiry (ibid.). Therefore, storytelling can be regarded as the ‘storied approach’ to narrative inquiry, since it seeks meaning in the stories themselves as well as encourages the reader/listener’s active engagement with the material’ (Ewick & Silbey, 1995). On the other hand, discourse establishes structuralists and public exchange that reflects the power relations that exist within a given society; therefore, storytelling is one form of discourse. Viewing it from this standpoint, social constructivists emphasise the importance of ideas, knowledge and norms in explaining the creation, behaviour and effects of institutions on building peace.

In applying storytelling as a form of peace discourse, efforts must always be taken to appreciate the dichotomy of storytelling trajectories. There are some stories which may be constructive while others could be destructive within the peacebuilding discourse. The next section addresses this storytelling dichotomy.

4.8 THE DICHOTOMY: CONSTRUCTIVE VERSUS DESTRUCTIVE STORYTELLING

Senehi (2009) argues that there are constructive and destructive stories. In peacebuilding, it is assumed that constructive stories should be used because they are able to inspire and offer opportunities for self-expression, hope and constructive engagement necessary for ensuring indurate peace. Storytelling in African traditional conflict resolution is anchored on trust and the principles of Ubuntu (being human) because stories may also be subverted to promote propaganda or support destructive values that foster conflict. These stories, especially during electoral competition may encourage or instrumentalise conflicts and emotions that have the possibility of heightening conflicts instead of resolving them. Therefore, effort should be directed to encouraging truthfulness and prioritising community interest.

On the basis of the power relations, storytelling may not just generate relationships that are positive among as well as within communities, but in addition, it is likely to intensify social mistrust and cleavages, including the perpetuation of divisive systematic and rhetoric violence. Senehi (2002) distinguishes between constructive and destructive storytelling to outline narratives which want to prevent or provoke acts of resistance, and why those acts occur. Further, she argues that constructive storytelling is inclusive as it is able to foster collaborative power as well as mutual recognition; it also creates opportunities for dialogue, openness and insight. Storytelling is further a means through which issues can be brought to consciousness and it can be used as a means of resistance. As such, storytelling is able to build on awareness and understanding as well as foster a voice.

On the contrary, storytelling which is destructive is mainly associated with exclusionary practices, coercive power, lack of mutual recognition, lack of awareness and dishonesty. As such, destructive storytelling helps in sustaining denial and mistrust (ibid.). Destructive storytelling is more likely to arise in situations where particular experiences in people's lives are narrated in situations where there has been a breach between the real and the ideal as well as the self and society (Reissman, 2001). Therefore, the daily experiences

of the people who are marginalised are encompassed by these breaches. In such situations, storytelling is likely to be a form of wish actualisation and fulfilment of an individual's ideologies, which carry different meanings to that of others and are therefore rejected.

Regardless of whether they are related to real events or mere fiction, all the stories cannot be equal. Therefore, differentiations of such nature recognise dehumanisation of the other versus mutual recognition; coercive power versus shared power; agency and resistance versus hopelessness and passivity; unawareness and dishonesty versus honesty and a critical mindfulness in the face of social injustice (Senehi, 2002).

Storytelling parties in a conflict organise their experiences in a narration form and draw attention to key events and associated occurrences that connect to human relationships and what they witnessed and endured. Winslade and Monk (2000) advance the notion that many people in different cultures live amidst competing narratives that tend to shape how they perceive themselves and other peoples. Storytelling provides them with a platform not only to share stories that pertain to themselves but also express their perceptions about others. They offer insights into what they think and experience in relation to themselves and others. They typify their feelings, experiences of conflicts and challenges in characteristically narrative form. When the story is told, it is understood to be on account of what others are able to attest to and sometimes it may have been recounted several times in the community.

Based on the foregoing, Winslade and Monk (2000) and Coburn (2011) posit that stories are not connoted as either true or false accounts based on objective reality but much rather on the dominant narratives held by the knower or narrator.

Despite their power for building narratives of change, stories can fall short in achieving their unexpected objectives or responses. Stories may be inadequate or inappropriate for reasons of form or delivery. Some "story traps" include seductiveness, single point of view and static-ness (Sole & Wilson, 2002). Stories can be so compelling, so seductive and vivid the listeners can get absorbed into the "truth" of the story and can have difficulty critically evaluating it as a template for their own experiences (Prasetyo, 2017). This

author further explains that when this happens, the listeners can be distracted from the real purpose of the telling, which is to prompt them to seek analogies and applications in their own work and domains of influence. The fact that stories are told from the perspective of one individual is also a limitation. This single point of view may be less directly relevant to the activities and concerns of many other individuals, and thus loses its power to connect with them. The impact of a story is likely to vary depending on its delivery – who is the teller and whether it is shared in an oral or written form.

The section that follows provides evidence of the role of constructive storytelling in peacebuilding.

4.9 EVIDENCE OF THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN PEACEBUILDING

4.9.1 Pathway to National Reconciliation and Restorative Justice

In most countries in which reconciliation is regarded as a major goal towards peacebuilding, what takes centre stage are ‘dialogue initiatives’. In such countries, the focus is highly placed on relations that build trust, including the mutual recognition for difference, as well as the respect for human dignity (Hazan, 2009). Hazan notes that reconciliation is basically a process which allows a society to take a step from a divided past to a future that is shared. Reconciliation is therefore a means through which former enemies are able find ways such as storytelling through which they might be able to live side by side, without necessarily forgiving and liking one another as well as without forgetting the past. Co-existence that is very peaceful among former enemies can be particularly achieved through fostering an ability among the various parties so that they can cooperate with each other (Hazan, 2009).

Through storytelling, the participants who take part are therefore encouraged to forgive their enemies so that the two parties can tolerate each other to peacefully co-exist. It has been argued by a number of scholars for ‘tolerance’ to be a ‘minimalist’ conception of reconciliation, this is because it is considered to be a primary potential outcome in the reconciliation process (Gibson, 2006; Rettberg & Ugarriza, 2016). Even though it is seen as a key principle with regard to moving towards a progressive democratic society,

political tolerance is a very difficult thing to maintain, particularly given that the society is too stressed. Therefore, given that there is the prevalence of dishonest, political tolerance is likely to lead to the persistence of divisions or resurgence of conflicts among societal groups in the process disrupting democratisation as well as the consolidation efforts (Kijewski & Rapp, 2019).

Correspondingly, 'empty reconciliation' is more likely to lead towards the exclusion of a newly constructed other, which therefore gives the impression that there is unity when in fact it divides the society even further (Renner, 2014). Nonetheless, given that storytelling is practiced organically, the narratives or stories offer more than empty reconciliation and tolerance. Therefore, storytelling offers empathy, understanding, as well as compassion. When compassion and empathy are reached, forgiveness is likely to be expected.

Kao and Revkib (2021) conducted a study in terrorism collaborators where they surveyed 1 458 people in Mosul, their study revealed that attitudes with regards to forgiveness and punishment are strongly related to the perceived volition in collaboration with Islamic state of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)-a terrorist group. This meant that those that collaborated with ISIS in obligation or compulsion were likely to be forgiven as opposed to those who collaborated based on the ideological convictions. Therefore, this is a clear demonstration that a member of the audience is likely to develop compassion for the one telling the story given that they understand their perspective.

Further, Moltmann (1983) explains that compassion requires people not just to listen to those who come bearing a solution or closure but also to those who come in the conviction of their own impotence and inadequacy. He adds that empathy and compassion communicate solidarity that is particularly healing during times of conflict resolution. In circumstances of wrongdoing, compassion, empathy as well as the recognition of responsibility can result from listening to the victims. This motivates remorse and guilt feelings that are essential during the process of reconciliation (Moltmann, 1983).

Shame, remorse and guilt are predictably expected of participants in times of truth telling reconciliation efforts, however each is different. According to Tangney et al. (2011:706):

Remorse is central to guilt, which is more narrowly linked to moral transgressions, whereas shame can be elicited by a broader range of situations, including both 'moral' and 'non-moral' failures. Further, shame is the more 'public' emotion which arises from exposure to judging others, while guilt is more of a 'private' experience, which is characterised by internally-generated pains of conscience.

Shame is a result of negative focus on the self which basically relates to one's core identity whereas guilt is a result of a negative focus on a specified kind of behaviour. Therefore, shame is characteristically the more disruptive and painful emotion due to the fact that the self and not the behaviour of an individual is the one which is objected to judgement (Tangney et al., 2011).

On the other hand, guilt is adaptive due to the fact that it sets a specific behaviour separately from the self (Pia, 2013). When a person who is guilt-stricken is drawn to examine why they behave in a certain way and consider the consequences of their behaviour, they are more likely to correct it. Therefore, individuals and groups who are publicly shamed become more damaged than those who are corrected through reconciliation efforts, particularly in degradation ceremonies or public trials (Garfinkel, 1956).

Additionally, in seeking restorative justice, there is always a desire to reach consensus and closure which would ensure that there is restoration leading to long-lasting harmony. In most situations, victims of conflicts and their families tend to endure some form of suffering because of many unanswered questions on their minds and they want to find out what really transpired and led to certain events to happen (Bau, 2013). More so, they may assume that no one cares about their pain. Therefore, storytelling helps them to bring out information that frees their conscious and curiosity and brings about healing from the past they had been consumed in which had hindered their healing (Fletcher & Weinstein, 2002).

Sabala (2019) demonstrates the immense ways in which the Ugandan and Sudanese societies integrate cultural and traditional practices of storytelling in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. He cites the Acholi of Uganda on their use of what they term as the *Mato Oput* -a traditional peace and justice mechanism whose jurisdiction is under the auspices of the elders within the communities. This mechanism uses among others

conveyance of stories and experiences which are shared by different parties to various conflicts. Conversely, in Sudan, there is a community-based customary mediation arrangement known as *Judiyya* anchored on providing customary mediation and restorative resolution of conflicts. *Judiyya* is also connoted within spiritual and traditional ethos of the communities (Sabala, 2019).

These approaches are critical in resolving conflicts because they focus on connecting personal experiences and stories that parties can easily relate to. In essence, these shared experiences are vital in fostering enduring peace and restorative justice. Storytelling in all these processes tends to massage and nurture empathy, remorse, forgiveness and restoration (Sabala, 2019). Neile (2009) discusses storytelling in relation to its peacebuilding and nation-building aspects. He notes that various countries such as South Africa, Angola and Rwanda have used truth and reconciliation processes to address historical violence and injustice, by using stories in giving narratives and testimonies intended to bring healing and closure to their conflicts.

Schaffer and Smith (2004) point out that storytelling is unique because it draws the audience into the storyteller's experiences, affecting their emotions. Indeed, the healing potential of telling stories has been acknowledged as an important attribute in the processes of reconciliation around the world.

4.9.2 Conflict Resolution and Management

Storytelling is an important way of life in Africa that is conducted with diverse practices, customs and traditions. Naturally, the values and ethos of storytelling in Africa tend to also have spiritual forms and daily experiences (Coburn, 2009; Sabala, 2019). Consequently, in dealing with daily challenges of the communities including conflicts, storytelling plays a cardinal role as it contributes to shaping their lifestyles. Ostensibly, storytelling in conflict resolution is significant in enhancing human relationships, advancing communality, mutuality, respect, sincerity, education, entertainment, wisdom, reconciliation, restitution and restoration of peace (Sabala, 2019). These aspects are what form the major premises for attaining not only conflict resolution but effectively

fostering enduring justice, truth and compensation, enhancement of human relationships, healing, reconciliation and restoration of peace and harmony (Sabala, 2019).

Incorporation of storytelling in conflict resolution enhances human relationships and peaceful co-existence, and focuses on the needs and interests of parties involved and the community as a whole during the resolution of conflicts. This is because it gives them an opportunity to express themselves and their personal experiences. The integration of storytelling processes and values in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is key in attaining sustainable peace. This is because communities can relate with different narrations and stories told. Storytelling in conflict resolution situates the holistic and unique nature of the conflicts by bringing out guarded issues and concerns that pertain to social relations, structural concerns and norms (Irobi, 2005).

Storytelling in conflict resolution and mediation is anchored on the view that there is trust, common values and a social connectedness amongst the parties. With the foregoing into consideration, there is mutual and collective desire to resolve the conflict. Morris and Fu (2001) argue that conflict resolution is affected by the macro-level structure of society comprising the distribution of wealth and power, and the system of social categories such as class or caste. Conversely, these factors are influenced by the micro-level social structure such as patterns of relationships, responsibilities and roles. These social strata and norms are institutionalised and interact with more informal everyday social life linked to socialisation practices which include cognitive and emotional responses to conflict (Johnson, 2013).

Doxtader and Villa-Valencio (2004) claim that storytelling assists in addressing inequality conflict in Africa. They argue that storytelling carries the prospects of contributing towards broad transformation and the inculcation of social relationships that are based on equity and respect. Narrative mediation in South Africa delivered a framework for conflict resolution that enabled the incorporation of transformation according to restorative justice principles (Price, 2007). Conflict, in this instance, is not regarded as an event in and of itself, but as part of a complex row over entitlement and the allocation of resources. For a long time, South Africans have used storytelling as a way of settling conflicts in the

country. This has proved to be a useful tool for understanding both sides of the conflicting parties.

4.9.3 Storytelling As “Bearing Witness”

The recording and collection of storytelling is not merely about negotiating the way out of the past into the present – it is also more about negotiating a way from the past into the future. Being a mechanism for the resolution of conflict, storytelling plays an important role as a conduit between the public and the private arenas and it may further be regarded not just as a practice which confers coherence and order on events for individual citizens but as a form of bearing witness, which contributes to the dense portrayal of very important events that affect society as well as communities (Kurasawa, 2009).

When the narratives or stories are documented and converted into records, they can be conceived as a form of bearing witness. In his article titled ‘Message in a Bottle: Bearing Witness as a Transitional Practice’, Kurasawa (2009) theorised the social cultural practices which constitute ‘bearing witness’ during post-conflict situations. His focus was on examining the challenges that must be navigated and the tasks that need to be carried out for bearing witness to be effective in these contexts.

Kurasawa (2009) identified the basic problems as well as solutions with regard to considering storytelling as bearing witness which focuses on the following aspects: how to give a voice to suffering in the face of silence; how to enable understanding in the face of incomprehensibility; how to foster empathy in the face of indifference; how to prevent repetition; and how to preserve memory in the face of forgetting. These are critical factors that require consideration as scholars continue to use storytelling as a peacebuilding tool.

In the intricate tapestry of conflict and healing, as storytelling emerges as a powerful thread, weaving narratives of resilience, trauma and reconciliation, there are factors which go beyond witnessing that play a crucial role in post-storytelling actions of healing and transformation. Its potency in peace and conflict management cannot be overstated, with the aftermath playing a pivotal role in determining its effectiveness. This exploration into post-storytelling actions is exemplified through instances such as the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, the healing from trauma in Zimbabwe, and the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission (TRC) in South Africa. Each case underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of what follows the act of storytelling, shedding light on the transformative potential and the imperative role of subsequent actions in fostering healing and societal change.

In post-genocide Rwanda, the Gacaca courts served as a form of storytelling and justice. After these community-based courts allowed survivors to share their stories and perpetrators to confess, a profound chapter in the nation's healing journey unfolded. However, what followed was equally vital. Communities actively engaged in reconciliation initiatives, economic development projects and educational programmes to foster unity. This signified the significance of the healing process having to extend far beyond the courtroom proceedings. A collective commitment to rebuilding and reconciliation within Rwandan communities ensued. Actively engaging in reconciliation initiatives became a cornerstone of this transformative era, where communities worked together to bridge the gaps forged by years of conflict and bloodshed. This collaborative effort was not confined to the emotional realm alone; rather, it extended into pragmatic avenues that sought to foster unity. Economic development projects emerged as vital instruments in revitalising the social fabric of Rwanda. By creating sustainable livelihoods and economic opportunities, communities sought to lay the foundations for a shared future, transcending the divisive narratives of the past (The National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), 2016).

In Zimbabwe, where communities have faced trauma from various sources including death threats, and violence caused by physical injury, torture, and mass killings of loved ones (Parsons et al., 2011), storytelling has played a role in healing. Beyond the initial sharing of experiences, ongoing support systems and mental health resources are essential. Community-based counselling, access to therapy, and infrastructure for rebuilding lives contribute significantly to sustained healing and have at least proven to be positive initiatives and vital elements in fostering a sense of agency and resilience within these communities (Walker et al., 2023).

The TRC in South Africa played a significant role as a platform where victims and perpetrators could openly share their narratives, fostering a collective understanding of

the nation's tumultuous past. However, the anticipated transformative impact envisioned by many did not materialise as expected, revealing the complexity and depth of the healing process. This outcome underscored the imperative for comprehensive follow-up actions beyond the TRC proceedings. In response to the TRC's limitations, South Africa has witnessed commendable efforts aimed at addressing deep-rooted socio-economic inequalities and advancing inclusive policies. Despite such progress, persistent challenges continue, indicative of the profound and enduring nature of the issues at hand. The ongoing struggle emphasises the continued necessity for an unwavering commitment to sustained change, recognising that transformative processes require time, perseverance, and a dedicated societal resolve to forge a path towards genuine reconciliation and lasting transformation (Jardine, 2008; Motlhoki, 2017).

As highlighted, storytelling is a catalyst for change, but its true potential is realised when coupled with sustained efforts in restorative justice, education, policy reform, community-building and self-awareness support. Drawing from the cases in Zimbabwe, Rwanda and South Africa, the narrative should serve as a foundation upon which a new, inclusive and peaceful future can be built. Adopting a restorative justice approach becomes pivotal, going beyond the mere narration of stories to actively address and repair the harm caused, instigating tangible changes in policies, systems and community dynamics.

Concurrently, initiatives focused on education and awareness play a crucial role, aiming to enlighten communities about the root causes of conflicts, fostering tolerance and dispelling ingrained stereotypes, thus laying the groundwork for long-term societal metamorphosis. Moreover, governments and institutions must engage in proactive policy changes, addressing historical injustices, discrimination and systemic issues brought to light through storytelling. Simultaneously, fostering community-building becomes imperative, encouraging open dialogue, collaboration and mutual understanding within communities as a foundation for sustained peace. Acknowledging the profound psychological impact of conflict is essential in recognising the need for ongoing mental health support for affected individuals.

4.9.4 Storytelling as Processes and Products

Largely the key to peacebuilding as well as living in a world that is characterised by peace is empathy. In the words of Mother Teresa as quoted by Jayakumar, (2015:15), “if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” This therefore entails that this state of belonging to each other arises out of the fact that humans are not just individuals – they are part of the whole which constitutes the universe. Additionally, this state of belonging to each other or the togetherness of humans is a result of the shared notions of suffering and happiness as well as the highs and lows that life presents. In this regard, suffering can be regarded as a natural part of the human condition, resulting from the existence of humans as separate bodies which react to their own emotions as well as their rational mind.

A key aspect of human motivation is the desire to gain satisfaction from our experiences and striving to achieve the outcomes we desire in the process (Jayakumar, 2015). In addition, it is also a human predisposition to fear the unknown as well as the temporariness of life, particularly when humans are challenged with the actual or potential loss of those they love (Jayakumar, 2015). Humans cling to externalities which are always changing while they remain rooted in their own story. In the process their experiences result in a state of separation from the truth and one another (Jayakumar, 2015). Eventually, all that humans seek is discovering their true selves.

Storytelling can therefore be regarded as a process that produces desired outcomes as a result of its power. According to Raheja and Gold (1994), through storytelling people operate in a world where they get results. Nonetheless, stories as well as power are also constrained because these very stories operate within a context of economic, ideological or power constraints. According to Senehi, (2002:57):

we must examine how we can facilitate cultural spaces where people faced with social upheaval and conflicts or in the aftermath of violence and tragedy can participate in building communities and inter-communal relationships characterised by shared power, mutual recognition and awareness in order to work together to shape the future.

4.10 EXAMPLES OF USING STORYTELLING TO RESOLVE POLITICAL ISSUES

Storytelling forms an important integral part of the African culture embedded in different social, economic and political fabrics. Its overarching role is evident in resolving conflicts within societies in Africa where traditional methods and approaches are used. For instance, the Gacaca of Rwanda relied on the narratives from the witnesses, victims and the accused during its hearings of the post-1994 genocide cases. LeBaron (2003) broadly argues the case of culture and its components such as storytelling in conflict resolution and avers that these aspects catalyse and stimulate inner experiences, long held perceptions, attributions, judgements and views about ourselves and other people. Therefore, the expression and interactions of these perceptions provides a possible outlet of letting go of long-held past hurts, emotions and misunderstandings. However, for most contemporary and non-traditional conflict resolution facets, storytelling remains amorphous and less commonly practised.

Much of the conflict in Africa revolves around structural and socio-political systems that are rooted within economic benefits, cultural milieus and ethnicity (Irobi, 2005). Therefore, in responding to these conflict dynamics, appropriate conflict resolution strategies and practices must be fully comprehended and contextualised within cultural perspectives so that the lowest social structure to the highest level are all considered. Avruch and Jose (2007) argue that cultural aspects of a society in conflict resolution proffer an understanding of the attitudes, experiences and behaviours for social, political, religious, economic and psychological dynamics. Johnson (2013) argues that modern conflict resolution methods often neglect cultural elements like storytelling, mainly because they equate culture with the normative appeals of civilisation and view it from a traditional, primordial perspective.

Conflict resolution and storytelling tend to interact with the societal structures, triggering social, political and economic actions that tend to have literal conjectures within various conflicts. Therefore, storytelling is an indispensable mechanism which has been used over several centuries for managing and resolving conflicts in Africa. For example,

storytelling played an important part in resolving the war in Angola. In 1998, SADC facilitated peace talks between the Angolan government and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Both sides presented their side of the conflict stories and eventually the conflict came to an end (Ploughshares, 2003). As observed above, in Rwanda, platforms were set up to tell stories after the genocide in 1994. The aftermath helped the Rwandese to live together despite the genocide. Storytelling was also crucial in the 2008 post-election violence in Kenya. The stories provided avenues for understanding the nature and depth of the electoral conflicts in Kenya. It also provided a level of acknowledgement and healing.

In Zambia storytelling has been central to the management and resolution of conflicts particularly those of a political nature. Since independence in 1964 to date, stories have been given space to influence the course of national development and democracy. Storytelling in modern Zambia has been formally conducted through commissions of inquiry, tribunals, court sessions, parliamentary select committees and CMCs. In 2016, the government appointed a commission of inquiry into voting patterns and electoral violence shortly after the elections. The commission listened to various stories and compiled a report which was published in 2019 with the aim of preventing violence in the succeeding elections. Another example relates to court processes. In 2019, the court had to decide who was the legitimate president of the former ruling party, the MMD, after listening to the stories of the two factions both of which were claiming leadership to the party after their extra-ordinary convention (Zambia24, 2019). These are but two examples for purposes of illustrating the use of stories in political life in Zambia.

Storytelling has also been a prominent feature in traditional courts and socialisation tales for children in villages in Zambia. Stories are used in a traditional sense to pass on knowledge about culture, security and relationships in the communities. The customs and norms of life in most rural communities of Zambia are transmitted orally and informally through stories. In this way, the children and outsiders learn about the intricacies of the community in which they are living.

Storytelling is a crucial and an inherent part of the cultural and African traditional conflict resolution system subsisting on the conception of harmony, reconciliation or the

restoration of peace. Most of these approaches use mediation which involves non-coercive interventions without an external presence, authority and arbitrators. It is important to note that when conflict resolution involves third parties, there is need to be aware and fully comprehend the cultural context of the conflict and its significance (Porto, 2012). Porto (2012) observes that outside mediators normally come with consciously assumed positions with their own ideas, knowledge, resources and interests motivated by their assumptions and agendas about the conflict in question. This leads to neglecting critical aspects that arise from the local context and can affect the conflict resolution process.

Storytelling and its dynamics conceived from cultural lenses play a critical role in helping comprehend and establish inferences and conjectures that are linked not only to the core conflicts but also to other structural causes which are associated with cultural dimensions. It has also a profound meaning to the way of life and underscores deep-rooted African practices that its people can easily relate to. This is so because the norms, attitudes and behavioural patterns are influenced by the social practices and structures in any given society and is thus premised on cultural facets (Johnson, 2013).

According to the University of Colorado (1998: No Page), by telling stories, parties to the conflict “define what conflict is, what causes conflict, what their interest is in the conflict” and furthermore by telling stories, parties to a conflict can explore their inner feelings, their wishes and fears by digging into conflict situations more deeply than is traditionally done. Thus storytelling can elicit similar action to brainstorming, letting participants explore different options and influence the results and outcomes.

4.11 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE INTERACTION OF PEACEBUILDING THEORIES STORYTELLING AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS

One of the challenges in theorizing peace is framing the issues. This is regardless of whether one is using the traditional or liberal approach to understand the peace. While existing theories in critical peacebuilding tend to focus on the level of the ‘local and the everyday’ such as in the use of oral storytelling indigenous community based peace

approach, they retain an unchallenged reliance on liberal goals. In the case of this study, the ideal end would be to bring about peace through free and fair elections in the communities. This reality must be borne in mind as this study navigates the use of storytelling as a community peacebuilding tool in the electoral mediation process.

Lederach (2024) and Randazzo (2021) make the argument that alternative and particularly non-liberal modes of thinking about peacebuilding have been promoted in theory, but the question of the manner in which they are implemented relates to the structures and agents of governance available within the traditional modern state system within which peacebuilding has been conceptualized and operationalized. This seems to hold true for the Zambian context in that most peace infrastructures are influenced by the government institutions, including the chieftaincy which supports traditional norms and customs. Under the current arrangement chiefs are funded under government subventions. This means customary practices including conflict management are exposed to the operations of the modern state system.

Specifically, if engagement with indigenous knowledge is to depend upon existing actors' willingness or indeed ability to relate to and understand indigenous approaches such as storytelling to issues such as conflict transformation, resolution and management of electoral conflicts, rights and representation of marginalized communities and equal access to electoral justice, it is possible to then question the extent to which international governmental organizations, or NGOs including governmental entities, would be capable of participating in indigenous or local peacebuilding endeavours without prioritizing mainstream frameworks. This appears to be a limitation to the approach this study has taken.

The nature of several of the peacebuilders follows agendas that are driven by essentially modernist understandings of political and social orders within nation state structures often tied to legacies of imperialism and settler colonialism (Randazzo, 2021). This might in fact impact their ability to participate in unsettling pre-conceived ideas pertaining to the ontological field of inquiry (Randazzo, 2021). The mainstream frameworks constitute a set of complex and 'dispersed practices through which colonial hierarchies and erasures are (re)produced in the global governance of "traditional knowledge"' (Tucker, 2018).

These practices drive the routinization of 'modes of interaction amongst government officials, international organizations secretariats, NGO workers, Indigenous leaders, academics, and others in spaces such as networking events, public forums and research collaborations', which ultimately promote and embed 'a legalistic approach to "traditional knowledge"' at the expense of local, 'non-market-oriented' approaches closer to Indigenous communities and their practices (Tucker, 2018:7- 8). Tucker further suggests that peacebuilding traditional practices which contain elements not considered to be suitable for Western understandings of representation could be perceived as problematic and thus also be subjected to a hierarchisation of practices. In this sense, existing theories fail to account for the unique sociopolitical dynamics of Zambia. Specifically, theorists face the problem of addressing variations in academic contexts that are permeated by Western hubris, effects of colonial and settler-colonial displacement and erasure, along with unchanged modernist epistemological presumptions (Tucker, 2018).

Randazzo (2021) argues that a shift towards Indigenous peacebuilding knowledge might indeed open up peacebuilding to further scrutiny, but the risk of manipulation and appropriation is real, severe and possibly unavoidable, particularly if the legacy of the liberal peace which underpins peacebuilding conceptualization is not disturbed in its entirety. In these circumstances, he suggests, reflecting on alterity to dislodge a hegemonic narrative, and not merely 'using' alternative knowledge as a supplemental tool to unlock peacebuilding within comfortable frames, is key. This perspective agrees with those who canvass for the idea that rethinking peacebuilding is much more than extending local ownership to communities subjected to peacebuilding, as it is about reflecting on how problem-solving approaches have failed to pay attention to processes of emergence, self-organization, adaptation and transformation (Zanker, 2017). This observation appears to be the Achille's heel for the various peacebuilding theories relating to local peacebuilding initiatives including the storytelling peace model.

Despite the vitality of storytelling as an indigenous tool for peacebuilding, it is limited by the permeation of the legacy of modernity in peacebuilding as a concept, visible in the continued reproduction of normative bias, selectivity, and an unchanged reliance on liberal actors to deliver change and transformation (Randazzo,2021). This legacy is

embedded in such a way that by focusing particularly on narratives, experiences and struggles muted in favour of formalized and elite-based engagements(Randazzo,2021), peacebuilders miss the silver lining for making local practices work organically. In the past decade, scholars critical of the liberal peace sought to engage with these marginalized communities, not simply to bring their experiences of conflict and peace to light, but also to critique the manner in which mainstream liberal peace approaches contribute to the marginalization of these narratives. (Randazzo,2021). It is therefore important that theories on local peacebuilding mechanisms such as storytelling in this study interrogate the mainstream discourse on the appropriate approach to make indigenous peacebuilding a success.

4.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed storytelling and its various uses in peacebuilding, including the context and purposes of storytelling. The chapter also reviewed literature in regard to storytelling as a social constructivist approach to peacebuilding. It has also examined the destructive and constructive paradigms of storytelling in peacebuilding. The chapter further provided evidence of how storytelling has been used in various conflict management situations but also exposed some shortcomings. It has also provided a critical analysis of peacebuilding in relation to the limitations of the peacebuilding theories for the study context.

The next chapter discusses the methodology that was used to gather data and implement storytelling as a community intervention for electoral conflict management using CMCs.

PART III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“We must examine how we can facilitate cultural spaces where people faced with social upheaval and conflicts or in the aftermath of violence and tragedy can participate in building communities and inter-communal relationships characterised by shared power, mutual recognition and awareness in order to work together to shape the future.”
(Senehi: 2002)

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this action research (AR) was to investigate how the Chongwe district CMC can use storytelling as an effective community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. The idea was to explore with a sample of voters, electoral stakeholders and the CMC their perceptions of how they are using storytelling during the CMC sessions at the Chongwe district council.

The researcher believed that a better understanding of the storytelling phenomenon would enable CMCs to leverage the electoral mediation process in terms of community peacebuilding, reconciliation and facilitation of electoral conflict management, resolution and transformation practice. The research was premised on exploring the use of storytelling as a mediation tool for electoral conflict resolution and community peacebuilding by the Chongwe District CMC in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. The research problem for the study was the under-utilisation or lack of exploitation of the potential and actual application of the storytelling model by the CMC during electoral conflict management and peacebuilding sessions. The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appear before the CMC in Chongwe district.
2. To analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district
3. Through AR, to implement an intervention of storytelling peacebuilding model with the Chongwe district CMC in the communities where the conflict occurred.
4. To carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected community

In seeking to understand this phenomenon, the study addressed four research questions:

- (a) What is the practice, role and effect of storytelling when voters/citizens appear before the CMC?
- (b) What issues does the community and electoral stakeholders perceive as important for storytelling to improve the mediation process at CMC?
- (c) How did the community electoral stakeholders respond to and perceive the implementation of peacebuilding using the storytelling intervention?
- (d) What are the challenges and opportunities for integrating storytelling intervention in the CMC peacebuilding infrastructure?

This chapter gives a detailed explanation of the study approach, design, methodology and data-collection methods and analysis. The chapter starts out with a description of the context and setting within which the research was undertaken. It provides the definition and justification for the methodology that was used for the study. It also explains the sampling procedure, ethical considerations, data collection and analysis methods and limitations of the study.

5.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT OR SETTING

This research study was carried out in Chongwe constituency in Lusaka province of Zambia. Chongwe constituency has twenty-one wards. These are the smallest units for purposes of elections. The study was conducted between August 2022 and August, 2023. Chongwe constituency recorded 94 677 registered voters in 2021 (ECZ, 2021). 45 158

(47.7%) of these were males and 49 519 (52.3%) were females. The constituency broadly represents both the metropolitan and rural characteristics common to communities that are slowly transitioning to urban life. The constituency includes a diverse representation of the population, comprising a few affluent individuals, a small middle class, and a large rural and underprivileged group.

For the past 10 years, the Chongwe constituency has reported cases to the CMC for mediation (ECZ, 2022). The constituency hosts several schools, colleges and a number of universities. It prides itself on a fairly good number of literate people. Thus, use of English was not an obstacle to conducting the current study. Because of its urban and rural traits, the constituency is usually one of the major political battlefields between the ruling party and the opposition political parties. The constituency is often affected by electoral disputes some of which are reported to and handled by the CMC in the Chongwe district.

As a rule, the CMC is composed of a chairperson appointed by the Electoral Commission; a vice-chairperson; one representative from each registered political party; representatives of CSOs and representatives of such government ministries and institutions as determined by the Commission. In the case of Chongwe CMC, these are the Zambian Police, Anti-Corruption Commission and the Drug Enforcement Commission. There is also a secretariat that supports the CMC. The number of members varies between 10 and 15. It largely depends on the active civil society groups and political parties in the district. Chongwe district committee had 15 members during the 2021 elections. Three of these were female and none of these was a youth or person living with disability. The rest were male adults. The practice is such that if the chairperson is male, the vice would be female and vice versa to accommodate a gender balance of power.

In 2021, three cases were heard by the CMC and only one was completely resolved and formally closed. The other two were not completed for various reasons such as failure of contestants to appear at the appointed time or withdrawal by the complainants. It was the completed case of mediation by the Chongwe CMC that formed the nexus of this study.

Storytelling plays a role during the mediation process when the contestants are being heard by the CMC. However, it is not necessarily an imperative that CMC must use storytelling during mediation. Its mandate only requires it to manage and resolve electoral conflicts with a view to achieving peaceful elections and mutual resolutions through mediation of conflicts that arise in the electoral process. This study was interested in the extent to which storytelling is applied during CMC mediation.

The selected case which the CMC had resolved involved two political party members who represented political party communities in Madido ward in Chongwe district. The ward had about one third of the voting population in 2021 and located close to the capital city of Zambia-Lusaka.

5.3 STUDY COMMUNITY

Madido ward of Chongwe district is a suburban area located northwest of Lusaka city. It has a medium-sized population characterised by low levels of income with a population that is generally poor. The residents are a motley collection of traders, marketers, blacksmiths, vegetable farmers, small shop owners, local food suppliers, street vendors and transporters. The community members share market spaces and sanitation facilities.

Madido ward community members are politically organised in sections. Each community section has at least 10 households. Political parties use this unit informally to take stock of who supports them in a particular area. The sections form branches. The various branches form the ward. The ward is the smallest operational unit for the ECZ to carry out elections. The ward is represented by an elected official referred to as a councillor. The predominant ethnic groups are Lenje and Soli. However, the communities use *chi Nyanja* and English which are the widely spoken languages in the adjacent greater city of Lusaka.

The study used political sections to undertake the study. The community section for the alleged defendant predominantly supported the governing PF party at the time while the section for the complainant predominantly supported the opposition UPND. Each section has some form of hierarchy for each party in the area. These sections were chosen as

the sub-units for the community because they were the closest to the conflict and had an idea of the community dynamics and relationships.

5.4 DEFINITION AND JUSTIFICATION OF METHODOLOGY USED

In this study a working definition of methodology is provided. Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a science of studying how research is to be carried out. Essentially, the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are called research methodology (Goundar, 2012). It is the way in which one chooses to deal with a particular question. Research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic (Gentles et al., 2016). The methodology section also deals with a critical evaluation of the study's overall validity and reliability. The methodology section answers two main questions: 1. How was the data collected or generated? 2. How was it analysed? Below are the detailed explanations of how the two questions were addressed.

5.4.1. Research Approach

5.4.1.1 Research philosophy

A research philosophy is a belief about the ways in which data about a phenomenon should be collected, analysed and used. This study employed the interpretivist research philosophy. The interpretivist philosophy emphasises qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis. "Interpretive researchers assume that access to reality (given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments" (Myers, 2008:248). Interpretivist studies usually focus on meaning and may employ multiple methods in order to reflect different aspects of the same issue. This philosophical understanding underpinned the current study.

5.4.1.2 Research type

This study was largely qualitative, and thus involved exploratory, descriptive and evaluative designs. Qualitative methodology implies an emphasis on discovery and description, and the objectives are generally focused on extracting and interpreting the meaning of experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Merriam, 1998). It was more appropriate because it has the relevant features to achieve the aim of the study. These features include (a) understanding the processes by which events and actions take place; (b) developing contextual understanding; (c) facilitating interactivity between researcher and participants; (d) adopting an interpretive stance; and (e) maintaining design flexibility.

This research used the deductive approach towards making its conclusions. A deductive approach was deemed more suitable because it assesses whether a theory applies within a certain context or tests a set of hypotheses derived from the literature. A deductive approach is concerned with “developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis” (Wilson, 2010). It leads to conclusive research. Conclusive research generates findings that can be practically useful for decision-making. The deductive approach proceeds from theory to a confirmatory position about study events. This study used three theories to understand the interplay of storytelling, electoral conflict resolution, community reconciliation and peacebuilding. The theories are the social learning theory, contact theory and conflict transformation theory. These formed the frameworks within which to confirm or disprove the study thesis on the effectiveness and role of storytelling in electoral conflicts.

5.4.2 Research Design

“Research design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers to research questions and to control variance” (Kerlinger, 1986:279). This study was an AR study based on a qualitative inquiry. It was a reflective process that underscored the strengths of a qualitative approach (Agee, 2009). At the heart of this approach were methods for representing what Geertz (1973:10) called the “microscopic” details of the social and cultural aspects of individuals’ lives. Mouton (2012:55) refers to

a research design as “a plan or blue print of how you intend conducting the research’ to provide answers to the research questions in the most scientific way”. A research design is the plan, recipe, or blueprint for investigation, and as such provides a guideline according to which a selection can be made of which data-collection method(s) will be most appropriate to the researcher’s goal and to the selected design (Delpont, 2002).

As already stated above, this research used the qualitative approach to investigate the role and usage of storytelling in electoral conflicts and peacebuilding in the communities in Chongwe constituency. Qualitative research approach involves collecting and analysing non-numerical data (e.g., text, video, or audio) to understand concepts, opinions or experiences (Bhandari, 2020). It can be used to gather in-depth insights into a problem or generate new ideas for research.

Others also distinguish qualitative research by claiming that it collects data using a naturalistic approach (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), focusing on the meaning actors ascribe to their actions. “The focus of qualitative social science is on everyday life and its significance is as perceived by the participants” (Jankowski & Wester, 1991:44). This was the approach of the researcher in this study with a need to understand the conflicts in the context of everyday life for the participants.

The researcher used narratives to study the meaning of the experiences of individuals and groups by taking and repeating their life stories as "micro-analytic pictures" (Creswell, 2012, ---) or moral tales, "depicting a rupture from the expected - interpretive because they mirror the world, rather than copying it exactly" (Riessman, 2008:4). It is argued that narratives engage, argue, convey and entertain; narratives reveal truths about human experience and in fact do political work (Riessman, 2008). Holstein and Gubrium (2012:4) offer an assortment of approaches to narrative analysis and demonstrate how researchers from different fields "deal with narrative data" and "how one might proceed through the analytic process". During this investigation, the researcher attempted to be an excellent listener, non-judgemental, truthful and flexible.

Carrying out this qualitative study permitted the researcher to have an enhanced appreciation of the perspectives of the people living in the affected communities regarding

electoral conflicts and how they distinguish between sources and causes of electoral conflicts and their management. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gain access to the 'insider's' viewpoint, making the research personal and thus more subjective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In this way, the genuine emotions of the study subjects were captured, providing a clearer perspective. Since human behaviour is context-specific, a qualitative approach was considered more comprehensive and less prone to manipulation compared to methods like the quantitative approach. Many qualitative scholars and practitioners criticise quantitative methods for having a tendency to reduce social reality to variables which in turn are controlled and measured against confirmable theories derived from testable assumptions (Daniels et al., 2016). The research design is discussed in more detail in the following sections below.

5.4.3 Research strategy

The research strategy provided the overall direction of the research including the process by which the research was conducted. The research strategy in this study was AR. An AR approach necessitated that the study covered the typical three phases of exploring the problem, planning and implementing an intervention, and evaluating the outcomes. Several scholars who use AR have observed that a central feature of the design is that participants themselves find solutions to problems rather than have these imposed on them by outsiders (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Kaye, 2017; Koshy 2011).

In this study, there was collaboration and participation by those involved in the electoral conflict and their communities. The other participants were CMC mediators and the researcher. The action researcher and the affected communities collaborated in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). The defendant and petitioner's communities and other stakeholders were mobilised to take part in the conversations around the electoral conflicts that were mediated by the Chongwe district CMC after the 2021 general elections. The study used the 2021 elections for purposes of establishing the baseline for the electoral conflicts mediated by the CMC and to create contact and relationship with the CMC.

One of the objectives of the study was to implement an intervention of storytelling peacebuilding by the two communities representing the political party communities that had disputants at the CMC. Therefore, a storytelling intervention was carried out by initially setting up an action research team (ART) of four members eligible to vote from each of the two communities together with CMC representative and the researcher. The action team comprised 10 people and AR was facilitated using this team. The team designed and planned the implementation of the planned activities. The AR took the form of meetings, observations and reflection over a period of three months. Specific details are highlighted in the chapter on implementation of the intervention strategy.

Stringer (2007) formally conceptualises AR as a process that provides the means by which stakeholders – those centrally affected by the issue investigated – explore their experience, gain greater clarity and understanding of events and activities, and use those extended understandings to construct effective solutions to the problem(s) on which the study was focused. Action researchers are often concerned with both the improvement of practice as well as creating a valid and systematic study (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2015). As already stated, AR is often a collaborative process, and specific approaches such as participatory action research (PAR) depend on the researcher forming relationships and gaining entry to the community of focus.

The purpose of AR in this study was fundamentally linked to addressing problems of electoral malpractice in the communities during elections. The process was collaborative and attempted to be inclusive and targeted “strategies that have the potential to shift power relationships and facilitate joint efforts that cross lines of organisational hierarchy” (Osterman, Furman & Sernak, 2014: 101). The study attempted to do research ‘with’ instead of ‘for’ stakeholders. The process was characterised by the participation of various stakeholders from the community at different stages.

This partnership was not a one-off event but a process that involved the communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of activities. The idea was to produce knowledge using the storytelling model to address electoral conflicts for the participating members of the community. Letts et al. (2007:4) contend that in PAR “the researcher works in partnership with participants throughout the research process.” Thus, this study

fundamentally involved the participation of members of the community as stakeholders together with the researcher.

Action research addresses the 'gap' between theoretical knowledge and practical application (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). During this study, the researcher and the research participants were regarded as equals and learned from each other. This is different from mainstream research methodologies where the social world is seen as static and scientific research is disengaged, creating a distance between the research and phenomena being observed, so that the phenomena become objects of the researcher's "gaze" (Naicker et al., 2020).

Research has to produce more than just a book according to Kaye and Harris (2017). Without people's participation in developing a solution, the solution is more likely to fail as whatever is proposed has to be done with, not to, the people involved. "People are capable of understanding and participating in change. Action research is intended to focus this understanding and then to expand it with the aim of change and improvement" (Kaye & Harris, 2017:11). Action research was preferred for this study also because it aimed at not only identifying the community problem and make recommendations to different stakeholders, as is the case with many academic studies, but it engaged the participants with possible solutions to manage and resolve electoral conflicts in a prudent and timely manner. The goal is to achieve peaceful elections and mutual resolutions through mediation of conflicts that arise in the electoral processes where the community proactively contributes to resolving the predominant problems. Action research is unapologetically value-driven and interpretative, openly declaring its desire to empower and create social change *for and with* communities (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

The steps in this AR were first to describe the problem or challenge; secondly to propose a solution; and thirdly to act in the direction of the chosen solution. In this particular study, the researcher worked with the communities affected by the electoral conflicts and the Chongwe district CMC for a period of three months to implement the action that was proposed. The fourth step was to evaluate the outcome of the action; and fifth to modify the problem, ideas and further action in the light of evaluation of the outcome of the action. The ultimate goal was to generate locally-relevant knowledge capable of addressing the

real-life issue (Baldwin, 2012) and fostering a sense of ownership that would ensure the outcomes of the research are empowering and sustaining (Hammad, Alunni & Alkhas, 2019).

5.4.3.1. Time horizon

The two kinds of time-horizon choices are cross-sectional and longitudinal. A cross-sectional time horizon means that the data are collected at one point in time only whereas a longitudinal time horizon means that the data are collected from the same sample at multiple points in time. The time horizon of this research was a cross-sectional time horizon. It was chosen because it was the practical choice due to the short timeline involved in a thesis. This made longitudinal research impractical and untenable.

A cross-sectional study type of research design that was used allowed the researcher to collect data from many different individuals at a single point in time in order to answer the research questions. In this cross-sectional research, the researcher observed variables naturally without influencing them. This approach was employed because it was cheaper and enabled the researcher to manage the time bound tasks that were carried out. It therefore had the advantage that it was less time-consuming and allowed the researcher to easily collect data.

5.4.3.2. Population and Sampling

The population for this study were community members of Madido ward in the Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. All the participants were registered voters in the 2021 general elections in Zambia. For the purpose of this study, the sample was 38 subjects who were all purposively selected.

The choice of the sample took into account the availability, geographical proximity and expert knowledge of the individuals whom the researcher wanted to use in the research in order to answer the research questions. The researcher relied on his judgement to select the sample (people, cases and organisations) to be studied. In this case, it was the defendant's community, the complainant's community, CMC and selected electoral stakeholder representatives.

The researcher selected individuals and sites for the study because they could “purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2012:156). The researcher decided what needed to be known and set out to find people, cases and organisations who could and were willing to provide the information by virtue of their knowledge and experience (Bernard, 1994). The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

The advantage of purposive sampling is that it is very valuable for situations where the researcher intends to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary issue. Using a purposive sampling procedure, the researcher was able to get the opinions of the target population without much ado. The number of study subjects was decided based on all possible aspects of involvement in the CMC mediation and electoral process. The sample size of 38 may appear relatively small in relation to the population size but the study emphasizes the depth rather than breadth of the inquiry. Hence, the information gathered is still valid and resources permitting, it can still be replicated and tested for generalization.

5.4.3.3 Research participants

The research participants were identified according to the method of data collection that was employed. Nine key informants drawn from practitioners, opinion-makers, community and institutional members conversant with elections, electoral processes and electoral conflict management were selected. These participants were chosen on the basis of their gender, special knowledge, experience or positions that they held during the period of the study. These individual participants had the appropriate attributes for this investigation because qualitative studies are intended to study a particular phenomenon intensively. Thus, the sample was sufficient to obtain a full range of data in relation to the phenomena.

For the FGDs, twenty-four participants were selected to participate in the study. These were chosen on account of the communities that they came from in relation to the complainant and defendant at the CMC. Each community was allowed to choose eight

members to participate in the study. Three FGDs were conducted. The selection was based on political inclination, age and gender considerations

Three participants were selected for personal narratives. These were the complainant, defendant and a neutral observer. Participants for the personal narratives were chosen in order to gain insights into the personal experiences of electoral conflicts, storytelling and mediation process at CMC.

In total there were 38 research subjects for the study comprising nine key informants, twenty-four community members, three personal narratives, one record and personal observation. All these were targeted because their actions were related to the electoral process in one way or another and they could provide valuable data to meet the objectives of the study.

5.4.4 Data-collection methods

Research is a methodological and systematic inquiry through which specific instruments are used to collect data in the pursuit of valid knowledge (Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard, 2014). Thus, data collection represents the key entry point of any scientific research project (Bryman, 2016). A mixture of methods was applied in the study for purposes of triangulating and testing the validity and reliability of information. The sources of data were both primary and secondary.

5.4.4.1 Primary data

The backbone of this qualitative research were the written accounts of what the researcher heard, saw, experienced and thought in the course of gathering and reflecting the data during interviews. The researcher explored the what, where, why and how. During the interview process, it was crucial that data-collection methods were consistent with ethical principles. The researcher ensured that the participants were willing to be interviewed and knowledgeable about the purpose of the research and that any data collected from them should not be traced back to participants thereby maintaining the individual's "privacy."

The main sources of primary data were FGDs, key informant interviews, personal narratives and observation. How these were conducted is further explained in detail below.

5.4.4.1.1 Focus group discussions

a) Participant identification, recruitment and planning

The participants were recruited through local networks and contacts. Through the CMC contact person, the researcher was able to trace the sampled names from the voters' register and through cell phone contacted the party leaders who in turn provided contacts for the section leaders where the two contestants lived. The researcher used local contacts because that was the only feasible way to initiate the study project. However, the use of local contacts has been criticised for its dependence on the availability, willingness and accessibility of the local contact and the loss of control and direction of the researcher in the recruitment process (Krueger, 1994). In this study, the researcher ensured that he conducted an inquiry into the background of the contacts who were used for this purpose. This was in order to take control of the recruitment process and guide the direction of the study in line with the aim of the research.

The researcher through the CMC contact person came up with an ART which helped with planning and execution of the FGDs and the intervention. The first meeting of the ART was intended to create awareness and agree on the design of the intervention as well as the process. The ART further held consultative meetings for selected ART members of each of the communities to explain the research agenda. This was prior to conducting FGDs in the community. The meeting was held at the CMC offices after sampling voters from each community.

The meeting discussed convenient venues and time frames for the FGD discussions. In deciding on the venues for each FGD, the researcher and the community representatives took into consideration participants' comfort, access to the venue, and levels of distraction (Guest et al., 2017; Smith, 1972).

After the ART planning meeting, the next step was to conduct the first FGD for each community. These meetings were both held in the respective communities, the

communities being one for the complainant and another for the defendant in the electoral conflicts. The conflict parties actually represented political parties in the communities.

The FGDs were structured around storytelling and electoral conflicts and how they were managed by CMC. The FGD guide (see Appendix E) was reviewed and developed further at a planning meeting between the researcher and the ART. Members of ART were also part of the FGDs and helped to identify the other participants for the research. In planning for the FGDs, gender, age and political affiliation were considered critical in order to capture significant variations and similarities that may exist along these variables. The expectations were that the process would produce evidence to interrogate narratives about storytelling and electoral conflict management in Zambia.

b) Size and characteristics of FGDs

In deciding the size of the FGD, the researcher took into account the need for inclusive participation during the electoral conflict dialogue. The decision was taken in line with the main characteristics of FGDs frequently highlighted by experts and scholars on the FGD discourse. These are people's participation, a sequence of assemblies, the generation of qualitative data, and homogeneity of the participants (Dilshad & Latif 2013). The FGDs were chosen for the study for their ability to obtain more in-depth information on beliefs, perceptions, insights, attitudes, or experiences, and gathering additional information compared to quantitative data collection (Morgan, 1997).

According to Kvale (2007), the group size of an FGD should ideally be 6–10 participants while Rubin and Rubin (1995) suggested 6–12 participants. Others assert that fewer than eight participants would make the discussion dull while more than 12, would be fairly difficult to moderate (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015:64). Too many participants in the FGDs could deny some participants time to contribute to the discussion or topic.

In this research, however, because of its political nature, where both communities needed to be heard, efforts were made to ensure equal representation in the FGDs by inviting four members from each community with equal gender representation and age considerations. This act was carefully considered so that the information collected was not skewed. The FGDs in this study were expected to clarify and augment the data from

interviews, personal narratives, record review and observation methods and build upon data reliability and validity (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016).

c) Conducting the FGDs

A three step approach was taken in conducting the FGDs. These steps were planning, conducting the meetings and analysing the data. According to Freitas et al. (1998) and Dilshad and Latif (2013), planning is deemed to be a critical factor in undertaking successful FGDs. The planning step in this study entailed amplification of the questions, identifying the participants and agreeing on the places to hold the meetings. This planning meeting took place at the council offices where CMC holds their sessions. The researcher and the CMC contact person worked together to make the necessary arrangements for the meetings. It was agreed that the first two FGDs be held in the communities where the identified participants lived and that the joint FGD would be held at the CMC.

The first FGD was held with the defendant's community under a tree near the market. All eight invited participants were present. During the FGD, the researcher moderated the discussions and probed for feelings, attitudes, perceptions and opinions to determine the real concerns of each group. The researcher also probed for clarity where it was necessary. The second FGD was held the following day at the same venue. It was also attended by all eight invited participants. The researcher played the same role and recorded and took notes of the process. Each FGD took approximately one hour and thirty minutes.

The third FGD was a joint meeting aimed at problem-solving to come up with a solution to electoral conflicts in the community and improving the CMC mediation process. During the joint FGD session, only four members were invited from each community. A level of tension preceded the discussions but after explaining why we needed to think and reflect together, the environment changed and the group started bonding. The group discussed and reflected on the possible interventions and their limitations and plans to implement those that were feasible. The composition was such that there was equal representation of men and women as well as youth from each community. The researcher moderated the sessions and followed the interview guide to ask questions and probe where the

responses were not clear. Both the researcher and his assistant took notes while the discussions were being conducted. At the end of the third FGD, a session was held to evaluate the outcomes of the proposed intervention strategies and make recommendations on the actions.

The main ways that were used in the data collection during the FGDs were audio recording, note-taking and participant observation(journaling).

d) Merits and demerits of FGDs

FGD is a flexible technique and is adaptable at any stage of the research (Ochieng et al., 2018). Compared to more conventional techniques such as individual interviews and surveys, an FGD offers an opportunity to explore issues that are not well-understood or where there is little prior research on the topic (ibid.). This is because, an FGD builds on the group dynamics to explore the issues in context, depth and detail, freely without imposing a conceptual framework compared with a structured individual interview. Researchers can benefit from the group context since it provides insight into social relations, and the information obtained reflects the social and overlapping nature of knowledge better than a summation of individual narratives through interviews and surveys. However, focus group participants are sometimes reluctant to deal with sensitive topics in a discussion setting compared with an individual interview or a survey (Ochieng et al., 2018).

The reason why the researcher used FGDs was that it is easy to collect data at one point. The researcher also wanted to generate a discussion about the research topic which required collective views and the meanings that lay behind those views including their experiences and beliefs (Asmamaw, Mohammed & Lulseged, 2011; Harisha & Padmavathy, 2013; Mfune, 2013; Wibeck, 2020).

The decision by the researcher is supported by Krueger (1994) and Morgan et al. (1998), who argue that an FGD is comparatively easier to conduct since all the target participants and the researcher are readily available in one location at the same time. In their view, geographic proximity is an important consideration for researchers with resource constraints in developing nations. The technique is appropriate for researchers working

within strict timelines and requiring rapid and resource-efficient way of gathering information about complex relationships (Parker & Tritter, 2006). Under resource-constrained conditions, the FGD technique minimises movements between locations and avails a large amount of data within a limited time frame compared to an equivalent number of interviews.

The use of FGD technique is not recommended when there is a risk of raising participants' expectations that cannot be fulfilled or where "strategic" group biases are anticipated (Harrison et al., 2015). Since FGD depends on participants' dynamics, it should be avoided where participants are uneasy with each other or where social stigmatisation due to the disclosure may arise (Harrison et al., 2015). In such situations, participants may not discuss their feelings and opinions freely or hesitate to participate in the topic of interest to the researcher. FGD provides depth and insight, but cannot produce useful numerical results, thus must not be used where statistical data are required (Bloor et al., 2001; Morgan et al., 1998). It was therefore crucially important to create a cordial environment for discussions during the FGDs in order to avoid tension.

Another concern about FGDs is that, in most cases, the range of topics that participants feel comfortable discussing may not be what the researcher intends to explore. Furthermore, some topics may be more difficult to discuss among some categories of participants than others. It is argued that experiences in using the FGD technique indicate that restricting participants to the topic of researcher's interest constraints creativity and encourages conformity and strategic biases. The aims of the research might also determine the extent to which the researcher can allow the participants to address issues that are perceived as particularly relevant to them, rather than those chosen by the researcher.

Because of some of the weaknesses of FGDs the researcher used other techniques alongside the FGDs within the context of mixed methods approach. The results were triangulated with other different methods, in a complementary way which offered an opportunity to draw conclusions from such a focus group. Figure 2 below shows the steps of the FGD method.

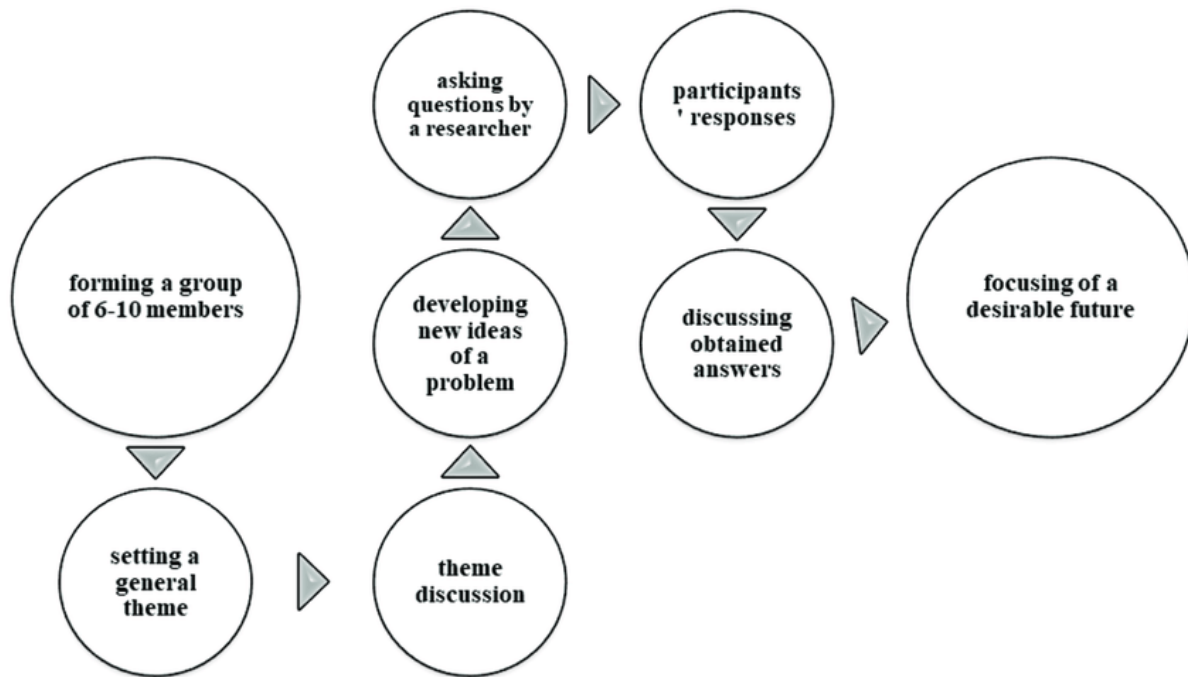


Figure 2: Steps in the focus-group method

Source: Dubovicki (2017:208)

Figure 2 illustrates the process that the researcher followed in conducting the FGDs.

(e) Managing and facilitating FGDs.

In order to ensure that the FGDs were successfully carried out, the research team put in place measures to enable the collection of the relevant data. For example, the researcher ensured balanced participation and avoided dominance by certain individuals by establishing ground rules for participation at the beginning of every session. The rules included limiting speaking time, creating an atmosphere of friendliness through icebreakers and emphasizing respectful listening while encouraging equal contribution from all participants. The researcher also facilitated balanced conversation by redirecting the discussion if certain individuals monopolized the conversation. The researcher further used direct questions specifically to quieter participants and made encouraging expressions. The researcher equally encouraged quieter participants to share their thoughts and opinions, and used techniques like asking participants to write their thoughts on a plain paper and give it to the researcher at the end if they had some more things to say. This provided everyone an opportunity to contribute and was an excellent technique. The researcher ensured that after the participants had spoken, he would summarize and rephrase key points in order to avoid misrepresentation.

5.4.4.1.2 Key informant interviews

Open-ended semi-structured questions were administered to nine interviewees for them to respond on a one-on-one basis (see Appendix D). The individual interview method was chosen bearing in mind the status, knowledge and experience of the participants. The method helped the researcher to obtain extra information by asking questions and observing the participants as they answered additional questions. The participants were allowed to comment on the CMC mediation process during elections and the role that storytelling and community involvement can play. The interviews illuminated the individual participant's knowledge, opinions, attitudes, but most importantly, their understanding about storytelling in relation to electoral conflicts and the CMC mediation process in the political context in which it takes place. In line with the requirements of the method, the

researcher made sure that the participants were representative and those chosen were expected to give their individual perceptions and perspectives (Leedy et al., 2005).

The criteria for key informants was based on choosing individuals who had some level of experience with the electoral process and conflict management in Zambia. The criterion was also sensitive to inclusion of voices of marginalized groups such as women, youth and disabled. The list below shows where the key informants were drawn from;

- i. Members of the Electoral Conflict Management Committee either at national or district level,
- ii. Media specialists in elections and conflict management
- iii. Human rights practitioners
- iv. Political and electoral experts- academics
- v. Election administrators
- vi. Law enforcement officials
- vii. Election observers
- viii. Political party members or
- ix. Any other relevant election stakeholder

The key informants were purposively sampled. This is because of their position, gender, special knowledge or history about the electoral conflicts, processes, rules and regulations. Six of these were one-on-one interviews via physical contact while three of them were conducted through the Zoom digital platform. The researcher followed six key informants to their various operational locations and allowed them room to speak even about issues they felt the storytelling model was not covering. The interviews were conducted in locations convenient for the participants who were interviewed in person. The interviews lasted approximately one hour for each participant. The researcher took notes and audio recorded the conversations. These interviews were conducted

independently, and the participants were not part of the FGDs. This approach enabled the researcher to triangulate the data collected objectively after the field research.

Data collection using in-depth interviews was conducted according to the following chronological plan in Table 3.

Table 3: Chronological plan of in-depth interviews.

Item no.	Step
1.	Setting up the in-depth interviews with key informants and explaining to them the purpose of the interview, why the participant has been chosen, and the expected duration of the interview
2.	Seeking informed consent of the participant in accordance with the recommended ethics
3.	Conducting the in-depth interview after obtaining consent
4.	Summarising the data immediately after the interview
5.	Verifying the information
6.	Data analysis through transcription
7	Report writing

Adapted from Boyce and Neale (2006:6)

a) Advantages of in-depth interviews

Some of the main advantages of using in-depth interviews are that they provide participants with the opportunity to provide historical information while still allowing the researcher to have control over the line of questioning (Creswell, 2014). The other advantage of using in-depth interviews is that it gives the researcher the opportunity to explain and clarify some of the questions. In addition, the process of probing further increased the accuracy of the data collected (Kvale, 1996). The main attribute of an in-depth interview is its ability to produce detailed information about the thoughts, feelings or behaviours being explored from a small sample (Driscoll et al., 2007). The other main advantage of in-depth interviews is that they yield much more detailed information that cannot be available from other data-collection methods. As opined by Boyce and Neale

(2006), the researcher observed that during the in-depth interview exercises, the participants were relaxed and comfortable.

b) Disadvantages of in-depth interviews

Despite the advantages explained above, there are also disadvantages of in-depth interviews which include among other things that the process is prone to bias (Creswell, 2009). In-depth interviews are inherently time-consuming to conduct, followed by transcription and analysis of the data (Patton & Cochran, 2002). In addition, a well-trained interviewer is needed for the process to yield sufficiently rich and detailed data (National Science Foundation, 2002). Another disadvantage is that the results of in-depth interviews are not generalisable because small samples are usually involved (Boyce and Neale, 2006).

An understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of this tool therefore informed appropriate use of in-depth interviews as a data-collection technique for this study.

5.4.4.1.3 Personal narratives

Three participants were selected to provide personal narratives. These were the complainant, the defendant and a neutral observer who was part of the CMC mediation process for the complainant and the defendant. A personal narrative guide was used to obtain information (see Appendix F). Personal narratives are especially relevant in conflict resolution, where they become the currency for healing and reconciliation. Conflict parties offer their personal stories in exchange for personal healing and relief. They are not only seeking a safe environment but are also anxious to be understood and to find meaning in their self-stories. Working with people to uncover deep meanings in their stories creates opportunities for healing and for hope as old self-stories are rewritten and new ones are envisioned. When memories are told and really heard, they become the experience of two people – the narrator and the listener (Lea Gaydos, 2005). In this way, memories not only offer insight into a person's history but also create and maintain a relationship in the present.

The personal effort to express as a story of what has been most important in the unfolding of one's life has been variously described as personal narrative, self-story, personal story,

life story, life history and life journey. These terms are interchangeably applied in this study to refer to the personal myth (archetypal story, not untruth) of the self-formed by self-defining memories and organised into a narrative (Lea Gaydos, 2005).

Human beings make sense of the world and themselves by creating self-stories which have the qualities of narratives (Lea Gaydos, 2005). These narratives have a beginning, middle and an end. They have plots and sub-plots and are peopled by interesting and varied characters who move the plot along. Each narrative has themes that are both explicit and implicit. Figures of speech, metaphors and similes and other linguistic devices are used to filter and organise the personal story (Lea Gaydos, 2005).

A personal narrative is not just a simple chronology (Braid, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988), and following a personal narrative is never a linear process (Braid, 1996). People start their stories in many various places, usually beginning with memories that are less emotionally intense but nonetheless significant to self-definition (Lea Gaydos 2005). Regardless of where the story begins, the listener is pulled into it and interprets it in the light of their own experiences and circumstances; then this interpretation becomes a resource and a memory for the listener as well as the narrator (Lea Gaydos, 2005).

Advantages of personal narratives:

- They are easily accessible.
- They put listeners inside the narrator's mind.
- They are direct and observable.
- They provide clear identity to the voice and individual.
- They make it easier for the narrator to say whatever they want.

Disadvantages:

- They are limited to a single story perspective.
- They risk making the narrative self-indulgent in the narrator's emotions.
- They tend to be biased.
- They narrow the experience to themselves.
- They make it difficult to capture the real character of the narrator.

In this study, in-depth personal narratives of the complainant, the defendant and a neutral observer were arranged and documented to understand and appreciate their feelings, perceptions, motivations and meanings about the mediation process by the CMC. The neutral observer was identified from those who attended the mediation and is usually part of the conflict management committee. The neutral observer provided a narrative of the process from their personal experience as they observed the conduct of the complainant, the defendant, and the chair of the mediation during the process at the CMC.

The personal face-to-face interviews allowed the participants to tell their side of the story unfettered. Coincidentally when each of the two opposed interlocutors was asked for their preferred venue of the interview, both proposed the Chongwe council offices. It was therefore at this location that one-on-one discussions took place including for the third participant. The complainant particularly expressed emotion during the narration.

The twin act of undertaking the record reviews and listening to personal narratives helped the researcher to follow up whether co-existence and reconciliation between the conflict parties and their communities had been achieved through the CMC mediation efforts. During the discussions and interview sessions, the researcher took field notes and recorded the data using an audio recorder. The aim was to tap the personal experiences of the three participants and later their communities in the mediation process of the CMC and accordingly determine its universal essence.

5.4.4.1.4 Observation

The study also employed the observation method and used a guide (see Appendix G) to take notes of the behaviours and attitudes particularly during FGD sessions. This was in order to observe the unsaid things such as power relations and dynamics in the groups. The researcher would look at the language used, the posture of the speaker and the confidence exhibited and how the group responded when some participants spoke in the meeting.

Marshall and Rossman (1989:79) define observation as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study". Observation may involve watching, listening, reading, touching, and recording behaviour and

characteristics of phenomena (Simpson et al., 2003). There are many types of observation in research. The major ones include naturalistic and participant observation. The section below briefly discusses the two types of observation.

Naturalistic observation is an observational method that involves observing people's behaviour in the environment in which it typically occurs. Observation means the careful and systematic watching of facts as they occur in course of nature. In the strict sense, observation implies more use of the eyes and the ears than the mouth. Observation serves the purpose of (i) studying collective behaviour and complex social situations; (ii) following up of individual units composing the situations; (iii) understanding the whole and the parts in their interrelation; and (iv) getting minor details of the situation out of the way. One can consider naturalistic observation as "people watching" with a purpose.

On the other hand, participant observation is where the researcher immerses herself or himself in a particular social setting or group, observing the behaviours, interactions and practices of the participants. This is done for purposes of understanding the experiences of individuals or groups in a specific social context. Bernard (1994) defines participant observation as the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then removing oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it.

In participant observation, the researcher is referred to as a participant-observer. This implies that the researcher participates in the group's activities while also observing the group's behaviour and interactions. There is flexibility in the degree of participation, ranging from non-participatory (the weakest) to complete participation (the strongest but most intensive.) The aim is to gain a deep understanding of the group's culture, beliefs, and practices from an "insider" perspective (George, 2023).

The difference between the two is that in the naturalistic observation setting, the researcher observes how the participants respond to their environment in "real-life" settings but does not influence their behaviour in any way whereas participant observation also occurs in "real-life" settings, but here, the researcher immerses themselves in the

participant group over a period of time. It was the latter approach which the researcher used. He observed the participants as they interacted and participated in the discussions relating to the topic of storytelling and electoral conflict management by the CMC at Chongwe district.

Advantages and disadvantages of observational studies

Advantages:

- Observational studies can provide information about difficult-to-analyse topics in a low-cost, efficient manner.
- Observational studies allow the researcher to study subjects that cannot be randomised safely, efficiently or ethically.
- Observational studies are often quite straightforward to conduct, since you just observe participant behaviour as it happens or use pre-existing data.

Disadvantages:

- Observational studies struggle to stand on their own as a reliable research method. There is a high risk of observer bias and undetected confounding variables or omitted variables.
- They lack conclusive results, typically are not externally valid or generalisable, and can usually only form a basis for further research.
- They cannot make statements about the safety or efficacy of the intervention they study, but only observe reactions to it. Therefore, they offer fewer satisfying results than other methods.

In the current study the researcher ensured that the process was well planned ahead of time before conducting the observation. The observation was covert and the group members were not aware that they were being observed. Covert observation was considered to be more effective because it afforded the sample group members an opportunity to behave naturally without impacting the authenticity of research findings. Furthermore, the researcher took notes to collect data. This was because unlike video or audio recording, it probably would have run the risk of changing participant behaviour.

Table 4: Participants' codes.

Gender	Code	identifier	Interview No.	Method
Male	M	M/01	01	FGD
Female	F	F/02	08	FGD
Female	F	F/03	11	FGD
Female	F	F/04	10	FGD
Male	M	M/05	03	FGD
Male	M	M/06	16	FGD
Male	M	M/07	22	FGD
Male	M	M/08	14	FGD
Male	M	M/09	07	FGD
Male	M	M/10	14	FGD
Female	F	F/11	04	FGD
Male	M	F/12	05	FGD
Male	M	F/13	09	FGD
Female	F	F/14	02	FGD
Female	F	F/15	13	FGD
Female	F	F/16	20	FGD
Male	M	F/17	06	FGD
Male	M	F/18	12	FGD
Female	F	F/19	15	FGD
Male	M	M/20	17	FGD
Female	F	F/21	23	FGD

Gender	Code	identifier	Interview No.	Method
Female	F	F/22	18	FGD
Female	F	F/23	19	FGD
Female	F	F/24	21	FGD
Male	M	M/25	01	KII
Female	F	F/26	02	KII
Female	F	F/27	07	KII
Male	M	M/28	08	KII
Male	M	M/29	03	KII
Male	M	M/30	09	KII
Male	M	M/31	04	KII
Female	F	F/32	06	KII
Female	F	F/33	05	KII
Male	M	M/34	01	PN
Male	M	M/35	02	PN
Female	F	M/36	03	PN
	R	M/37	01	CRR
	R	F-M /38	01	Observation
Total	/		38	

Key: FGD= Focus Group Discussion, KII= Key informant Interview, PN=Personal Narrative, CRR=Case Record Review.

Table 5: Research design overview

Method	No. of Participants	Sample	Objective	Method of Data Analysis
KII	09	10	In-depth interviews on storytelling, CMCs and community peacebuilding	Thematic analysis
FGDs	24	80	Implementation of storytelling peacebuilding intervention	Narrative analysis
PNs	03	11	Document personal experiences of those who participated in CMC mediation in 2021	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis(IPA)
Record Review	01	03	To understand the way the mediation was concluded and agreed upon	Content analysis
Observation	01	05	Take note of the group dynamics and verbal cues regarding the electoral conflict discussions	Discourse analysis

5.4.5 Secondary Data

Secondary data sources included all the text books, journals and reports cited in the various chapters especially the literature review chapter. This data provided a useful source for answering the research questions. Most research questions were answered using a combination of secondary and primary data. To this end the availability of both primary and secondary data enabled the researcher to capture most of the responses (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009)

This study also made use of case records that are kept at the CMC in Chongwe. The researcher was given access to the files and was able to read and make meaning out of the record about the case which was reported, acted upon and closed. The case related to the use of inappropriate language and the details of reconciliation which the researcher

collected. The report was rather scant with demographic details of the contestants and action taken. Although three individual case records were sampled only one record was complete and available for review.

Record reviews are useful tools for gathering data about conflict management although they are popular in clinical trials and psychology. The researcher carried out a record review of the mediation process for the complainant and the defendant using records kept by the Chongwe district CMC. The Chongwe district conflict management committee, in effect, was the unit of analysis, which the researcher believes was representative enough for the community and in any way the general practice of CMCs across the country.

A case review design was also convenient because, as defined by the USA Bureau of Justice Assistance (2021), case review means review of files or documentation of post-conviction cases of violent felony offences (as defined by state law) by appropriate persons. In this case, the mediators in the CMC can review the record to determine whether evidence exists that might demonstrate the actual reconciliation and peaceful co-existence by the persons who appeared before the committee.

Record reviews are based upon information that is already available in the form of records. If particular information is not recorded reliably, then it cannot be used for record reviews. Broadly, record reviews may be more helpful in finding associations with what is taking place at a particular moment in time.

Conducting a record review has several advantages. It requires less effort and time compared to other studies. It is therefore less resource-intensive. It enables assessment of a large sample at limited cost. In addition, it enables easy collection of information which is routinely recorded. For some types of data, record review may be the most feasible type of study. For example, knowing the conflict resolution trends of a particular electoral conflict by the EMB.

On the other hand, record reviews have certain disadvantages. Variation in the manner in which data has been gathered and recorded in the case records limits the extraction and interpretation of the variables. Some records may be incomplete or lost in the course of time, leading to missing data. Also, records may not have been stored in an easily

retrievable manner restricting the extent to which they could be used further. In this study the researcher endeavoured to confirm the information with the members of the CMC to ensure that it was reliable.

5.4.6 Positionality of the researcher

As an ART, either subconsciously or consciously, we engaged in preliminary self-reflection, identified our positioning in relation to potential participants and tried to identify ways to mitigate challenges through strategies implemented in the study protocol. The influence of positionality on study design was shown in this study when the social learning and transformative grounded approaches were used because they allowed for the testing of theory steeped in the experiences of the participants while recognizing and trying to minimize the influence of the researcher and his team. Through social learning and transformative approaches, one cannot ignore the pragmatic challenges associated with bracketing ones' biases and a priori knowledge. However, the choice of AR methodology demonstrates intentionality in minimizing the researchers influence as a community outsider. For example, the researcher realized that living outside the community of Madido meant that he may overlook important local political dynamics and nuances. He therefore recruited an ART that was familiar with electoral issues and the role of CMC in the community to assist in facilitating discussions to mitigate such challenges.

5.4.7 Pre-Testing

The tradition of pre-testing is greatly regarded as an effective procedure for improving validity in qualitative data-collection techniques and the interpretation of findings (Bowden, Fox-Rushby, Nyandieka, & Wanjau, 2002; Brown, Lindenberger, & Bryant, 2008; Collins, 2003; Drennan, 2003; Foddy, 1998). Sustained by its nature of qualitative research as an iterative rather than a linear process, the pre-test interaction to self-correct between design and implementation ensures the greatest prospect for attaining reliability and rigour in qualitative inquiry and analysis (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). By definition, pre-testing involves simulating the formal data-collection process on a small scale to detect practical problems in relation to data-collection instruments, sessions and methodology. The value of pre-testing can lead to identification of errors in

cross-cultural language relevance and word ambiguity, as well as discovering possible flaws in survey measurement variables (Hurst et al., 2015). Pre-testing can also provide prior warning about how or why a main research study can flop by showing where research protocols are not adhered to or not feasible.

A classic pre-test in qualitative research includes administering the interview to a group of individuals that have similar characteristics to the target study population, and in a way that replicates how the data-collection session will be introduced and what type of study materials will be administered (consent forms, demographic questionnaires, interviews, etc.) as part of the process (Hurst et al., 2015). Pre-testing offers an opportunity to make revisions to study materials and data-collection procedures to ensure that appropriate questions are being asked and that questions do not make participants uncomfortable and/or confused because they combine two or more important issues in a single question. It is important that pre-tests are carried out systematically and embrace practice for all personnel who will be involved in data-collection procedures for the final main study.

The researcher ensured that the following main selection criteria was used to assess the rigour and relevance of the study instruments and procedures:

- Evaluating language competency and content validity of data-collection instruments.
- Estimating the length of time for delivering a full interview and taking note of periods of participant fatigue.
- Maximising methodological skills and achieving proficiency standards for qualitative data collection.
- Assessing the feasibility and fidelity of translation and transcription protocols in preparation of the interview text for qualitative analysis.

The process of pre-testing was carried out at the beginning of field work. The pre-test was carried out in the nearby *Kamanga* compound located next to *Madido* where the subject communities are. The process helped the researcher to refine and improve the research instruments which were used in the main study.

5.4.8 Methodology check

Methodological validity involves asking how well matched the logic of the method is to the kinds of research questions that are being posed and the kind of explanation that the researcher is attempting to develop. Dealing with this type of validity involves consideration of the interrelationship between the research design components – the study's purpose, conceptual framework, research questions and methods. Interpretative validity involves asking how valid the data analysis is and the interpretation on which it is based. Although this step is somewhat dependent on methodological validity, it goes further in that it directs attention to the quality and rigour with which the researcher interprets and analyses data in relation to the research design (Mason, 2017).

To enhance the methodological validity of the study, the researcher triangulated data sources as well as data-collection methods. Gathering data from multiple sources and by multiple methods yields a fuller and richer picture of the phenomenon under review. The researcher ensured that each research instrument had a corresponding data analysis method, providing a more thorough validation of the overall methodological approach.

5.5 OVERALL DESIGN

The following are the steps which were used to carry out this research.

- Prior to the actual collection of data, a selected review of the literature was conducted to appreciate the contributions of other researchers and writers in the broad areas of storytelling and its practice around the world.
- Following the proposal defence, the researcher acquired approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) to proceed with the research. The IREC approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards put forth for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
- Potential research participants were contacted by telephone, and those who agreed to participate were met and interviews were conducted in the case of key informants.

The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic as well as perceptual data. For FGDs, the participants were traced using voter lists and contacted through guidance by the Chongwe CMC. The complainant and the defendant were contacted directly by telephone after the review of the CMC case records which also provided residential addresses.

- Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine (9) key informants from diverse fields with relevant knowledge of the electoral conflict management process. Three (3) FGDs comprising eight (8) people each were carried out. Two were conducted separately while one (1) was jointly done. One case record was reviewed and the owners of the file were interviewed using two separate personal narrative questionnaires. A third party was also interviewed using the personal narrative questionnaire. Personal observation was employed during the study particularly in FGDs.
- Interview data responses were analysed within and between groups of interviewees.
- Of the 38 subject participants, all responded.

5.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical considerations are necessary to

- protect the rights of research participants
- enhance research validity
- maintain scientific or academic integrity

Below is Table 6 showing the ethical issues and how they were managed during this study.

Table 6: Ethical issues and mitigation measures.

Item no.	Ethical issue	Action taken
1.	Voluntary participation	Participants were informed and made aware that they were free to opt in or out of the study at any point in time.

Item no.	Ethical issue	Action taken
2.	Informed consent	Participants were informed and made aware of the purpose, benefits, risks, and funding of the study before they agreed or declined to participate.
3.	Anonymity	In most cases, there was no insistence on knowing the identities of the participants and where it happened, and no personally identifiable data was collected.
4.	Confidentiality	While the researcher knew who the participants were during the study, he kept that information hidden from everyone else. He anonymised personally identifiable data in order to avoid linking it to other data by anyone else.
5.	Potential for harm	The researcher ensured that physical, social, psychological and all other types of harm were kept to an absolute minimum.
6.	Results communication	The researcher ensured that this work was free of plagiarism or research misconduct, and accurately represented the results of the study.

With regard to managing potential biases during storytelling sessions, the researcher probed and asked questions for clarifications in order to ensure participants' wishes were accurately represented. The process involved the examining of biases in the stories, examining story image choices, and decision-making to manage the discussion. It also required continuous reflection, learning and adaptation based on the diverse experiences and feedback.

5.7 LIMITATIONS

Highlighting the limitations of the study is important because it exposes the conditions that may weaken the study (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Limitations arise from, among other things, restricted sample size, sample selection, reliance on certain techniques for gathering data, and issues of researcher bias and participant reactivity.

Although this study produced results that may not be generalised beyond the sample group, it provides a more in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, motivations and emotions in relation to electoral conflicts and storytelling. While generalizability was not the intended goal of this study, what the research addressed is the issue of

transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By way of thick, rich description, as well as detailed information regarding the context and background of the study, it was anticipated that knowledge could be assessed for its applicability and applied appropriately in other contexts.

Another key limitation of this study was the issue of subjectivity and potential bias regarding the researcher's own participation in the CMC in the past years. To address the problem, the researcher continued to reflect on how and in what ways he might be influencing participants. Furthermore, he made a conscious attempt to create an environment that was conducive to honest and open dialogue. Experience as an interviewer, as well as prior research experience, was helpful in this regard.

Furthermore, in recognising these limitations, the researcher also took the following measures. First, he acknowledged his research agenda and stated his assumptions up front. Coding schemes were scrutinised by peers as were coded documents and transcripts. To reduce the limitation of potential bias during data analysis, the researcher removed all participant names and coded all interview transcripts.

5.8 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DATA COLLECTION

Because the study was carried out during the COVID 19 period, the researcher had to employ multiple approaches to the collection of data. Initially, the intention was to conduct physical face-to-face interviews but a shift was made to include telephone interviews, email, skype and zoom meetings, especially for key informant interviewees. Although only a few questionnaires were sent to interviewees, non-response was observed and the interviews had to be rescheduled until face to face interviews were conducted. For the FGDs it was much easier in that participants were all provided face masks during the sessions. The challenge was that they required larger space.

Therefore, the shift in mode of collection from face-to-face to telephone and other electronic means caused slight delays in completing the data collection. Secondly, the data from emailed questionnaires was limited in terms of detail when compared to face to face interactions which enabled the researcher to probe and get clarifications instantly

in comparison to telephone calls which sometimes went unanswered. Indeed, researchers should be mindful of this limitation when carrying out research under restrictive conditions such as was the case during the COVID 19 pandemic.

5.9 DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The formal process of data analysis began by assigning alphanumeric codes according to the categories and descriptors of the study's conceptual framework. The researcher prepared large flip chart sheets. These sheets were colour-coded and taped on the wall. Each sheet identified the descriptors under the respective categories of the conceptual framework. As the process of coding the transcripts proceeded, new flip chart sheets were prepared to capture other themes as they emerged. The data analysis process involved transcription, coding and analysis of data. The researcher gathered descriptive data for purposes of answering the research problem. The interviews were transcribed, and an appropriate method of analysis applied.

For key informant interviews, thematic analysis was conducted. Once the data was gathered, the researcher went through the data repeatedly with the intention of finding emerging patterns, themes or sub-themes. This involved coding all the data before identifying and reviewing the key themes. This procedure allowed the researcher to categorise the data under different sections. This was a rather tedious task because the researcher had to go through the data many times before finalising the main themes and sub-themes of the research. Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and motivations in relation to storytelling and electoral conflict management. The advantages of using a thematic analysis are that it brings out detailed and rich data and provides a logical structure to the research.

Narrative analysis was used to analyse the data from FGDs. This involved listening to group participants telling their stories and analysing what the stories meant. Since stories serve a functional purpose of helping people make sense of the world, the researcher gained some insights into the ways that the people of Chongwe constituency dealt with and made sense of electoral conflicts by analysing their stories and the ways in which they were told.

In terms of the personal narratives tool which was applied to the complainant, the defendant and the neutral observer to the electoral conflict, the study used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data. The action involved analysing both the complainant and defendant's personal experiences of what had happened to them to end up being subject of electoral conflict management by the CMC. The neutral observer provided the insights into determining what mattered to each of the contestants. This required that the researcher understood the personal experiences of both the complainant and the defendant as well as the third-party perspective.

Content analysis method was used to analyse the data after the review of the records that were filed and kept by the CMC of Chongwe. Content analysis was used to evaluate patterns in the records by the CMC, particularly words, phrases or images. It identified the frequency with which an idea on electoral conflicts and its resolution was shared or spoken about. Content analysis enables a systematic coding of data by organising the information into categories to discover patterns undetectable by merely listening to the tapes or reading the transcripts (Robson, 2006; Yin, 1989).

Data obtained from observation was analysed using discourse analysis. This entailed analysing language within its social and political context. By using discourse analysis, the researcher was able to identify how the political culture and power dynamics have an effect on the way electoral conflict concepts are spoken about.

Analysis entailed working with the data collected, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, and looking for patterns, determining what was important and what was to be learned. In this study therefore, I manually sorted out and analysed the data as described by Creswell (2003: 191-195):

Step 1: "Organising and preparing data for analysing. This stage involved transcribing interviews by optically scanning material and typing up field notes.

Step 2: Reading through all the data in order to obtain a general sense of information and reflecting its overall meaning. At this stage initial ideas, impressions, and potential patterns that merited further exploration were identified. This was an iterative process of

checking the field notes, listening to the recordings and getting back to some of the respondents for clarification and validation of the data.

Step 3: *Detailing analyses with a coding process.* This stage involved generating initial codes. It involved working systematically through the data set and coding segments of text that were relevant to each research question.

Step 4: *Using the coding process to generate categories or themes for analysis.* Once the data had been coded, the codes were collated into potential themes. This involved examining the codes and the data extracts associated with them to identify significant broader patterns that captured important aspects of the data in relation to the research question/s.

Step 5: *Advancing how the themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative.* After identifying potential themes, they then were reviewed. This step involved two levels of review: The first was to check the themes against the coded extracts to ensure that they formed a coherent pattern, and the second was to ensure that each theme was distinct and meaningful in relation to the other identified themes. During this phase, some themes were split, combined, or discarded as the analysis kept refining and sharpening the thematic map of the data.

Step 6: *Making an interpretation or meaning of the data about the lessons learned.* These lessons were derived from the researcher's personal interpretation, with the understanding that the researcher also brought to the study idiosyncrasies from his own culture, history and experiences."

Based on the data gathered from the research tools, several key themes emerged that informed the application of storytelling as a community peacebuilding mechanism in electoral conflicts. The first set of themes responded to the first objective and they include community electoral conflicts; practice of storytelling of electoral conflicts at the CMC; Role of storytelling at CMC; Effects of CMC mediation; the second set was related to questions under objective two and the themes that were generated were; Conditions precedent to improve the use of storytelling in Electoral conflict mediation at CMC; Remodelling the CMC architecture to accommodate storytelling; The themes under

objective three which was to implement the storytelling intervention were; vulnerability of storytelling and issues on storytelling intervention as community-based peacebuilding.

The themes generated by questions under objective four which was about evaluating the outcome were; context of storytelling; conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding and operationalisation of storytelling under CMC.

In summary, data coding was accomplished in two stages. The first step was the initial coding which involved the generation of numerous category codes without limiting the number of codes (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the researcher listed emerging ideas, made relationship diagrams and identified keywords used by participants frequently as indicators of important themes. The second stage involved focused coding where the researcher excluded, combined or segmented the coding categories identified in the first step.

5.10 REFLECTIONS ON THE PROCESS

Generally, the study design was appropriate and enjoyed a level of flexibility that allowed the researcher to go back and forth to correct and solicit more information where it was scant. The researcher had anticipated tension during the joint FGD sessions but they turned out to be interactive, warm and positive. Furthermore, the researcher had anticipated that the target community for the research was well-informed about the CMC. However, it took some time to sensitise the community members on the purpose and intentions of the researcher. Some community members thought the researcher was going to provide funding and answered certain questions in anticipation of financial support.

Once rapport was created in the community, members began to own the process and began to take leadership and became very helpful. In terms of case records, I anticipated to find two records for the contestants but only a joint record was found. The implementation of the intervention was the most exciting part of the study and demonstrated that human beings have immense capacity to connect and change their perceptions. Evaluating the intervention carried out over a short period was quite

challenging and therefore using AR may require a longer period for satisfactory and undisputable results.

5.11 RESEARCH ACTION TEAM

In implementing the AR, particularly the storytelling intervention, an ART was initiated by the researcher. The ART comprised the researcher and his assistant, CMC contact point and member of the CMC secretariat, four community members from the defendant's community and four members from the complainant's community. The planning and initial meetings were held at CMC at the district council. The ART collaborated extensively and came up with the intervention design and process. Consultations were made with the CMC leadership and community section leaders who made suggestions regarding participants, venues, time frames, time of day and facilities. The ART was also instrumental in monitoring and evaluating the action research processes for the intervention including the reflection exercises that succeeded the research activities.

5.12 CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The chapter commenced by restating the research objectives and questions, thereafter, presented the study setting before discussing the methodological approach in detail.

Qualitative AR methodology was employed to illustrate the phenomenon of storytelling in electoral conflicts. A qualitative methodological approach was argued for based on the subjective nature of the study, access to data and contextual appropriateness. The participant sample was made up of 38 purposefully selected subjects. Five data-collection methods were employed, including individual interviews, FGDs, personal narratives, case record review and observation. The data were reviewed against literature as well as emergent themes. Validity and reliability were accounted for through various strategies, including source and method triangulation. In summary, this chapter provided a detailed description of this study's research methodology.

The elements in the chapter are:

- How the ART members were recruited and selected, and how they actively engaged in identifying and recruiting key participants to participate in the study in view of their political affiliation and places of residence.
- The chapter has also described the research settings and where the interventions took place.
- Data collection coming from five key sources: (a) FGDs; (b) Key informant interviews; (c) Personal narratives; (d) record review of the CMC files; and (e) observation.
- Data analysis by first coding, organising into themes and analysing the new information in terms of how it informed the research questions and their ongoing peacebuilding practice.

The next chapter presents and discusses the findings for research objective 1.

PART FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“In changing the people, relationships, and environment, the process ultimately changes the problem itself.”

This part of the thesis presents and discusses the findings of the study. The chapters under this part are arranged according to the four study objectives set out in the introduction of the thesis. Chapter 6 deals with objective 1 while Chapter 7 addresses objective two with elements of objective 4. Objective 3 is dealt under Chapter 8 with elements of objective 4 and Chapter 9 addresses objective 4 with elements of objective three.

This study set out to investigate the utilisation of storytelling as a mediation tool for electoral conflict resolution and community peacebuilding by the Chongwe District CMC in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. The research problem for the study was the under-utilisation or lack of exploitation of the potential and actual application of storytelling as a conflict resolution method by the CMC during electoral conflict management and peacebuilding sessions.

This thesis used action research to explore how district CMCs in general and the Chongwe district CMC in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka in particular can use storytelling as an effective community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The intention was to illuminate the potential that storytelling holds for application by the electoral CMCs as an Indigenous method of conflict management based on the 2021 general elections in Zambia. This was in light of the growing importance of community electoral conflicts and violence as Zambia is increasingly holding competitive general elections which have seen four turn-overs since 1991.

Although there are currently electoral conflict management and peacebuilding mechanisms that exist, previous work has not specifically addressed the role that

storytelling can play in the management of electoral conflicts. Concerns have been expressed about the endemic breach of the ECC with impunity. However, there has been little discussion let alone action about how this should be brought to an end. Indeed, insufficient attention has been paid to the role that Indigenous peace infrastructures such as storytelling can contribute to peace during elections. In addition, no research has taken into account the idea of integrating storytelling into the work of CMCs in Zambia.

This study was designed to remedy that weakness by exploring the use of storytelling in solving electoral conflicts.

CHAPTER SIX: COMMUNITY ELECTORAL CONFLICTS, STORYTELLING AND CMCS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the data and findings of the study for objective 1. The data is presented according to the four objectives set out in the study. All the data presented was gathered through interactions with study participants in Chongwe constituency, Chongwe district Zambia. The collection of the data lasted over 24-months spanning the period between November 2021 and December 2023. Throughout this period, the researcher conducted in-depth key informant interviews with different stakeholders, convened three FGDs workshops and several reflection sessions where all proceedings were recorded in the field and personal journals. The chapter begins by first offering a brief overview of the research design and later presents findings from the study. The findings of the study are analysed and discussed in light of the information gathered by way of an extensive literature review on electoral conflicts and peacebuilding efforts in Zambia, field notes, participants' evaluation forms and observations.

In selecting evidence from the various discussions to demonstrate arguments raised in the study, only quotations that express opinions or examples of recurrent experiences were chosen. The results of the study came from five key sources: (a) FGDs; (b) key informant interviews; (c) personal narratives; (d) record review of the CMC files; and (e) observation. The main data forming the basis of this discussion are the transcripts of the recordings of the storytelling interviews and narratives as well as record reviews. This process generated multiple themes for each objective of the study. These are discussed in turn below.

Objective 1 was to explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appear before the CMC in Chongwe district. In addressing the objective, participants were asked and probed for answers on

the questions of the nature and prevalence of electoral conflicts in their communities, and what the practice, role and effect of storytelling is when voters/citizens appear before the CMC to address electoral conflicts. The perceptions or opinions were collected from both the election stakeholders' as well as the researcher's perspective.

6.2 COMMUNITY ELECTORAL CONFLICTS

Before addressing the question of practice, role and effects of storytelling, participants in the study were asked to describe the nature, prevalence and reporting system of electoral conflicts in their community. The results show recurring points of agreement amongst participants on the nature, prevalence and reporting system of electoral conflicts.

6.2.1 Prevalence, Nature and Reporting System

A study participant described what he experienced at a market in Madido ward prior to the 2021 elections.

“One afternoon, a group of youths led by a ‘muscleman’ came to threaten us and warned us to stop entertaining the opposition in the market. This was because they saw too many posters and campaign materials for the opposition in the market. They then left. Very early the following day they came in the morning loaded into a bus carrying machetes, axes, stones, slings, sticks and all manner of basic weapons to attack us. We all ran for our lives and abandoned our merchandise. They pulled down all opposition banners and looted everything we had left in the market. It was bad and I will never forget that day.” (Male youth FGD participant, August 2023)

The statement quoted above explains the nature of conflicts that affected communities prior to elections in 2021. The party cadres as they were referred to had literally taken over all the institutions of the state where they could manage to overrule any authority including the police. In a sense, there was serious break down of law and order despite having the institutions of governance in place to maintain the rule of law.

With regard to making a report to the CMCs, one FGD participant commented as follows:

“Although CMCs exist at the district council, it takes time, effort, courage and money to report the cases. There are also perceptions that even if the matter was reported, no serious action would be taken as one would be fighting the governing party. Because of this, many cases related to electoral conflicts are left to take their course and die a natural death.” (Male FGD participant, July 2023, Chongwe).

The above sentiments raise critical issues about the CMCs. First, it raises the issue of availability. Second, it raises the issue of accessibility and finally, there is the issue of affordability. Availability relates to the extent to which CMC mediation services can be received within a reasonable waiting time whereas affordability relates to the extent to which community members have the resources to enable them to receive the service by the CMC while accessibility relates to the ability to receive CMC services in terms of their proximity or convenience for the community members. Most of the participants in the study felt that these parameters were not effectively met in the conduct of CMCs.

Another participant explained:

“First of all, if they(cadres) know that you are the one who has reported them they will come back for you. Secondly the police rarely do anything even if you report. The political cadres have more power than the police. We were helpless and just watched the situation until we had the chance to vote their party out in 2021.” (Male youth FGD participant, Chongwe, July 2023).

A female key informant noted:

“The institutions of electoral governance such as ECZ, CMCs, ZPS, ACC, DEC and HRC have no capacity to change the behaviour of the offenders because they are all complicity to the violation of the ECC. This is the main reason why electoral conflicts are ever on the rise.”

The above statements underscore the fact that while voters had no confidence in the electoral governance institutions or had no other way to respond to the community electoral conflicts due to fear of intimidation and harassment or lack of access to CMC, there was room for making change through the vote which would bring about peace in the community. Fortunately for them, this change took place and there was a positive outcome through the evolving democratic culture in the country. This result aligns with Lederach's (2003) transformation theory, which defines conflict transformation as the

capacity to perceive and address social conflicts as opportunities for positive change. It focuses on reducing violence, enhancing justice in social interactions and structures, and addressing real-life issues within human relationships. The vote to change the ruling regime in 2021 was in part explained by this theory.

A related issue was that of participation which was affected by the conduct of the governing party supporters who only made directives or demands on those they believed where sympathetic to the opposition. Again, prejudice as argued by Allport (1954) seemed to support the understanding of the conflict situation in the community; that because there was no contact and participation, prejudice led to the actions to harass the voters in the community.

The role of participation is further discussed by Manthwa and Ntsoane (2018) who observed that only enhanced public participation can properly facilitate members of the community to take part in the resolution of disputes and conflicts in their community. However, when they are made to fear to get involved as in the above case the process of conflict resolution becomes ineffective.

The findings of this study are further supported by the work of Iwu (2015) who argues that warring communities often seek to capture political power and that is why electoral conflicts increase during elections or political activities. The electoral conflicts in the Chongwe communities were precisely about capturing political power to access benefits by the opposition or holding on to it for the governing party in order to perpetuate benefits of incumbency and control opposition opponents. In the process community participation was marginalised as the community became the object of the crossfire between the contending parties.

The study showed that there was a prevalence of electoral conflicts in the communities especially during elections or political meetings. The electoral conflicts at the time were mainly between the governing party, the PF and the main opposition, the UPND. The conflicts were verbal abuse (insults) and intimidation, tearing down campaign banners and posters, assault, harassing those wearing opposing party campaign gear, disruption of mainly opposition meetings by police, threats of evictions from market stalls and threats

of violence based on political affiliation and sometimes ethnicity by ruling party officials. These types of electoral conflicts were reported to have been carried out mainly by unemployed youths in the communities and were said to have largely been orchestrated for both political and economic ends although there was attribution of these conflicts to political party territorial control as well. The participants in the study noted that there was always tension and political accusations in the community by youths and other officials although these had diminished substantially after the change of government in 2021. The participants disclosed that one had to report to the police for serious offences or to the CMC for minor offences. Serious offences were those that could cause harm to life and property whereas minor offences were those that inconvenienced or humiliated them.

The study showed that reports to police seldom yielded any results as community members were advised that nothing much could be done as these cases were about politics. Participants also indicated that it was a cumbersome process to report minor offences to the CMC due to the nature of the procedure which requires one to write, and the costs attached to travelling to present and hear the complaint. These factors considered together with lack of political co-existence, intolerance for divergent views, a compromised police and a leadership that condoned and supported political hooliganism formed the enabling environment for community electoral conflicts.

These findings agree with the observations of several election observer reports for 2021 elections in Zambia (Commonwealth, European Union, African Union and Christian Churches Monitoring Group) who identified police laxity and intolerance by political contestants. The findings also agree with scholarly research on the nature and motive of electoral conflicts (Mukunto, 2019; Ndulo, 2020) being a consequence of both economic and political aspirations. As a consequence, cases of conflicts continue to rise in the electoral process.

6.2.2 Implications and Significance of the results

The study results draw attention to the fact that conflicts during elections are not just about the peace infrastructure available to resolve them but that electoral conflicts and their resolution are interlinked to political economic issues of unemployment, poverty and

power. Due to the foregoing, it is unlikely that the CMC can resolve the electoral conflicts using the current mediation approach alone. The fact that CMC has challenges of availability, affordability and accessibility requires viewing the electoral conflict management process from a variety of perspectives including strengthening community involvement or complementing them with Indigenous approaches to ensure that the existing mechanisms respond appropriately to the electoral conflict issues in the communities. Most of the study participants preferred an integrated approach which they felt would work better for the CMC. This study acknowledged that this was crucially important for the design and continuous development of electoral conflict management frameworks and peacebuilding policies that support a peaceful, free and fair electoral process for the local communities.

6.3 PRACTICE OF STORYTELLING IN ELECTORAL CONFLICTS UNDER THE CMC

With regard to the practice of storytelling by the CMCs, it involved soliciting and analysing views from electoral stakeholders about their perception of storytelling in relation to managing electoral conflicts in the communities using CMC.

6.3.1 Perceptions of Storytelling at CMC

The results of the study show that the CMC process does not perceive storytelling as an important component in addressing the electoral conflicts. It focuses more on the substance of the issues and making a verdict on whether the electoral laws have been flouted rather than paying more attention to the post reconciliation, individual healing or relief. Virtually all the participants interviewed responded that they were not telling a story to the CMC whether as complainants or defendants when they appeared before it.

“When I attended the CMC mediation to present a complaint about my neighbour who had threatened me with violence in the 2016 elections, I didn’t feel like I was telling a story, I felt like I was appearing before a panel of judges asking me questions when my expectation was sympathy and a call out for my neighbour.” (Male FGD participant, May 2023, Chongwe).

A participant in the storytelling role play exemplified this point by observing that there is no focus on storytelling that happens at the CMC.

“The CMC mediation process does not essentially focus on storytelling for them to reach an agreement between the conflicting parties. But I think storytelling may have an important role in electoral conflict management” (Male FGD participant, May, 2023, Chongwe)

A key informant who participates in the process as a member of the NCMC observed that:

“The current CMC mediation process is not accommodative of meaningful storytelling, yes you tell your side of the story but you are only confirming what you submitted in the written brief or if you are a defendant you explain your side of the story as the committee asks questions.” (Key Informant, February, 2023, Lusaka)

Indeed, many other interlocutors in key informant interviews and FGDs confirmed these sentiments. Therefore, going by the majority views from the interlocutors, it is clear that the CMC underutilises storytelling and does not capitalise on its value beyond testimonies from participants or are unaware of the huge potential of storytelling practice as a peacebuilding instrument.

One participant put it as follows:

“Although the CMC invites participants to appear before it to give their side of the story, it never occurs to many of us that the sessions use storytelling in the manner we have discussed it during our FGD sessions.” (Female FGD participant, July, 2023, Chongwe).

The study therefore concludes that storytelling potential and practice by the CMC is not exploited and that storytelling under the current procedure for conflict resolution and management is underutilised in the resolution of electoral conflicts that take place. This finding is valuable because it draws attention to the need for complementarity between the methods used by informal and formal institutional processes as key elements of peacebuilding effectiveness. The finding draws attention to insights about the power of storytelling, a practice that can foster reflection and connections (Slingerland et al., 2023) between contestants and their supporters in an electoral contest. The question that begs an answer for the case of the CMC is why it has not taken advantage of the seemingly powerful intervention of storytelling which is an inherent part of the traditional African adjudication system. The African adjudication system focuses on the notion of reconciliation or the restoration of harmony which is essentially the mandate of the CMC.

The practice of storytelling as a peacebuilding tool is supported by McKee (2008) who argues that storytelling practice is used to sketch and illustrate a simple model of the Indigenous knowledge-sustainable development relationship.

A youth participant during FGDs noted:

“I thought the CMC was too formal to allow people to tell their stories freely without fear of being attacked by opponents after appearing before them.” They must come here(Community) where we are used to and can protect ourselves. (Male youth FGD participant, May, 2023, Chongwe).

The above statement seems to suggest that the CMC needs to decentralise further and create more awareness among members of the communities with assurances that they would be protected in the event that they reported cases of electoral malpractice to the CMC.

The view to decentralise was further supported by another participant who argued that:

“although we want to come and report cases of electoral disputes such as tearing of campaign posters during elections, the district CMC is quite far and requires you to spend money to go there. Therefore, me and my friends, we choose not to go there because we don't have money.” (Female FGD participant, May 2023).

It is noteworthy that while decentralisation of the CMC can respond to some of the expectations by the communities through opportunities for the expression of diversity and better attention to local needs, it also has the potential to interact with conflict dynamics in the communities where it is implemented. Therefore, caution must be taken if decentralisation of CMC is to be carried out.

6.3.2 Results Summary

The CMC mediation process does not perceive storytelling as an important component in that its focus is on whether the electoral laws and code of conduct have been flouted and thereafter attempt to reconcile the conflict parties. The CMC is largely unconcerned with storytelling as a method of conflict resolution, post-conflict reconciliation or individual healing or co-existence back in the community. Study participants observed that there was no sense or feeling of telling a story to the CMC; rather, they saw it as a form of tribunal and called for the decentralisation of the CMC electoral mediation. The

participants argued that decentralisation of electoral mediation would enable the process to be efficient, participatory and inclusive. The participants showed a positive view of promoting storytelling within the current mediation process.

6.3.3 Implications and Significance of the Results

The CMC mediation process misses an opportunity to enhance the quality of electoral mediation by neglecting complementarity between the formal and informal elements of the mediation process. These findings are important as they highlight the need to raise awareness among policymakers and scholars in Africa and beyond about the untapped potential of storytelling as a local peacebuilding tool. Despite being a proven and integral part of the African adjudication system, it remains underutilised. The finding contributes to scholarly discourse on arguments that liberal values, colonialism, cultural as well as intellectual imperialism have overshadowed and stymied the popularisation of Indigenous peacebuilding approaches. This research has therefore contributed by way of engaging with oral storytelling as a local peacebuilding method that can play a role in the electoral mediation process due to its ubiquity.

6.4 THE ROLE OF STORYTELLING IN ELECTORAL CONFLICTS

The study addressed the role of storytelling under the same objective which sought to solicit views on the practice of storytelling. The question explored the actual role that participants thought storytelling played during electoral mediation. This led to the theme below.

6.4.1 The Role of Oral Storytelling at CMC

The study showed that there was no significant role that storytelling played in conflict management apart from clarifying issues at CMC. The study found that the role of the CMC was to clarify and confirm the written complaint that was submitted to them and for the contestants to clarify and respond to the issues. The CMC did not give much attention to the recognition of the pain and dignity of the complainant or to listening to their experience and feelings. The role of the CMC was to apply conflict analysis based mainly on measurable factors alone which are drawn from the ECC. Storytelling was not

perceived as a conflict resolution or management approach. For example, if one brings down an opponent's campaign banner or poster, it is in contravention of the code of conduct which prescribes that a person has, subject to paragraph (2), the right to erect banners, placards and posters during election campaigns. The role of the CMC is to bring advise the alleged offender the provisions of the code of conduct in relation to the offence. At this stage, both parties are required to tell their side of the stories. Unfortunately, this format of storytelling does not address conflict stories beneath surface-level depictions of events. It also does not explain the assumptions of disputing parties or their expectations of each other and the roles they cast on each other. Thus, the results of this study agree with Stringer (2004) who argues that it is important to understand the ways in which conflict stories help to go beyond the mere settlement of superficial conflict.

During the personal narrative with the complainant in the case of the 2021 elections, he expressed the role of the CMC in the following terms:

“The process of mediation by CMC has to do with power relations and operates as if it is a tribunal when it is supposed to reconcile and help people get along. It is not a very familiar environment. I felt worse than before I went there. There was no point in going as the defendant was arrogant, not remorseful and only made up, to quickly end the matter.” (Personal narrative, 2023).

The above statement seems to suggest a sense in which the participant felt that the process was merely symbolic as it did not address his feelings and relationship with the offender. He felt harassed and thought he was on trial rather than getting relief for his complaint. His expectations were certainly not met.

The issue of power relations which was raised is relevant as it determines the course of electoral justice. The observation by the participant goes down to the question of who constitutes the CMC and how they are selected. The challenge is that power structures remain the same, even where action research is considered in discussions of method or legitimacy. The perception of symbolism about CMC is further expanded by another Key informant who observed that:

“the very fact that CMC is ad hoc and becomes active only during the election periods tells you why it cannot resolve conflicts sustainably. It is just funded at election time to show the public that there is a mechanism for resolving electoral conflicts but in reality it does

not deter people from breaching the code of conduct. It is merely symbolic. There is need to entrench the committee into the communities.” (Key Informant, March, 2023, Lusaka)

While storytelling may be important as a peacebuilding tool, it is also imperative to be aware of both the positive and negative roles it can play in conflict situations. One of the negative roles that the study found out about storytelling was that it was double-edged in issues of political nature including electoral conflict resolution. Majority of the interlocutors noted that there is a thin line between propaganda and storytelling and extreme caution must be taken if storytelling is being considered for integration into CMC framework because it can easily be taken advantage of by those who control the institutions of the state. Once used as propaganda, storytelling can disrupt democratic elections, sow suspicion and justify injustices in the electoral process. One key informant described storytelling role in the following way:

“The weakness about the storytelling approach is that it can easily be used as propaganda leading to the creation of narratives that suit those in authority. However, CMC will have to put measures in place to ensure that this does not happen if storytelling is incorporated in the CMCs. Otherwise it is a well rooted approach to resolving problems if our political players acted with integrity.” (Key informant, February, 2023)

This view is also reflected in the literature by a number of scholars who suggest that propaganda storytelling, which is a situation whereby the media environment is filled with false or misleading information for political purposes and serves to marginalise those on the fringes of power (Nguyen, 2021; Piechota, 2020; Manns, 2019) can be disruptive to peace in the communities. Thus it is important to apply storytelling appropriately.

Despite the varying views about storytelling at the CMC, a number of interlocutors agreed that storytelling is inappropriate for CMC mediation and should be used for peace education and building tolerance in the communities. One FGD participant noted that:

“I think it would be a good idea to incorporate storytelling in peace and civic education campaigns by ECZ during elections. It has a way in which it touches your heart and somehow you feel changed after listening to stories that you relate with.” (FGD participant)

Another participant observed that:

“Storytelling is an excellent way of sustaining peace in the community. My view is that it should be part of community education and be practiced throughout regardless of whether elections are taking place or not. I don’t see storytelling working effectively at CMC

because they deal with minor offences and Thus it is largely symbolic.” The best would be to anchor it in the communities through peace education and use community radios to connect people to each other despite their different political persuasions.” (key informant interview, Lusaka, 2023).

6.4.2 Results Summary

The findings show that less attention was paid to recognition of the pain and dignity of the complainant or listening to their experience and feelings by CMC while the storytelling of electoral conflicts was restricted to clarifying and confirming the written complaint and applying conflict analysis based on the ECC and then making a verdict. The study confirmed that the storytelling during mediation was confined to conflict parties and mediators and usually tended to exclude the communities in which the conflict occurred. There is no significant role that is played by storytelling as a method of conflict resolution. The study participants also observed that CMC is ad hoc because it becomes active only during the election periods. The results also show that while storytelling is an excellent approach to electoral conflict management, it has risks that need to be managed. This is because it can easily be used as propaganda leading to the creation of narratives that suit those who control the channels of communication, state institutions or storytelling anchors. Once used as propaganda, storytelling can disrupt democratic elections, sow suspicion and justify injustices in the electoral process. The study participants noted that it would be a good idea to elevate the role of storytelling in the CMC mediation process.

6.4.3 Implications and Significance of the Results

Because of the mediation format, storytelling does not play a significant role as a method of conflict resolution. Furthermore, because CMC is only active during election period it is unlikely to be sustainable in the long run as it fails to effectively connect the conflict management process to the community where it occurs.

Another implication is that while the electoral conflict management process is to a large extent implemented by well-meaning and educated professionals, these are largely inclined towards democratic liberal values and approaches (the premises on which CMCs were founded) or it may also be sheer lack of interest or lack of awareness about the role of storytelling as a conflict resolution method. Consequently, traditional approaches for

resolving electoral conflicts such as storytelling are relegated to the back room. Thus, there is need to revisit the current approach and consider taking on board traditional storytelling elements to enable complementarity of the approaches to mediation in the electoral process.

6.5 EFFECTS OF CMC MEDIATION

The study participants were asked to describe the effects of the CMC mediation on the patterns of interaction and the relationship created between contestants after the CMC mediation process. The theme below was generated.

6.5.1 Effects on Patterns of Interactions and Relationships

With regard to the question on the effects of storytelling on electoral mediation process, study participants suggested that there may be little or no positive effect on the patterns of interactions by contestants after they had been made to reconcile by the CMC. The participants argued that the CMC mediation process does not genuinely alter relationships but only stops the conflict symbolically. While symbolism is important in peacebuilding, it works to the extent that political parties involved must be the ones who are summoned to appear before CMC to account for their member's actions rather than individual complainants. When members appear in their individual capacities, it does not carry the weight required to show seriousness of the CMC.

During the personal narrative session, the defendant in the 2021 electoral conflict which was subject of resolution by the CMC gave the following perspective:

As a matter of fact, I was doing what I did on behalf of my party and the leaders who sent me. Of course you are appreciated and compensated for successfully undertaking the task that they ask you to do. That's all I did." For me the reconciliation thing was just politics. There was no way I could start apologising to an opposition member." (Defendant's narrative).

It is clear that the CMC process does not change the attitude or behaviour of the protagonists since it is about performing a duty on behalf of the political party on one hand and seeking relief by an individual offended on the other. The study participants equally doubted the level of forgiveness and reconciliation that ensued from the current CMC

mediation process. This perspective appears to hold credence in line with the argument by theologian Lewis Smedes that forgiveness is a process; that although the words are said, the angry feelings often return. He suggests that people need to go through a process to understand their feelings and they also need to take concrete action (Smedes, 1984). While some individuals take action by petitioning the CMC, the process does not accord them space to be heard and have the CMC understand their feelings. On this score therefore the CMC seems to fail to address requirements for forgiveness. A key informant in the study highlighted the following perspective:

“The CMC process in my view does not give opportunity to complainants to cry, vent their frustration or talk as they wish, to gain relief. If it allowed people to pour out their feelings and fears, there would be individual healing leading to closure of issues. I am afraid, as things stand their frustration could still be vented on the offender when everybody else expects it least. This means peacebuilding here is not sustainable. The CMC must play a therapeutic role as well as a reconciliation role.”

In relation to forgiveness there is also the aspect of reconciliation. Reconciliation is not a naturally occurring process but one that requires active efforts to overcome obstacles. However, if it occurs in a casual manner and once-off interaction, it is unlikely to yield fruitful results. Reconciliation involves both the process and the outcome. In the case of the CMC, the process should enable the contending parties to tell their stories unfettered instead of strictly adhering to the script. If both forgiveness and reconciliation are treated as processes that need more time and investment there would be most likely transformation of relationships between the contending parties. Healing can begin after listening, hearing, and responding to stories with the necessary follow-up actions to address the electoral injustices that are brought before CMC.

Study participants unanimously agreed that there was no evidence of follow-up in the community by CMC after attending to or reconciling the parties to a conflict. A member of the CMC confirmed that the CMC process does not include any follow-up mechanism due to inadequate financial and human resources as well as time constraints. As a result, the CMC is never aware of whether the conflicting parties which they reconciled built a relationship in their communities. This underscores the need for CMC activities to be seen as processes rather than ad hoc once-off efforts tied to the electoral cycle.

Both the complainant and the defendant attested that they were not contacted by anybody to enquire on whether reconciliation had truly taken place after the matter was resolved at the CMC.

“That matter ended at CMC, and you are the first one to remind me of that issue since 2021. May be they will still come and talk to me. I don’t know. But I see the man who reported me just at a distance though we have never talked.” (Personal narrative by defendant, August 2023).

“I think the CMC is not mandated to follow up on such cases. I have been on my own, managing my feelings and coping since we talked about the incident at CMC in 2021. There is no follow up whatsoever.” (Personal narrative by complainant, August 2023)

The view about lack of a follow up was echoed by several other participants who noted that there was incapacity by the CMC to follow up such cases because there were many activities that were happening during the election period.

“I personally think it is expecting too much to have CMC follow up people in the community whose cases they have already resolved. Remember this is at the time of elections. Anyway, people have different expectations about the CMC.” (Key Informant Interview with a member of CMC, July 2023).

The case review record also indicated that the matter was closed, and the two parties had reconciled.

In so far as the CMC was concerned, there was no further need to follow individuals to the communities as these were minor offences.

“Once we have resolved the issue here and the parties have reconciled, that is the end of the matter, we cannot be following up on minor offences.” (Key informant and CMC member, August, 2023)

An FGD participant, however, noted a positive effect of the CMC mediation process:

“One of the good things about the CMC is that when you threaten that you will report those who insult or mutilate banners for their opponents to the CMC, the perpetrators are somehow scared, and this prevents the offence from spreading wide. Those who do it, do it in secrecy and fortunately some are caught.”

The researcher agrees with this viewpoint in that the nature of security entails that would-be offenders must feel the presence of the law every time they think of breaking it. The CMC is a necessary structure in that it provides a perception that the ECZ is not only

talking about peace, but it is also seen to have structures in place to resolve the electoral conflicts. The above observation suggests that there is room for improving the process – this study, thus, introduces the storytelling perspective to ensure that peace values are embedded in the consciousness of community members in the same way the CMC believes in them. This approach would probably enable community transformation and ownership of the conflict management process facilitated by the CMC.

The study demonstrates that the capacity to share one's story and empathetically hold space for the stories of others is a significant point of growth as well and one that can lead to transformation not only of the storyteller but also those witnessing the story with acceptance and love, as the participants expressed for one another. They were able to rise above the electoral disputes and collaborate for the common good. As Ledwith and Springett (2010:103) have argued: "The transformative process begins in the stories people tell about their everyday lives...by telling our stories, retelling them, then rewriting them, we find we can create counter narratives that steer a course to transformation". Ledwith and Springett (2022) see the approach to participatory practice that begins with storytelling as a deeply reflexive process and one that connects us to others in the important work of developing consciousness about the connections between our personal experiences and the systems and structures of society that shape our lives, the relationship between the personal and the political.

6.5.2 Results Summary

The study results indicate that the CMC mediation process does not genuinely alter relationships but serves a symbolic role. All study participants regardless of the method of data collection unanimously observed that there was little or no positive effect on the patterns of interactions by conflict parties after they had been made to reconcile by the CMC. Further, that forgiveness and reconciliation are processes that require nurturing and follow-up in the communities to enable transformation of relationships.

6.5.3 Implications and Significance of the Results

This finding is important because it explains why electoral conflicts continue to be on the upswing in successive elections despite efforts by CMCs to manage the conflicts. It also

highlights the fact that the current process does not create the space to honour the pain and dignity of the victims of electoral complaints. CMC also does not create the necessary space to listen to the experiences and feelings of the complainants or have their feelings understood by the CMC. The mediation exercise is just a procedural ritual to request petitioners to speak to their written complaint. Healing can begin only after listening, hearing, and responding to stories with the necessary follow-up actions to address the electoral injustices that are brought before CMC. As a result of the lack of follow-up, the CMC is never aware of whether the conflicting parties which they reconciled built a relationship in their communities. From this perspective, one can argue that the CMC approach is incapable of reflecting the multiple and diverse experiences of local communities during election cycles in Zambia, and their constant struggle to create and maintain spaces for participation in the midst of rising electoral conflicts in each successive electoral cycle.

Both forgiveness and reconciliation are processes that need more time and investment and the one-time mediation that occurs falls far short of addressing these processes. Further, given its inherent and strong relationship to therapy, storytelling enables persons in conflict to organise and give meaning to their experience and allow their stories to shape political lives and relationships. The study reveals that storytelling and story-based approaches are valued for generating spaces for electoral conflict resolution in that they provide avenues that help to alter perceptions at individual and interpersonal levels. More importantly, story-telling offers peacebuilders and electoral conflict experts a different way of approaching electoral conflict management as it provides both a means of altering as well as analysing conflict.

6.5.4 Correlation of study elements

To address the objective on the question of the practice, role and effects of storytelling at CMC, which is what this chapter attempted to do, the data collection method used was the FGDs. A narrative analysis was employed to refine the data. The anticipated outputs were levels of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes and behaviour. For example, the study found out that storytelling was not used effectively while the practice was not inclusive of the communities where the conflict occurs. And that the role of the of storytelling was

ECC rule based. The attitude seemed to be one where participants did not feel ownership of CMC and that it was an institution for the political elites in the electoral process. As a result, they behaved in a manner that did not demonstrate ownership of the CMC activities.

When personal narratives were employed as data collection tools, interpretive phenomenological analysis was used and the responses illuminated the emotional and relational aspects of conflict resolution which appear to be inadequately addressed by the CMC. The narratives elicited memories and feelings of pain, desire, joy, anger or resentment. In terms of data collection by the observation method, a discourse analysis was applied and it showed that when the stories were shared among the participants a sense of either sadness, silent cries or relief was exhibited. It is therefore clear that for each method of data collection and analysis the results varied but were congruent in some issues.

Observational data also enriched the perspectives that were obtained through FGDs and Personal narratives. For example, some participants expressed sadness when they recalled what had happened to them during the elections and others shed some tears (field notes, July 2023). This implies that the stories had a relational and emotional impact.

6.6 HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CHAPTER FINDINGS

This study agrees with the assumption that storytelling is not sufficiently used as an effective local community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding by the CMCs during elections in Zambia. This is despite the practice being common and well-understood in the communities. This finding gets traction with scholars who argue that Indigenous knowledge has been displaced not simply by the usual colonising influences of the liberal state but equally by the rise of global intellectual imperialism and the digital age.

The study has agreed with the social learning, transformative and contact theories by demonstrating that when parties to a conflict are brought into contact and stories are shared, there is a reduction of prejudice (Allport,1951) and a process of learning occurs

(Bandura & Hall,2018). This learning is exemplified by Lawrence and D.S. Paige (2016) who have argued that storytelling is a collaborative non-hierarchical process that involves the learners as active agents in the learning process rather than as passive receivers. The learning process in this study led to transformation of perceptions and attitudes that could not be imagined at the start of the study and confirms Lederach's transformative theory (1996).

6.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The chapter has shown that storytelling is not sufficiently used as an effective local community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding by the CMCs during elections in the Chongwe constituency despite the practice being common and well-understood in the communities. This is arguably due to the ever-changing conflict management context driven by the digital age and the predominance of the liberal peace paradigm.

This chapter demonstrated the nature, prevalence and reporting system of electoral conflicts in the communities and highlighted the practice, role and effects of storytelling at the CMC. The chapter affirms the findings of Warren-Gordon (2020) that storytelling and stories create understanding, empathy and provide tools, a platform and inspiration for individuals and communities to share their experiences, connect across differences and begin crucial conversations. The chapter also presented the opinions and perceptions of community members with regard to storytelling and its application by CMC. The chapter discussed the potential, opportunities and challenges of storytelling under the current CMC set-up and further shows that the current process does not pay much attention to the post-conflict reconciliation, individual healing or relief as long as an agreement has been reached.

The next chapter presents and discuss the findings on objective 2.

CHAPTER SEVEN: HYBRIDISATION OF CMC ELECTORAL MEDIATION AND ORAL STORYTELLING MODELS TO IMPROVE THE PROCESS OF ELECTORAL CONFLICT MEDIATION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses objective 2 of the study: to analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district.

The findings are a product of sifting through and developing themes to arrive at the discussion points on integrating and improving the process of mediation by the CMC. The participants were asked to address the question of how the storytelling as a peacebuilding approach can help improve the CMC electoral mediation process. The chapter addresses the general status of the storytelling culture, conditions precedent to the application of storytelling as a conflict management strategy at CMC on one hand and the measures for remodelling the CMC architecture on the other so that the two approaches can complement each other. The chapter further discusses the integration of the storytelling peacebuilding model into the electoral mediation process. It also highlights the interpretation of the findings of the study and concludes by giving a summary of the issues raised in the study including their implications and significance.

7.2 GENERAL STATUS OF THE STORYTELLING CULTURE

The use of storytelling as a knowledge acquisition tool has declined significantly in many cultures during the “modern period” and given rise to a shifting away from story and replacing it with a focus on scientific inquiry (Boa-Ventura et al., 2012). This not only affected the western countries but also had a similar effect in the south particularly in Africa. While storytelling is still popular, new forms of storytelling have emerged and oral storytelling in its typical form in particular has been eroded in many urban centres of African cities. Consequently, any strategy that aims to use storytelling needs to be revisited before it is implemented as many dynamics are now at play. However, there is

now also an argument that with the advent of digital media technologies, we seem to be entering a postmodern era in which story has begun to re-elevate itself from an art form into an emerging change agent that can transform imagination into action (Coles, 1989). Story is enjoying a modest revival with educators and peacebuilders alike because it relates well to constructivist ideas about innovation and change required for societies to be resilient. Practitioners who were somewhat reluctant to change are beginning to understand that story is a valid way of knowing things – a “narrative epistemology” (Bradt, 1997: xi). Thus, this study presents an opportunity for using storytelling as a strategy for conflict management and peacebuilding.

In light of the above there is need to revive and promote the culture of storytelling in the communities where electoral conflicts are prevalent. This is to avoid lapses in the intervention in case the communities have developed a weak storytelling culture along the way. Once communities have acclimatised, it would be much easier to integrate storytelling into the CMC mediation. To improve the process, a number of precedent conditions are necessary to elevate storytelling as a strategy for conflict management and community peacebuilding during the mediation process.

7.3 CONDITIONS PRECEDENT

Study participants were asked to respond to the question of how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district. Varied responses were received from across the participants but were predominantly congruent. The study results showed that storytelling had the potential to improve the CMC mediation process provided that a number of factors were taken into account. Among these were understanding the motivations of the contestants at CMC, the setting for mediation, method of reporting, location of the mediation sessions, the extent of audience reach and language applied during the process. These factors are discussed in detail in the following sections.

7.3.1 Motivation to Report Cases

It was evident from the group discussions that the motivation to report cases of breach of the ECC was influenced by both internal and external circumstances such as pain by those who reported violations or anticipated benefits from the process. Understanding the motivation to report to CMC was an important consideration for purposes of improving the mediation process. While it is difficult to know one's motive, the varying expectations by study participants about what they thought CMC was intended to achieve was instructive. The motivation to report cases of electoral malpractice or to appear before the CMC to answer alleged electoral malpractices were highlighted by the study participants. One FGD youth participant explained that:

“Our friend from the party went to report the case where he was insulted because we heard that the CMC provides transport money for anyone who reports electoral malpractices. But he came back disappointed. There was no transport money although his case was attended to.”

Clearly, the motive for reporting the case was more about the financial benefit that was anticipated rather than the genuine need to resolve the conflict. This poses a challenge to efforts that aim to improve mediation because the motive is more about financial gain than resolution of the electoral matter.

When the complainant was asked about the motive for reporting the case of being insulted, he had this to say:

“I did not want the guys from the ruling party to take advantage of us even if I knew that nothing would happen to him. I felt good that I reported him. I also expected some transport money from CMC for reporting the case, but they did not give me.”

The idea of financial gain is also inherent in the motive to breach the ECC and cause electoral conflict.

“We brought down banners and posters and I insulted him because I was going to get some money from our team leader. It was a party plan where a group of us were sent out in the compound to stop and intimidate opposition members.” (Personal narrative, August 2023)

The results also suggest that undergoing a positive or negative election campaign experience subsequently influences the motive not to report or to report cases to the CMC or to attend the hearings.

“Voters who report cases of electoral malpractice have likely experienced humiliation or harassment and they fear that those experiences may reoccur. So, they go the CMC to take refuge.” (Key Informant Interview, July 2023).

Some of the above motivations may not be so noble but CMC must be aware that participants, especially political party members, could be driven by other motives during storytelling to gain pecuniary or power advantage as they seek redress of their grievances through CMC. This awareness is critical to the organisation and improvement of the mediation process. In sum, these results suggest that both defensive and non-defensive motives play a role in storytelling at the CMC mediation process.

Furthermore, CMC must be cognizant of the fact that when people fall victim to an electoral offence, they may pursue different objectives in the aftermath. Those affected may attempt to take away feelings of stress and discomfort in order to reduce the chance of future victimisation or to restore their (im-)material situation (Fiselier, 1978). Therefore, storytelling would improve the mediation process if the CMC members were aware that contestants have different motives when they appear before the CMC to resolve their electoral disputes. This also justifies why the process must involve community so that private and personal motives are kept in check.

7.3.2 Mediation Setting

The setting of a storytelling activity is just as important as its purpose. This is because the teller must focus equally on both their goals for the story and the audience of the story. The study participants responded to the issue of improving mediation through storytelling by observing that the setting is critical to enhance the CMC mediation process. It was observed that the current CMC setting was restrictive and not familiar to many of the local community residents.

“There is need for CMC to come closer to the people and make the process more informal. When you go to their offices at the council you feel intimidated just from the way you are

dressed. By the time they start asking you questions you have lost all the confidence.”
(Female FGD participant, July 2023)

The above quotation underscores the importance of the setting for storytelling. People want to be in a familiar environment; to feel safe and psychologically protected. The setting must enable the tellers and listeners to engage in a respectful manner. In other words, the CMC setting is too formal and in that sense, therefore, not friendly to the users per se.

The setting of the storytelling should ideally be such that it creates opportunities for stakeholders and communities to build or strengthen social ties through organised reflection. Five participants noted that an intimate setting adds to bringing people closer together. Another set of six participants argued that people will only connect when CMC provides a platform where all the participants will experience equality when they appear before the CMC. Therefore, both intimacy of interaction and sense of equality provide the suitable setting for communities to share information, ideas and thoughts.

“When you talk to us in our local setting like this, it gives us a common language and it gives us a common focus and a kind of neutral one where we can talk about the expected electoral norms without fear.” (Male FGD participant, July 2023).

The quotations above connote power relationships, confidence and identity. Naturally these attributes play out at all levels of the community. Participants faced a serious challenge in negotiating confidence, identities and power relations, which was necessary for them to participate and be recognised as legitimate and competent members of their political communities. The participants equally attempted to shape their own participation by exercising their personal agency through actively negotiating their positionalities, which were locally constructed within the study context.

Some of the community members observed that they would never consider themselves competent to report or later on tell a story at the CMC.

“That setting at CMC is for you the upper class. Us, we cannot go there because we feel powerless and ignorant.” (FGD woman participant, June 2023)

Porter (2007) observes that a sense of powerlessness, in all its forms, denies a person the will to take up opportunities that will enable them to participate actively in both the

economic and social life of the wider society. One of the solutions to such participation and a sense of empowerment can emerge from developing the skills to express oneself and be heard (Porter, 2007).

It is, therefore, imperative that CMC should consider providing necessary skills in the community for them to develop capacity and knowledge to be able to use the available CMC mediation process. In this way, they would greatly improve the process in terms of both accessibility and number of cases that would be reported.

7.3.3 Method of Reporting

The results show that the willingness by participants to tell their stories of electoral malpractices is more likely to occur when all modes of reporting are available, and that total time spent in the reporting process is short especially that CMC deals with minor electoral offences. Participants noted that the current reporting procedure which requires one to write and present a report is cumbersome and discourages people from reporting. Participants expressed need for making the process accessible even by telephone or digital platforms to engage the CMC. Participants in the study believed that the way stories are told and what the stories are about are critical to the promotion of a community-driven and effective mediation process by the CMC.

“The interface between storytellers and story receivers enables reflection when they together deliberate their differences and commonalities, including their role in the community.” (Key Informant Interview, June 2023)

During a storytelling event, content and form feed into a process in which reflection is orchestrated through supporting empathy, changing perspectives, challenging prejudices, and instigating dialogue (Slingerland et al., 2023). These attributes create social ties, and the social ties could, after the event, lead to further emergent outcomes and, as a result, to stronger communities (ibid.).

There is also the ethical aspect of the storytelling which is contextual. This means “it is dependent on how the narrative is interpreted and put to use in a particular social, historical, and cultural world” (Meretoja 2018:170). Meretoja (2018:2) proposes “a hermeneutic narrative ethics, which acknowledges that narrative practices can be

oppressive, empowering, or both, and provides resources for analysing the different dimensions of the ethical potential and dangers of storytelling”.

Participants also believed that the intention to report to CMC would be greater if ECZ officials encouraged victims or community members to report electoral malpractices on a frequent basis. Their failure to be seen in the community to encourage people to report makes the community fear to go to CMC to avoid the consequences of harassment from the political parties.

“If the ECZ was here regularly we would be encouraged to report cases and will not be afraid of being harassed by political party youths.” (Female youth FGD participant, July 2023)

The message from the participant’s concerns was that CMC must have a method of reporting that is safe; allowing people to freely report without fear of victimisation. This implies that ECZ should establish measures to assure the protection of citizens who report electoral malpractices.

7.3.4 Location of the Mediation Sessions

Relationships to place can be important in the memories of local groups and their ideas about community or what is politically significant and what electoral conflict stories they can tell. Choosing a site where certain electoral incidents occurred in the past is a simple way of having community to reflect on such incidents and articulate their thoughts. Such a place can be a powerful motivator for action by the community.

“That football arena you see there, brings very sad memories to me because it is where police teargassed my brother while he was walking to attend an opposition rally. Since then, he became a sickling. He has never recovered since that time. I therefore associate this place with police heavy handedness and just have bad feelings when I pass there. I am participating here because I don’t want anybody to go through what my family has endured.” (FGD youth participant, August 2023).

The mediation process by CMC has an opportunity to improve if they devise ways and means to hear electoral disputes at the sites of their occurrence. The hearing of the disputes on site has the advantage of carrying the experience of those affected and building a relationship both with the community and creating an appreciation of the environmental circumstances that make the conflicts possible. Place, in the sense of

proximity and intimacy, plays a great part in the healing, reconciliation and decision to cooperate and unite for community members as implied in the above statement.

The community interaction and ensuing understating of local dynamics would certainly improve the mediation process of the CMC. Location of the electoral dispute mediation sessions should encourage individuals to value and identify with their local area where the community feels it is convenient, a familiar meeting place and one where the participants would benefit from the confidence of remaining close. This would drastically change the community dynamics and perceptions about electoral conflict resolution and management.

One participant observed:

“For me, place proximity and intimacy mean the political ideas I propagate and the political choices I make affect the way that neighbours interact with me.” (Key Informant Interview, April, 2023).

In essence, the above statement suggests that it is possible to cooperate and work together with people who understand who one is and what they stand for. When a person goes to CMC at the district council, it means they are with an audience that largely does not know or understand them. If CMC is able to take into consideration such factors, they would not hesitate to set up their electoral conflict management committees in the smaller communities, particularly those that have shown sustained trends of electoral violence over the years.

The findings of this study are, therefore, important for improving mediation by CMC as the study brings into focus the benefits that location of mediation sites have in the process and the storytelling format.

7.3.5 The Extent of Audience Reach and Language Applied

Participants in the study agreed that the selection of the medium of communication must always be appropriate to the tone of the content of the story being told if CMC has to improve the mediation process. It was submitted that CMC needs to think through the available means of communication including the language and the audience and select the one that makes the most sense on the basis of the intention of the story content and

the targeted audience. For both CMC mediators and clients, communicating with purpose, candour, courage and sensitivity is a desirable skill. Storytelling becomes such a powerful instrument of persuasion when stories have a quality that makes information more credible and retainable than pure facts and codes (Juraid & Ibrahim, 2016). These qualities can only be appreciated when the medium of communication is appropriate, and the audience is taken into account.

“You see sir, the language used at CMC is English our official language. Apart from that you have to speak in a microphone. Sometimes some of us who have basic knowledge begin to doubt ourselves whether we can speak to a group like CMC through a microphone where there are lawyers, policemen and important people like priests.” (Male FGD participant, July 2023)

The statement by the above participant carries undertones of the need for a suitable medium of communication and perceptions about the nature of the audience that a storyteller has to face at the CMC. In order to improve storytelling at the CMC, consideration of employing common media forms for the targeted local communities seems to be an imperative. In addition, the majority of the adjudicators must be familiar with the local community itself. This also ties in with bringing the CMC to local communities instead of the district level.

“I feel that CMC should focus on storytelling instead of just focusing on the content of the complaint and breach of the electoral code of conduct. Storytelling in a free fashion will enable the CMC and other members of the audience to examine the gestures, facial expressions and voice pitching to get meaning from the storyteller.” (Key Informant Interview, March 2023)

By virtue of its emotional power, storytelling captivates the audience and the audience may be affected by gestures, facial expressions and voice intonation. Further, when the audience relates to the story episode, it cultivates a certain degree of trust both of which play a significant role in establishing a strong relationship between storytelling content and engagement of the audience.

Listening to stories in a mediation session should be a social experience. This must embed a feeling of unity, a shared laughter, sadness, excitement and anticipation all provoked by stories in the session (Juraid & Ibrahim, 2016). These attributes promote social and emotional closeness which enhances team-spirit and collaboration.

Storytelling in the mediation process should create a friendly and joyful atmosphere where both the storyteller and CMC members enjoy resolving community electoral conflicts together because it is a common goal. In this way, storytelling will improve the CMC mediation process.

Another aspect of story communication is an increasing requirement to have knowledge relating to the various linguistic and ethical features of storytelling. Mediated communication has meanings attached to its practices. Meretoja (2018: 47) states:

Instead of being mere representations, narratives have a performative character that is intertwined with practices of power. As interpretations of the world, narrative practices have real-world effects. This is precisely what their (per)formative and productive character means: they take part in constructing, shaping, and transforming human reality.

Consequently, ways of expressing oneself within a community are shaped by the relationship between communicators, norms, purpose and the participants' characteristics (Hårdaf Segerstad, 2002). While some scholars have acknowledged both the ethical potential and the risks of storytelling, they have also addressed "the ethical complexity of the roles that narratives play in our lives" (Meretoja, 2018: 2). Therefore, as storytelling is being advocated for in order to improve CMC mediation, it is crucially important to be aware that stories can also be used to induce or even mislead listeners (Auvinen, 2012; Gabriel 2008; Riessman, 2008) and the language and medium of transmission matters.

"I fear that if storytelling is allowed in the way we are proposing here, it will be a license for those in power to tell lies about those in opposition and anybody else they don't like. I say so because government controls most of the institutions." (FGD participant, July 2023)

The above statement intimates the issue of ethical use of storytelling. Ethics are important in any practice and indeed it will require that storytelling follows strict ethics to avoid injuring some sections of the society. Consequently, storytelling, like many professional practices has to be practised through application of ethics without which it will become a risk to the wellbeing of all citizens in the country.

In the above statement, there is also a sense in which the participant doubts the independence of the governance institutions and worries whether there are sufficient control mechanisms for storytelling to be applied fairly. Ethics apply to all stakeholders

including those in government and this makes it possible to manage the usage of storytelling and preventing its abuse by any stakeholder. In view of the above observation, it is thus necessary to also create a level of awareness about storytelling ethics among stakeholders in order to understand the proposed storytelling election peacebuilding mechanism. This would be for purposes of accommodating and improving the CMC mediation process. While stories appear informal, their practice must be guided in order to achieve the targeted benefits using this peacebuilding approach.

The study further inquired into measures aimed at remodelling the CMC current architecture to accommodate aspects of Indigenous storytelling in the mediation process. The aim is to make the two approaches work in tandem. This is the subject of discussion in the next section.

7.4 REMODELLING THE CMC ARCHITECTURE

The study suggests that it is possible to remodel the CMC architecture to accommodate storytelling as both a conflict management and peacebuilding model for electoral conflicts. In responding to the question on measures for remodelling the CMC and changing its architecture through use of storytelling to resolve electoral conflicts, six themes were established. These were review of legislation and procedures; decentralising CMC from district to community level; ensuring continuity of CMC activities outside election periods; anchoring CMC on Indigenous knowledge systems; promoting inclusion of marginalised groups in CMC processes; and managing gender dynamics. The following sections discuss these themes.

7.4.1 Review of Legislation and Procedures

In this study, participants proposed a review of legislation and procedures that currently guide the work and operations of the CMC. These proposals were in line with the understanding that conflict management practice and processes in Zambia are a product of its democratic values, psychological imperatives and its history including the economic, political and social structures.

Some of the comments on which there was unanimity were:

“The CMC process is too formal, and they do not publicise their agreements after settlement. You know that mediation is a confidential process and should be treated as such.” (Key Informant Interview, July 2023).

Elections are a public process and should entail that all its processes be open and participatory including the CMC mediation. This means strict rules of mediation should not apply in the case of the minor electoral conflicts that are being resolved.

Another participant observed that the procedure should be reviewed:

“CMC requires that complaints about the conduct of elections are put in writing. This procedure appears to be easy, but it discourages people from taking complaints. It takes time and effort to write a complaint in a manner that other people will understand. Why can’t they just allow people to go and talk?” (FGD participant, June 2023)

Both the above interlocutors point to the need for addressing the level of formality in procedures and the degree of “publicness” of the mediation process. Currently, the CMC mediation is confidential, and its contents are not for publication. This approach needs to be reviewed if storytelling has to play a role in the resolution of the electoral conflicts. It requires that the process becomes public by way of broadened access to the hearings as well as access to the cases and agreements that are settled. The process must further allow participants to use the oral method of reporting electoral offences in cases where they feel that they cannot write. Some level of informality would enable CMC to be more user-friendly. This shift would fit in with the idea of using storytelling and community involvement in electoral conflict management and peacebuilding. It is anticipated that review of the law would provide for flexibility to enable all citizen categories (literate and illiterate) to participate.

Another area of consideration for review according to the study participants was the need to limit adjudication of cases to local communities as they are minor electoral offences. CMC does not deal with issues of litigation and mainly relies on other wings of government to litigate cases.

“If you take a serious offence like assault to CMC, they will refer you to police. Because of this it is better those classified as minor cases are handled locally in the community instead of spending money to report a case at the district only to be referred elsewhere.” (FGD participant, June 2023)

It is apparent that CMC cannot deal with root causes of electoral violence or seriously punish perpetrators of electoral violence. Their role as mediators is to reconcile and advise the disputants in the electoral process. Arising from this observation, it is imperative that storytelling is accommodated in the mediation process to add value through providing a platform for venting, relief, healing and genuine reconciliation. When CMC is remodelled along this architecture it will be more meaningful for participants to use it as a method of resolving electoral conflicts.

The concerns to review the legislation and procedures of CMC are further justified by the fact that CMC is not proactive in carrying out their mandate. They wait for cases to be reported and that is when the committees are called upon to preside over such cases. In fact, CMC is only reconstituted when there is a case/s to preside over.

One participant noted as follows:

“You need to review the procedures of CMC not only because you want to accommodate storytelling but equally necessary is that the CMC must be made proactive and act on cases to punish perpetrators even before someone reports.” (Personal narrative, 2023)

Changing the law and certain procedures to allow for storytelling in the CMC process will be important because the stories shared will keep reminding the CMC mediators to take a more proactive stance and engage with the communities throughout even between election cycles. The law should further give CMC powers to anchor their activities in the communities and give them authority over these communities where they would train them in various skills relating to storytelling and electoral conflicts in the absence of elections. By so doing the CMC would popularise its work and enhance its capacity to respond to community electoral conflict in an efficient and effective manner.

Clearly, the study demonstrated that regular review of legislation, policies and procedures is key to keeping CMC up to date with the latest developments in technology or new approaches to electoral conflict management as well as being consistent with the field's best practices. The ideal review of legislation, policy and procedures broadens the sense of ownership by stakeholders. The need for review is justified because legislation and procedures are made more consistent and effective, and thereby help protect the

organisation and its clientele. In this way the organisation remains current, compliant and viable.

7.4.2 Decentralise to Community Level

In responding to the question on how storytelling can improve the CMC mediation process, the study showed that participants would prefer further decentralisation of the CMC from district to community level to effectively address the electoral conflicts during election periods.

“The constituency is too wide to have CMC at the district only. Let them at least have CMC at ward level. However, I prefer it to be at branch level. This will encourage us to participate when the office is closer.” (FGD participant, July 2023)

The proposition by the above participant was echoed by several other participants in the study. One key informant said:

“There is need to move the CMC away from the district centres because these structures were formed as a mechanism to deal with or respond to community electoral conflicts. But they seem to be centralised at the district level. How then can they respond to electoral conflicts in the communities?”

During the conversations, with the defendant who was summoned by the CMC in 2021, he observed that:

“CMC mediation would be effective if they set up structures in every ward in the constituency in the same way police are trying to do. This would enable the community to access their services more easily and in a friendly and familiar place.” (Personal narrative, August 2023)

Decentralising the CMC and its powers to lower levels of the communities will establish mechanisms for sharing responsibilities between the district CMC and the various local communities. The foregoing will enable inclusive representation and participation. It will provide a certain degree of self- governance, which reduces demands for violent aspirations during elections.

There are 21 wards in Chongwe constituency and each ward is geographically vast. All 21 wards have to take their electoral complaints to the CMC in the district. The unit of this study was Madido ward where study participants still felt the branch must be the unit for organising the communities for action because the ward was too big to deliver services

efficiently. Decentralisation, therefore, is not only a tool of conflict resolution but is also strongly linked to elements of peacebuilding and democratisation (Keil & Anderson, 2018). Thus, the proposals by the study participants appear valid to the extent that they are supported by scholars such as Brancati (2009), Keil (2012, 2013) and Watts (2015) who argue that decentralisation is one of the most efficient means to manage contemporary conflicts. However, others (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2007; McGarry & O’Leary, 2013) suggest that decentralisation has had mixed results when used as a tool for conflict resolution. In view of the foregoing, the primacy of context in enabling or disabling decentralisation as a conflict mitigating tool is crucial. These discussions are important pointers even as the study unravels the community solutions for improving mediation of electoral conflicts in the Chongwe constituency.

7.4.3 Ensure Continuity of CMC Activities After Elections

Participants in the study also addressed the question of the ad hoc nature of CMC and were unanimous in recommending a permanent CMC structure that continues to operate beyond an election period. Participants argued that there is no need for the CMC to become dormant when there are no elections taking place. The lack of continuity makes it difficult for community members to appreciate the critical role that CMC plays during elections.

“In order to improve the process of mediation, there is need for making CMC permanently present in the community so that when there are no elections it can use storytelling to carry out peace and civic education.” (FGD participant, July 2023)

Another participant explained that:

“the ad hoc nature of the CMC does not give confidence to the public because it is always like a passing cloud.” (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

The above views are suggestive of the need for a conflict management and peacebuilding structure that is available throughout the community because election cycles are predetermined. Currently the CMC is convened if and when there is an election in the area, and someone reports a breach of the ECC. This implies that even the funding for its activities is tied to the elections. Separate funding which is detached from the elections fund is an imperative if the CMC has to be sustainable. This would enable CMC to engage

with communities continuously and make the CMC truly responsive to the needs of the communities. Because of the ad hoc nature of the CMC it is unlikely that it can prevent electoral conflicts. It has to wait for an election to take place and citizens to report before it can act. This reactive posture of the CMC needs to change if the mediation process has to improve.

A participant in the study observed that:

“CMC is not given the seriousness that it deserves. Its activities are only reignited when there are elections. They are not proactive, and I wonder why they have to wait for complainants to report when electoral offences are regularly taking place in the communities during elections.” (FGD participant, 2023)

The statement above points to the need for CMC to be proactive and get into the community without waiting for people to commit electoral offences before they act. The idea of prevention within the electoral conflict scholarship is widely accepted. Literature is replete with recommendations for investing in the maintenance of peace to prevent potential conflicts (Lund, 2005). Consequently, an investment in prevention will lead to an effective mediation process whether through storytelling or other interventions.

In addition, the ad hoc nature of the CMC does not entail the mediation process going beyond the reconciliation that might take place during the sessions. The relationship with the conflict stakeholders is transactional and does not deepen the idea of community-building and co-existence. To this extent, the CMC falls short as a serious peacebuilding mechanism because its goals are not long-term, its focus being on short-term immediate reconciliation of the parties at conflict. However, genuine reconciliation will demand more effort and a shift in approach to embrace more sustained and long-term initiatives to prevent electoral conflicts and build a culture of tolerance and co-existence.

7.4.4 Anchor CMC on Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Participants in this study suggested that storytelling is a good intervention to improve the mediation process by CMC because it is based on the African way of socialisation and Indigenous knowledge. The participants, however, were concerned with the influence of ICTs and social media stories which had blossomed and diluted the Indigenous way of transmitting knowledge and cultural norms in society. Oral storytelling was seen as part

of the Indigenous knowledge system and plausible for electoral conflict resolution. The use of Indigenous systems can be positive as traditional relationships and structures hold more customary support than those imposed from outside (Machakanja, 2010).

“If CMC based its management of electoral conflicts on Indigenous knowledge it would not be an adhoc arrangement but a continuous way of teaching people how to participate in peaceful elections.” (Key Informant Interview, March 2023).

Another participant connected the idea of storytelling to Indigenous knowledge:

“Storytelling is a form of Indigenous knowledge and since most people in the community are familiar with it, using it as a form of conflict management would be a sustainable approach. Let CMC change its approach and involve members of the community in storytelling about the electoral conflicts in our communities.” (Male FGD, participant, June 2023)

Storytelling seemed to motivate the study participants who advocated for it to be part of the electoral mediation process. This observation demonstrates that the approach used for mediation influences the levels of participation by the community members. The majority of participants also seemed to suggest that storytelling would be useful in the process of both creating awareness about electoral conflicts in the communities and reconciling and healing others at CMC. In addition, the storytelling model working in tandem with CMC mediation would prove sustainable since it would be supported by customary norms and structures at the local community level and national resources including skills capacity at the CMC level.

It has been argued that the fullness of the tradition of oral history and storytelling so treasured by many Africans brings to conflict management and peacebuilding customary interpretations and explanations that connect all individuals in the spirit of community and humanness. The significance of oral accounts transmitted by word of mouth carries a body of implicit knowledge that can be made explicit by augmenting them with other primary and secondary sources (Machakanja, 2010). This should definitely complement the mediation process of the CMC.

“I support use of storytelling to resolve electoral conflicts because of its informal nature. It is easy to practice for everyone and is based on our daily experiences. Others can then give their side and either agree or disagree with your version of the story. You are not

taken to task by any group for sharing your knowledge and experiences. In this way the process of mediation would greatly improve.” (Female FGD participant, June 2023).

The storytelling peacebuilding model found traction with the participants mainly because of its quality of informality and ability to allow and accept all members of the community to be able to tell their story in a manner that allows them to express their feelings and perspective without much questioning. This view nonetheless may be erroneous as there is an assumption that storytelling does not entail accountability and responsibility for what an individual narrates. Every practice has its rules for conducting business: so does storytelling. It is not just waking up and telling a story. It must conform to the required minimum standards of doing no harm to others. In view of these observations, storytelling must be planned and deliberately orchestrated to meet the goals of community peacebuilding and conflict transformation as it relates to the resolution of electoral conflicts.

Another participant added to the discussion in the following way:

“For anything to succeed, you must start from the known to the unknown. Stories are known as a way of socialising and teaching young children things about life in our communities, so all of us know about storytelling. By beginning electoral conflict management from this understanding, we can make CMC an effective structure which will be linked to the community practice.” (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

The idea of anchoring CMC mediation process on local knowledge is apparent in the statement above. In seeking to make CMC more effective, remodelling its architecture will require consideration of what exists and how it works in the community so that there is a connection with the knowledge and experiences of people in the communities including their approaches to conflict management. The respect for local resources and belief systems must be understood and acknowledged if CMC is truly to respond to both community needs and the modern peacebuilding and electoral conflict management demands.

7.4.5 Promote Inclusion of Marginalised Groups

Another theme that was generated was the inclusion of marginalised groups in the CMC mediation process. Most participants felt that there was need for inclusive representation and participation of marginalised groups in the CMC process. The marginalised or

vulnerable groups were identified as women, youth and people living with disability (PLWDs). Participants observed that in cases where these groups were recognised, it was a case of tokenism.

“I think the women, youths and PLWDs are not fully represented in most of these formal public participation spaces including CMC. As a result, there is no fair and equitable representation. Statistically women and youth are the majority, so why are they sidelined everywhere?” (Woman key informant, 2023).

Geographical distance from the mediation table, the language used during mediations and implicit issues of hierarchy and privilege pervade the public participation spaces and limit participation of the vulnerable groups. Overcoming barriers to achieving more participation from local and community-level vulnerable groups was evidently a challenge for the community. For example, the language used by the CMC is largely informed by the formal legal system and the electoral codes of conduct as well the institutional nomenclature. Vulnerable groups are normally illiterate and poor and their concerns are generally at the periphery of society.

“Honestly when you look at me can I sit and discuss issues with important people like you. Today I am just lucky that I am one of the people talking to you. I am poor and less educated. I am not sure if my ideas will be accepted.” (Female FGD participant, 2023).

Because the majority of the vulnerable are illiterate, they are not confident enough to escalate their concerns to higher authorities. This brings in the dimension of the need for empowerment before vulnerable groups can effectively participate in formal public spaces such as in CMC. The notion of empowerment here refers to mechanisms to ensure that all voters can exercise their responsibilities as citizens and be engaged in the resolution of electoral conflicts as equal members of society.

In terms of their poor status in relation to use of CMC services, community members argue that in most cases they cannot afford the minimum cost of transport to the district to register a complaint and systematically follow it up. They have to be sponsored by either their political party or any other concerned party. Because of these factors they are automatically excluded from effectively participating in such public processes.

“Even if someone insults me, I have no means to go to the CMC unless my political party sponsors my trip. I have no money to follow up such an issue on my own.” (FGD youth participant, 2023).

Since most vulnerable groups do not have the necessary capacity, there is need to mainstream their issues in the CMC strategy, laws and policies. Mainstreaming is crucial to support both equality and peaceful conduct of elections in the local communities. The notion of empowerment especially for women and youth should be considered in their full capacity of key actors and they should be able to formulate and express their views and participate in community peacebuilding and electoral conflict management decision-making processes. The PLWDs, too, have both particular needs and capacities which are often forgotten in the design and implementation of electoral conflict management and peacebuilding programmes. This is especially persistent because this group is somehow insignificant in terms of the voting population.

To address these issues and remodel CMC, it may not only require changes in organisational structures and procedures but also relationships, values and attitudes to create organisational environments which are inclusive and conducive to the promotion of equality and, ultimately, more favourable to peacebuilding, electoral conflict resolution and management. Critical to this inclusion is ensuring that specific focus is placed on tackling the gendered dynamics that fuel electoral conflict and exacerbate both gender inequality and violence. Equally critical is supporting the meaningful, inclusive and sustained participation of women, young women and young men, recognising their valuable expertise, skills and solutions that deserve due space and consideration in peace and conflict related decision-making. Many people who are most affected by conflict and violence remain on the fringes of decision-making. This is particularly true for women, young people and other marginalised groups who struggle to be regarded as trusted and reputable resources. Yet, these marginalised groups make up the local communities with the knowledge and legitimacy to make critical strides towards conducting peaceful free and fair elections.

Finally, the understanding of inclusion must go beyond the narrow interpretation of being present at the mediation table. Inclusion should encompass a more substantial

participation that involves multiple entry points and forms of influence. This participation must be recognised and supported by the ECZ through capacity building and identifying new and diverse leadership. It should not be about tokenism but real participation which affects decisions in the CMC.

7.4.6 Management of Gender Dynamics

A related theme to the above was the management of gender dynamics. Although the storytelling approach in electoral conflicts demonstrated viability, it also exposed the existing gender dynamics and fault lines in the communities. This is largely because of the context in which the activities were carried out. Zambia continues to record low participation in democratic and political governance processes as well as decision-making by women, the youth and persons with disabilities (Government of Zambia, 2021). After the August 2021 general election, the proportion of women in Parliament reduced to 13% from 18.1% in 2016, while the youth constituted 4% with one member of Parliament with a disability. Female Mayoral and Council Chairpersons increased to 25% and 10% from 12% and 7% in 2016, respectively.

One of the predominant gender drivers that was evident in the discussions during the study was the ever-lingering patriarchal power imbalance such as men wanting to dominate the discussion despite gender parity in the meetings. Patriarchy in the communities is still a key driver against women's inclusion, agency and empowerment (CARE International, 2022). This reality inevitably affects the context in which stories are shared.

Patriarchy also seems to be a factor in the exclusion of women in electoral processes in general and electoral conflict management in particular. This is by virtue of the prevailing social norms and practices. These social norms and practices prescribe speaking and interaction habits at household level, such as, women must not speak in the meeting if their husband is present or that men must talk first before women do so. This certainly manifested itself in the participation of women during the storytelling intervention as they would not take the first instance to contribute but would wait for men to speak and then join in later on. From the researcher's observation, it was also apparent during the FGDs

that most of the women participants were less confident when they spoke about the issues of electoral conflicts.

The system of patriarchy combined with limited access and control of resources by women create a power imbalance which in turn informs gender participation and decision-making ability. Unfortunately, national literacy rates are higher for males (92.56%) who are the patriarchs in comparison to females at (91.63%) (GRZ, 2021). This exacerbates the exclusion of women in literally all spheres of public spaces including participation in electoral conflict management despite being the most affected by the electoral conflicts. Consequently, if conflict management has to be effective, CMC will have to take mitigation measures for marginalised groups to participate equally.

The following section discusses possibilities of a hybrid model by integrating storytelling into the electoral conflict mediation process by the CMC.

7.5 PROSPECTS OF INTEGRATING STORYTELLING INTO ELECTORAL CONFLICT MEDIATION

As Maier (2008) observed about storytelling, both teller and listener bring with them their relations with self, other and world. To the extent that the interaction occurs, a shared world is enacted that projects its pattern down upon the lived world that the two imagine they share (Maier, 2008). Thus, the world can be reviewed so that teller and listener can leave with more of a shared world than they arrived with. This scenario boils down to shared values of humanity and an excellent opportunity for integrating storytelling into a peacebuilding and conflict management instrument or tool.

The process of storytelling integration into peacebuilding or electoral conflict management can benefit immensely from the systems thinking methodology. Systems thinking is a methodology that comprehends how individual parts fold into the whole. It surpasses previous methods of understanding through “analysis” whereby knowledge of the system is gained by understanding its parts (Onat, Kucukvar, Halog & Cloutier, 2017). It uses “synthesis” which explains the role of the system in the larger system of which it is a part. Analysis is useful for revealing how a system works but synthesis reveals why a system

works the way it does (ibid.). Thus, systems thinking is a way to diagnose or understand at the greatest scale, while examining the 'what is' in nuanced detail(ibid.). In light of this understanding, there is need to apply systems thinking to enable storytelling to complement the current CMC structure. This approach would ensure that personal stories and subjectivities are taken into account during electoral conflict management.

Without the capacity to integrate individual stories and subjectivities into electoral conflict management systems, there is a risk to lose the ability to find a complete diagnosis of a difficult space and therefore the design of viable, substantial solutions. This relational approach seems critical to the mediation process. Furthermore, when individual stories are located within the broader conflict system, previously disregarded insights can be found. Stories and their subjectivity strengthen and encourage conflict mapping or diagrams and enable a more complete, but still political and biased understanding of the problem space. Only in this way can problem space reach a consequential level of diagnosis that forms from a comprehension of the present that can be reframed with concrete insights to reveal emerging design potential (Ollove & Lteif, 2017).

The study findings showed a desire by participants to have storytelling accommodated as a conflict management method by the CMC because it would address the deficiencies of the process in its current form. Furthermore, the CMC is open to suggestions to reduce electoral conflicts during elections. These are good prospects for implementing the intervention beyond this study.

7.6 INTERPRETATION OF THE FINDINGS

Three important issues arise from the findings in this chapter. The first issue is the elevation of storytelling to a strategy for conflict management during mediation, the second is the application of storytelling as a concomitant approach to the electoral mediation process and the third is the complementarity of the storytelling and CMC mediation models.

With regard to the elevation of storytelling as a strategy for conflict management, the CMC will need to create an environment where storytelling can flourish as a mediation tool and

a community peacebuilding strategy. When storytelling is elevated to a strategy, then the process of hybridisation of the process will be made much easier. In this sense, when storytelling peacebuilding is recognised as a form of persuasion (Federman & Niezen, 2022), peacebuilding will also be understood as the intentional cultivation of persuasive stories to foster peaceful elections. From the perspective of a strategy, storytelling can then be harnessed to destabilise the stories that drive electoral conflicts and political divisions. It can provide a platform for relief to those offended at the CMC and promote a culture of peaceful electoral conduct in communities. In this way, it will achieve the twin objectives of managing the conflicts at CMC and building peace in the communities.

In terms of the second issue, it is clear from the study that the storytelling approach does not only focus on the electoral offences but affects the perceptions and relational environment. It is equally about redefining the inclusivity and collaborative role as well as relationships of political contestants, the CMC and local communities in sustaining peace before, during and after elections. To this extent storytelling could strengthen the aspects that are currently deficient in the mode of electoral conflict mediation by the CMC. These include going beyond the offence and having effects on both the conflict parties and the wider stakeholder spectrum, albeit in different ways. This relational approach addresses both the concerns of the CMC as well as the communities where the conflicts take place. In other words, the mediation process must introduce or embed the principle of care in the process of resolving electoral conflicts. The principle of care in peacebuilding practice should ideally involve recognising people's interconnectedness and interdependence and valuing the importance of relationships and care practices, especially during elections and in the post-election period. This study suggests that opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of electoral conflict management might be lost when organisations such as CMC engaged in electoral conflict management and peacebuilding fail to respond to the needs of the voters with caring responsibilities and focus only on the outcomes of the mediation exercise based on violation of the ECC. Storytelling as community peacebuilding is critical in that it creates new kinds of relationships. Lederach (2005:98) emphasises the importance of finding innovative ways of creating "relational spaces" for groups affected by conflict where they can come together to address both the past and the future.

As this study revealed, practices that support a relational approach such as storytelling as the foundation of mediation and community peacebuilding are indicative of a critical shift toward a philosophy of listening and an ethic of care, a pedagogy oriented toward interconnectedness, collaboration and process-based (Childress, 2020) electoral conflict management rather than solely content-based outcomes. Pursuing community interconnectedness in the electoral processes through individual and collective means by storytelling presents important possibilities to support necessary and timely change in CMC mediation contexts.

The third issue which is complementarity of the two models of storytelling as a strategy on one hand and CMC mediation on the other is based on finding the appropriate balance between CMC guarantees and resources (national), on the one hand, and the degree to which the local communities have the liberty to improve their own self-organisation, on the other (local). This appears to be the key to successful electoral conflict management and community peacebuilding. This is crucially important because it will take care of both the mediation outcomes and the relational needs of the voting communities.

While it is important to underscore the value of context-sensitive electoral peacebuilding efforts such as the storytelling intervention, which seek to activate local resources and energise Indigenous conflict management, it is also important to recognise the benefits of collaborative approaches. Given these realities, there is wisdom in Lederach's counsel to balance prescriptive and elicitive modes of mediation and to direct issues brought by national experts towards the refinement of locally resonant models. To be clear, conflict resolution approaches that are developed and disseminated in other cultural contexts are "prescriptive" whereas those that are "elicitive" use local cultural resources in conflict transformation. The point is not to do away with the CMC national approach but rather to develop an inclusive mode of operation in which the national level functions as a midwife whose overriding goal is to help local actors discover their own resources and context-specific solutions to electoral conflicts. The experiences of reflective practitioners indicate that there is no set of conflict resolution practices that works equally well in every setting. Therefore, the case for complementarity in the electoral conflict management process becomes inevitable because it will embrace as many aspects of the peacebuilding as

possible. In this way, the insights of the appropriate technology movement and the evolving international peacebuilding ideas will trickle down to the CMC electoral conflict management practice. The intention is to make the practice more innovatively responsive to the immediately felt needs, available resources and existing knowledge of all the actors.

The ongoing culture of intolerance to divergent views in the electoral process in Zambia is undeniably a defining reality of our time. It demands seizing the possibilities such as those offered by the integration of the storytelling model in the CMC spaces to bring about free and fair electoral environment in the country.

7.7 RESULTS SUMMARY

The study results show that storytelling as a strategy and relational approach to conflict management in the electoral process can open possibilities where electoral stakeholders have a safe, supportive space built on trusting relationships, consistent engagement over time and connection of the electorates as a community of voters and their realities. The study results also suggest that it is possible to remodel the CMC architecture on one hand and improve storytelling on the other in order to ensure that the electoral mediation process is pitched as both a conflict management and community peacebuilding model. Such a hybrid model would address the relational and legal based mediation outcomes. Therefore, Hybridisation promises a comprehensive and inclusive approach to electoral conflict management by the CMC.

The results further show that this hybrid approach should promote inclusion of marginalised groups as well as mechanisms to manage gender dynamics in CMC processes. The study also examined the prospects for integrating storytelling into the electoral mediation process by using system thinking so that it can complement the CMC to make it more efficient and inclusive. This complementarity should inevitably embrace technology to cater for an evolving virtual community detached from physical interaction yet potent in influencing the electoral atmosphere during elections. It is evident that these measures could make CMC a more inclusive and effective electoral peace infrastructure.

7.8 IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS

The findings of the study seem to suggest movement towards a hybrid approach to the electoral mediation process by the CMC where both the national and community levels co-own the conflict management process. This position is fortified by the view that hybrid approaches can strategically amalgamate top-down and bottom-up strategies, capitalising on the strengths of both governance levels (Mac Ginty, 2010). In recent times, the scholarly literature on the 'local turn' in peacebuilding has placed a premium on a bottom-up or grassroots approach, inclusive of the role of local communities. By striking a balance between national-level policies and grassroots initiatives such as storytelling, the hybrid approach would contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding process during elections in Zambia. This study is significant to the production of hybrid forms of peace and the ongoing struggle to create and maintain spaces where more emancipatory and transformative thinking on peace can emerge (Popplewell, 2017). The study has confirmed some of the major peacebuilding theories that emphasise the viability and integration of traditional or local approaches to the existing peacebuilding models.

7.9 HIGHLIGHTS OF CHAPTER FINDINGS

The study has shown that it is possible to remodel the CMC architecture on one hand and improve storytelling on the other in order to ensure that the electoral mediation process is pitched as both a conflict management and community peacebuilding model. The study findings indicate that both the CMC approach and the storytelling intervention can be enhanced to contribute to improvements in individual, relational and organisational functioning to resolve electoral conflicts. The social learning and transformation theories have both provided appropriate lenses to support this finding in that through the lens of social learning participants were able to conceptualise the importance of both storytelling and CMC mediation working alongside each other to bring about transformation at individual, organisational and community level. This transformation was envisaged using the transformation theory which enabled participant in the AR to grasp how elements that

straddle CMC procedure, emotional and relational aspects of peacebuilding would create a holistic approach.

The study has also demonstrated that storytelling as a relational approach to conflict management in the electoral process is an effective local tool for mediation and can open up possibilities where electoral stakeholders have a safe, supportive space based on trusting relationships, consistent engagement over time and connection of the electorate as a community of voters and their realities. It suggests that storytelling is an engaging approach that can educate voters about the experiences of electoral conflicts during elections in Zambia.

7.10 CONCLUSION

The study has found that there are possibilities for improving the CMC mediation process by addressing both the use of storytelling and the remodelling of the current practice so that the two are complementary within the same process. This will lead to the Hybridisation of the mediation process and enable it to address both the electoral conflicts brought by conflict parties for mediation and the community concerns where the conflict takes place. Decentralisation of the CMC to local levels that are more easily manageable will be a condition precedent to enable storytelling strategy to complement the mediation process appropriately. In other words, the results of the study suggest that it is possible to remodel the CMC architecture on one hand and use storytelling as a strategy for relational space on the other in order to ensure that the electoral mediation by the CMC is pitched as both a conflict management and community peacebuilding model.

This chapter presented the study findings and discussed how storytelling can be enabled to improve the CMC mediation process. The study has also highlighted how CMC architecture can be remodelled so that the two approaches can form a hybrid mechanism that can respond better to the resolution of the conflicts at the CMC as well as community participation in electoral peacebuilding. It has discussed the conditions that are needed before any intervention can take place; such as understanding the motivations of the contestants at CMC; the setting for mediation; method of reporting; location of the mediation sessions; the extent of audience reach; and language applied during the

process as influential parameters in improving storytelling during mediation by the CMC. The study also presented and discussed measures for remodelling the CMC to enable storytelling approach to become effective. These measures include a review of legislation and procedures; decentralising CMC from district to community level; ensuring continuity of CMC activities outside election periods; anchoring CMC on Indigenous knowledge systems and promoting inclusion of marginalised groups, and paying attention to the gender dynamics in the CMC processes. The study also discussed the integration of storytelling into the CMC mediation by using systems thinking. All the findings in this section tend to lean towards Hybridisation of the CMC process. Overall, the study found that storytelling electoral peacebuilding model can potentially improve the CMC mediation as long as there is complementarity by both the storytelling approach(Indigenous) as a method on one side and the current petitioner-based CMC mediation process(modern) to resolve electoral conflicts.

In the next chapter, the study still addresses objective two and examines the context and conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding for electoral conflicts in the Chongwe constituency

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONTEXT AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF STORYTELLING AS COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING FOR ELECTORAL CONFLICTS IN CHONGWE CONSTITUENCY

“I now believe that peacebuilding is a personal, emotional, cultural and political journey. All these attributes must be considered in order to build sustainable peace.”

Lee M Habasonda (2024)

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the Chongwe District CMC could use storytelling as an effective community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This chapter also addresses objective number two and discusses the results. Objective 2 sought to analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district. The prospects of improvement in this case were connected to the context and conceptualisation of storytelling as a method of conflict management and peacebuilding.

The research was an experiential process embedded in time and place and stretched over a period of three months. The researcher closely worked with the local community and established an ART of 10 people which he was part of. The ART collected data on the storytelling peacebuilding model for the CMC. Once the interviews and FGDs had been carried out, the data collected was transcribed and thematic analysis was applied. This involved coding all the data before identifying and reviewing key themes. Each theme was examined to gain an understanding of participants' perceptions and meaning of storytelling in the context of peacebuilding. The sections below discuss the data themes which make up this chapter.

8.1.1 Conceptualisation and Context of Storytelling as Community Peacebuilding for Electoral Conflicts

Communities responsibility to become involved in election peacebuilding in Zambia is widely acknowledged and permeates news, political discourse and governmental activities including school curricula. This is demonstrated by the ongoing support for civic education and human rights awareness to community non-state actors and the introduction of civic education with a component of peace studies in primary and secondary schools in the country. Alongside this development, the ECZ has established CMCs to respond to community electoral conflicts classified as minor electoral offences (Electoral Act No. 35 of 2016). Examples of minor electoral offences may include verbal abuse or tearing of an opponent's materials (ibid.).

One of the questions for the participants was to explain how they perceived and conceptualised storytelling as community peacebuilding to resolve electoral conflicts. The purpose was to solicit answers relating to how the study communities understood it and how they thought about their connection to it. In asking the question, the assumption of the study was that storytelling as community peacebuilding was necessary and valid because it is already a cultural practice that merely requires integration into the electoral mediation process as explained in the preceding chapter. The results show that the community participants did not perceive storytelling as a method of electoral conflict management and peacebuilding until a process of interaction and awareness sharing was concluded. However, this did not imply that the assumption was invalid – it simply demonstrated that there is need for a process of self-awareness and reflection in order to appreciate peace perspectives. This interpretation agrees with de Coning (2016) who posits that community peacebuilding entails a sustainable process of stimulating and facilitating the capacity of the community to “self-organise”.

The overarching idea of the study was to understand how peacebuilding using oral storytelling to resolve electoral conflicts was given meaning by processing discourses and events in the communities of Madido ward, as well as how people understood themselves and their positions in relation to election conflict management in the community. As communities make meaning of ideas like peacebuilding, conflict management, justice,

forgiveness or reconciliation, they connect these concepts to emerging understandings of themselves, their social positions, and their futures (Boehle, 2021; Spencer, Dupree & Hartmann, 1997). The ensuing dynamic and contextualised meaning they create is their conceptualisation of peace. This conceptualisation of peace enables the use of language which empowers people rather than using victimising language that can disempower (Gouse, Valentin-Llopis, Perry, & Nyamwange, 2019). The foregoing has been demonstrated in the cases of the TRC in Liberia and the post-genocide period in Rwanda where former protagonists have lived under a new conception of peace whereby they share stories of their survival and live side by side (Gor pudolo, 2019).

What was striking about the discussion in this study was that participants presented storytelling as community peacebuilding in a similar way to the media narrative: political parties must take responsibility and change the attitudes of their members. This was the story for community peacebuilding by the participants. The implication here is that peacebuilding was an exclusive function of political parties and that they must lead community mobilisation and conduct peaceful campaigns. This narrative seemed to suggest that the main responsibility for addressing electoral conflicts lay with the contesting political parties in that particular election. However, this view seems to ignore the fact that elections are a collective responsibility of all the members of the community as it does not affect only members of political parties that contest elections. The community posture and their narrative could be interpreted as a consequence of media stories about the role of political parties during elections.

“For me, storytelling as a means of community peacebuilding for electoral conflicts is this idea that stories connect you to what is common or unique to other members of the community during political campaigns and how you carry the onus of nurturing relationships and conveying messages to individuals as well as the systems and institutions, being well aware that the campaign period will end.” (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

This conceptualisation conveys some important elements. First, it recognises that individuals in the community are politically diverse. Some share similar political views and persuasions while others differ sharply and yet others have no clear-cut positions on political issues. However, noteworthy is that voters still share a common heritage and interest as members of one community. In other words, the cultural commonalities

override political divisions which are usually transient in nature. Second, storytelling binds us in our different formations and thus builds a sense of community although we may have different opinions and ideological or philosophical orientations. Third, storytelling provides an opportunity for reflection on how to nurture relations with other members of the community as they will still be part of your community after election campaigns. Fourth, it implicates an idea that storytelling has qualities that help you communicate with individuals, systems and institutions to enable order and stability.

“I understand storytelling as peacebuilding in the sense of making you feel relieved and lighter after you have told your story. It makes you move on and forget about the bad things that others may have done to you or said about you during elections. This prevents you from thinking about revenge.” (Female FGD participant, 2023).

The participant in this case conceptualised storytelling as peacebuilding in terms of the effects of telling the story on her. As seen from her statement, these effects are quite positive. However, it seems she does not consider the effects of the storytelling on the people being told the story by her. For her, she has addressed the electoral conflict as long as she has a platform and has talked about it. This conceptualisation is intimately associated with the idea of justice which has to do with how individual people are treated. Issues of justice arise because people can advance claims – to freedom, opportunities, resources and so forth – that are potentially conflicting, and an appeal to justice is made to resolve such conflicts by determining what each person is properly entitled to have. In this instance an opportunity to be heard on the electoral conflicts that the participant experienced gives empowerment and creates a sense of justice for the storyteller. Therefore, she no longer desires to make revenge for her pain.

“Storytelling as community peacebuilding in my understanding is bringing the culprit to the table and allowing both of us to discuss in a mature way without disrupting each other or showing lack of seriousness to address the concerns of electoral conflicts taken to CMC. Thereafter tell everybody out there in the community what has transpired so that they learn lessons.” (Personal narrative, 2023).

The participant perceives and conceptualises storytelling as peacebuilding in electoral conflicts as a two-way dialogue where people sit and talk to each other in a respectful and safe atmosphere and agree on the expected decorum of conduct. Since the process has to do with issues in the public space, the communities who are part of the electoral

process must, therefore, be informed and accordingly be made aware of the settlement. The idea seems to suggest creating an awareness on the rewards and sanctions that follow when a participant in the electoral process behaves in a manner that breaches the ECC. For this participant, once this occurs, he gets a sense that justice has occurred for his grievance.

This conceptualisation is in line with Allport's (1954) group contact theory which holds that contact between two groups can promote tolerance and acceptance, but only under certain conditions, such as equal status among groups and common goals. The storytelling intervention demonstrated that providing a platform for individuals to relive and recount their experience made them feel better although, in one case, the participant felt bad about his brother's emergent situation of illness after a police teargas incident at the football arena.

"Sharing is caring. Caring is protecting the community. When you share your story to the community, it means you care and are predisposed to protecting the community. Once you share the story of electoral conflicts, it becomes community heritage and everybody relates to it in one way or another. This is what builds community and peace." (Key Informant Interview, 2023).

However, the most common conception of peacebuilding by participants was that storytelling had the effect of creating political and civic space because it was non-confrontational and merely required one to narrate the story from their perspective.

"All parties want to campaign freely and disseminate their messages. Stories can do the job without much ado." (Male FGD participant, July, 2023 Chongwe)

Another participant added:

"It is perfect because the political and civic space that is restricted by the police is presented by storytelling platforms." (Female FGD participant, July 2023, Chongwe).

"The storytelling platforms allow you to enjoy your freedom of expression, association and assembly in a smarter way. It gives you the political and civic space that you need and to me that is peacebuilding." (Key Informant Interview, 2023, Chongwe).

The view that storytelling was peacebuilding by way of creating political and civic spaces was supported by several participants in the study. It connoted a sense that the electoral

mediation process may not create enough space and participation by communities where the electoral conflicts take place.

Some participants tied the storytelling approach to the fact that it evokes the spiritual bonds of the community as its members compete during elections. One FGD participant had this to say about storytelling as a means of spiritual bonding.

“Being found in the same community ties you to shared stories. This is not by accident; it is spiritual and we are bound by that community spirit even as we go to choose leaders in an election.” (July 2023, Chongwe).

A key informant put the aspect of storytelling as peacebuilding in terms of a spiritual bond in the following way:

“Storytelling embeds the community values and is used as glue to influence the behaviour and spiritual beliefs which are assumed to protect the community at all times, even during the time of elections.” (Key Informant Interview, March 2023, Chongwe).

Overall, the views cited above encapsulate the conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding. These conceptions of storytelling as community peacebuilding are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding

Context`	Conceptualisation
Oral storytelling as community peacebuilding	An opportunity to be heard on election issues.
	A way of advising political parties to take responsibility and change the attitudes of their members during campaigns.
	Creation of a sense of awareness and justice that someone cares when the code of conduct is violated
	Gives a sense of ‘push’ or empowerment to take action.
	Tends to make one want to dialogue about problems in the electoral process.
	Makes people feel respected as they address electoral issues. The community stories will discourage party youths from harassing and threatening us.
	Provides a platform to relive and recount one’s electoral experience and consequently made to feel better.
	Creates political and civic space without confrontation. This way police will stop disrupting our meetings.
	Leads to forgiving after hearing the other side of the story.
	Enables flexibility and room to express one’s ideas, thoughts and feelings before others unhindered.
	keeps political rivals sensitive to community expectations.
	Encourages conducting peaceful campaigns during elections.
	Evokes the spiritual bonds of the community as candidates compete during elections

8.1.2 Results Summary

The study revealed that there are diverse ways of conceptualising storytelling as electoral community peacebuilding and the meaning attached to this conceptualisation tends to differ between groups and individuals as well as across time, scale and location. This finding agrees with (Megoran, 2013: 203) who argues that “peace is not a once-and-for-all outcome, but a continuously negotiated social relationship.” It was evidently clear from the study that the ensuing dynamic and contextualised meaning the participants attached to storytelling as electoral conflict management was their conceptualisation of community peacebuilding during elections. From the study, the conceptualisation of storytelling as

community peacebuilding was largely based on realities as perceived through political party affiliations and accrual of personal benefits from the obtaining social political order.

8.1.3 Implications and Significance of the Results

This conceptualisation of peace and the storytelling context during elections appears to be what propels the community under study to respond to the criteria set out by CMC for them to participate in the electoral conflict management process. The study seems to suggest that the responses by community members to report cases to the CMC are based on their personal, emotional and cultural interpretation of the elements of peace and peacebuilding within their communities. If these elements are seen to be absent in the CMC process, then it affects the propensity by the electorates to report the violation of the ECC as procedurally or/and legally demanded. Thus, the elevation of storytelling as a strategy into the CMC mediation process, to create shared meaning, may be a solution to the community responses to the CMC. This is an important finding in that the understanding about why CMC may not receive as many reports as they should during any particular election cycle against the number of electoral offences that occur should be explained. For example, while so many electoral malpractices occurred in the communities in Chongwe constituency in 2021, only three cases were reported to the Chongwe district CMC. Indeed, many electoral offences occur during elections but many of them remain unreported. This could explain the reason in part and is a matter that still requires attention by electoral stakeholders in Zambia.

The study also asked questions on how storytelling as understood from the perspectives of the participants could be made operational. Their responses led to the generation of the theme which follows.

8.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF STORYTELLING AS COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING

In addressing the question of making storytelling operational under the auspices of the CMC, participants opined that storytelling could operate as community peacebuilding in many Zambian communities particularly those in the rural and peri-urban settings. They

argued that rural and peri-urban settings are predisposed to the storytelling culture and would embrace the practice much more easily than the typical urban dweller.

In this study, the average participant in the FGD workshops showed preference for the oral traditional storytelling format in comparison to the average key informants who did not think that the current format by the CMC was problematic. Overall, however, participants felt that the storytelling approach would work better in some of their communities than the current practice of writing to register an electoral complaint. They felt that informal dispute resolution using stories would be speedy, less expensive, friendly, and both parties to conflict would obtain benefits compared to the formal system that locks one in procedural formalities.

One participant was so convinced about the viability of the storytelling approach after evaluating the storytelling activities:

“If you frame stories in terms of good and bad conduct during elections, it will work very well because one will have to reflect about their action and eventually choose between good and bad conduct. But you know all of us want to be seen to be good, so it will be a winning formula.” (FGD participant, 2023).

Notwithstanding the challenges that storytelling may have, there are opportunities for constructive storytelling within the framework of CMC. Constructive storytelling is nurturing positive peace through promoting empowerment, mutual recognition, and awareness of self in context (Senehi, 2021). The CMC has district structures and identified leadership which can work with issues of power, identity and knowledge which are often associated with electoral conflicts in the communities. These can include various types of practices such as promoting self-awareness, promoting political dialogue and innovative interventions that can be tailored to the specific needs of local communities to attain electoral justice. Pentón Herrera and McNair (2021) state

“When we sit in a community to “dialogue” or share stories, telling and listening, listening and receiving, touching minds, spirits, bodies and souls, barriers that we have created may break down, tears may flow, and hardened hearts may be softened”

Indeed, evidence abounds to demonstrate that storytelling can serve as a catharsis for healing and making peace in communities (Sachs, 2023). The CMC therefore potentially holds a readily available resource to use oral traditional storytelling for the ends of

electoral justice and peaceful co-existence. Storytelling perspective grants opportunities for the contesting parties in an election to develop shared understanding over time. Many scholars who have written on storytelling as a tool for peacebuilding have argued the fact that much is lost when we fail to open up storytelling spaces, but much is to be achieved when we do, for when we learn each other's stories, there is limitless potential for building tolerance, understandings and indeed, a better, more peaceful world. (Deardorff, 2020; Huber, Caine, Huber, and Steeves, 2013; Pranis, Stuart, and Wedge, 2013)

As explained by Mollica (2006:115), "the foundation of storytelling is the capacity of human beings to empathetically listen to the suffering [or happiness] of others, an act that is therapeutic for the storyteller and beneficial to the listener". Storytelling can establish a human connection with others, deepening the bonds between the storyteller and the listeners while working on peacebuilding to create harmony. This is the potential that storytelling holds for the CMC.

The argument by Mollica above shows congruency with the observation of one key informant during the study who suggested that the CMC can use storytelling to connect politicians, voters and citizens around the expected election norms. The CMC just needs to plan the best way in which they can get both the tellers and listeners engaged."

As such, using the storytelling approach, elections stakeholders are in a unique position to engage with, contribute to and establish sustainable, peaceful communities inside and outside the CMC spaces. Conflict management and peacebuilding in a democracy requires the use of stories to identify who we are, what we think we want, what we think about politicians, and who we think about us (Coleman, 2015). Storytelling is a tool to support co-existence and build political tolerance; it can also help people understand how peace narratives in the electoral process are presented and perceived.

"I think storytelling is viable for CMC because it is flexible and allows one to be in control of the things that they say. Nobody asks who you are, they know who you are from your story." (Key Informant Interview, August, 2023)

The above observation suggests that If storytelling is accorded the space and time for engaging the citizens in an oral traditional fashion to present their grievances and engage in some form of dialogue, the stories of the electorate, concerned citizens, politicians and

members of different political parties can help to build trust, common identity and overcome anxieties and misconceptions about others. This would in turn lead to less acrimonious elections and entrench confidence in conflict resolution mechanisms such as CMC. Indeed, this assertion agrees with the group contact theory which argues that the more repeated contacts conflict parties make, the less prejudiced they become.

“Storytelling is not the first thing people think of when it comes to addressing electoral conflicts, but it has a vital role to play in achieving sustainable peace. ...Where the culture of storytelling is weak as in the case of CMC, we can see a corresponding loss of political cooperation, social cohesion and community wellbeing as people struggle to make sense of, and adapt to, a changing political and election environment.” (Key Informant Interview, August, 2023)

Although storytelling seems remote in the scheme of CMC procedures, it is readily available and merely requires adjusting the current approach to accommodate the Indigenous style presentation of stories to help build election competition values that are tied to community cultural values, and public re-narration of painful history of electoral injustices. The area of improvement in the first instance is to encourage the culture of storytelling in order for people to connect and feel for one another as all communities share some form of heritage.

In assessing the potential for storytelling, the study found that a substantial body of literature discusses the benefits of storytelling practices for individuals and communities, and the purpose they can serve (Ganz, 2009; Meretoja & Davis, 2017; Nah et al., 2016; Schanche et al., 2002). These studies conclude that both storytellers and receivers benefit from engaging in storytelling (Davis, 2011; Lukosch, Klebl & Buttle, 2011). Thus, CMC stands to benefit should they exploit the storytelling potential that exists within their reach.

It is also noteworthy that storytelling requires proper facilitation to alleviate risks, such as suppression of certain voices (McCarthy & Wright, 2015), misinterpretation of stories, or failure to take stories seriously (Razack, 1993). Facilitators of storytelling functions are charged with safeguarding the transmission of stories in an inclusive and respectful way. This would be the responsibility of the CMC if they had to adapt the storytelling peacebuilding model. A key challenge, however, is to shift storytelling practices from the

empathy building phase to a stage where participants jointly reflect on their community and engage in actions to attain common goals (Allan et al., 2018; Davis, 2011; Schanche et al., 2002).

The CMC can consider a range of options from reviewing the law to the implementation of the CMC mandate to include more serious offences in which the communities can jointly apply problem-solving skills and manage to build the peace in their particular locations. The CMC is clearly better placed to undertake storytelling due to the national spread of their peace infrastructure. Some participants suggested that the CMC should initially use community radio and social media platforms to promote the idea of storytelling awareness and eventually implement the storytelling peace model. For decades, voters in Zambia have been fed the same diet by the politicians: Lies, intimidation, threats and political trickery thereby entrenching electoral conflicts in the communities. Facilitated storytelling would potentially provide a fresh breath to the current CMC approach and motivate citizens to tell their stories and build peaceful electoral communities through shared political values.

Furthermore, the findings show that the oral storytelling mechanism for resolving electoral conflicts seemed to offer a good opportunity and ways that can make it operational because the mechanism is located within the grasp of the ordinary community members. It is familiar and does not require onerous procedures for one to participate.

“Before I talked to you about my experience with that man I reported to CMC, I did not see myself ever talking or relating to him. I feel I can now forgive him.” (Personal narrative, 2023).

The statement above is evidence that storytelling works. The fact that the participant acknowledged that he could forgive after telling his story was enough to appreciate the opportunities that storytelling provides for building peace in the electoral process. It is, therefore, imperative that CMC working with the community devise a mechanism to continue engagements and follow up on the disputants, way after the mediation of the electoral conflict in order to help the individuals mend their broken relationships.

In the above quotation, the participant introduces the aspect of forgiveness which is an important part of maintaining relationships. Cantacuzino (2015) suggests that grievance

stories for past offences too often become roadblocks that stop individuals from moving forward. As the above participant's experience seems to suggest, forgiveness means taking hold of your painful emotions and deciding to let them go while at the same time refusing to let the pain of the past experiences dictate the path of the future (ibid.).

One avenue that participants identified for implementing storytelling as community peacebuilding is telling stories that promote peaceful election campaigns on community radio stations. The proposal was made in the light of community radio stations taking root in the country. Almost every constituency has a radio station. These have become important channels for constituency development and CMC could easily leverage on these to implement storytelling peacebuilding.

8.2.1 Results Summary

The average participant in the FGD workshops showed preference for oral traditional storytelling format in comparison to the average key informants who did not think that the current format by the CMC was problematic. Overall, participants felt that the storytelling approach would work better in their communities than the current practice of writing to register an electoral complaint. They felt that informal dispute resolution using stories would be speedy, less expensive, friendly, and both parties to conflict would obtain benefits compared to the formal system that locks one into procedural formalities. The results also showed that storytelling approach can lead to forgiveness. Further, to operationalise storytelling there is need for a series of self-awareness workshops for both individuals and the community so that all members of the community involved appreciate the essence of the storytelling interventions.

8.2.2 Implications and Significance of the Results

The role of context in applying storytelling approach to electoral conflict management was seen to be significant by the participants. Context herein refers to the way that electoral conflicts and peace are given meaning in a particular community. Understanding context is essential to effective conflict resolution and community peacebuilding without which the proposed interventions may not work. Context is a crucial factor in applying peacebuilding interventions since varied understandings are linked to it by different actors. This

contextualisation is important for peacebuilders to appreciate as ignoring the context would lead to inability to operationalise the model and lead to undesirable results. Factors like the physical location and characteristics of the community in conflict, the political culture associated with the conflict parties, the relationships between conflict parties, and the expected behaviour based on past behaviours influence the context of storytelling as an effective peacebuilding mechanism.

The question that followed addressed the factors that would undermine the possibilities of operationalising the storytelling model. Participants provided a variety of responses, and this also generated a theme which is discussed in the next section.

8.3 FACTORS THAT RENDER THE OPERATIONALISATION OF THE STORYTELLING ELECTORAL PEACEBUILDING MODEL VULNERABLE

Although participants demonstrated that storytelling activities were feasible, storytelling renders itself vulnerable to a number of issues which were inferred by both study participants and the literature on the subject. The sub-themes identified were

- i. the liberal peace perspectives:
- ii. ICTs and social media:
- iii. modern forms of socialisation and:
- iv. political leadership influence.

Each of these is discussed in turn.

8.3.1 Effects of Liberal Peace Perspectives

The first concern in addressing this vulnerability was whether an organisations such as the CMC and the ECZ which are fundamentally modern in nature, are able to adapt their own internal logic to practices such as oral storytelling which are, at their core, not based on modern and linear conceptions of time, space and agency (de Coning, 2016). Storytelling is essentially rooted in typical traditional African ethos. For it to work effectively, a framework outside the liberal peace perspectives (see the section on conceptual issues in Chapter 3 of the thesis for understanding this concept) which largely

define the gamut of peacebuilding practice may need to be considered. Traditional practices which contain elements not considered to be suitable for Western understandings of representation and participation, are evidently problematic as they are also subjected to a hierarchisation of practices. Democracy is currently the overarching framework in which electoral conflicts are discussed and equally conflict resolution is considered through the same liberal democratic lenses. Peacebuilding interventions now appear to interfere in the local social process as their goal is to engineer specific outcomes, linked to a neoliberal state (Hudson, 2021).

This liberal lens approach makes it harder for CMCs to function, grow and offer their best contribution and local resources to electoral conflict management and resolution for the grassroots communities. Storytelling as one of the traditional approaches is crucial to remedying the situation since it seeks to disrupt liberal approaches to peacebuilding which is supply-driven rather than demand-driven (Hudson, 2021). One can safely opine that the current electoral mediation practice by CMC may have harmful and discriminatory ramifications against marginalised groups such as women, the poor, youths and those living with disability in that within these structures, there are inherent power relations created by the very nature of liberal values which tend to further sideline marginalised groups. Liberal values particularly in post-electoral conflicts tend to risk worsening the socio-economic conditions of these groups who are expected to compete on an equal footing with better resourced people in the free and liberalised markets rather than dependence on community-based solidarity networks

The local community elites understand CMC approach through the liberal peace lens, and it is evidently a challenge to popularise the traditional alternative approach unless it is anchored on the existing liberal frameworks of peacebuilding and electoral conflict management. To this extent, storytelling is vulnerable and can be driven into atrophy.

One participant observed:

“Storytelling has become weak because now people listen to Radio and Television programmes which are not necessarily stories but are based on values of democracy. The era of oral tradition of telling stories is long gone. To tell your story you must incline it to these values. I am not sure if this is interesting.” (FGD participants, 2023).

The participant seems dismissive to the point of appearing to suggest that it is waste of time to talk about the traditional oral storytelling in this era. This is precisely because he views the role of storytelling from the liberal democratic understanding which has overshadowed the perspectives of its viability as a local alternative. External peacebuilders impose neoliberal political and judicial norms and model institutions according to their own ideal types (Hudson, 2021). In the process, we deny the local communities the room to develop their own institutions which are emergent from their own history, culture and context, and which seek to disrupt liberal approaches to peacebuilding that are supply-driven rather than demand-driven (Hudson, 2021). This seems to be the challenge that many communities may face to implement the storytelling interventions. The degree of openness for a fundamental shift in peacebuilding seems to be limited by the penetration of the legacy of modernity in peacebuilding as a concept, visible in the continued reproduction of normative bias, selectivity, and an unchanged reliance on liberal actors to deliver change and transformation (de Coning, 2016).

We have to acknowledge that there are no off-the-shelf solutions and no single theory of change or model of community transformation including the neoliberal peace model that can claim universal applicability. We have to come to terms with what it actually means when we say that something is context-specific. It implies that it can only arise from that context. It does not mean that we can import a universal model and just make a few adjustments for the local culture and context (de Coning, 2016). This reality will have to be confronted by community peacebuilders if lasting solutions are to be found for reducing electoral and other conflicts.

8.3.2 ICTs and Social Media

ICT is an extended term to describe information technology (IT) which emphasises the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications such as telephone lines and wireless signals including computers as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audio-visual systems, which enable users to access, store, transmit and manipulate information (Murray, 2011).

All information and communication technologies share some degree of commonality in the sense that all of them are related to technologies that facilitate the transfer of information and various types of electronically mediated communications (Zuppo, 2012). This has now commonly become the digital age. The digital age has created a virtual community which more often than not has influence on processes that take place further away. Advances in ICT have resulted in the modification of various communication related processes such as mediation. However, quantifying the effects of ICT in the organisational context remains an ongoing challenge. In this study, the participants were asked about the role of ICTs and social media, and their effects on traditional storytelling and its operationalisation along with the CMC electoral conflict mediation process. They were also asked to comment on their subsequent influence on the performance of the CMC. The participants provided varying accounts of the value of ICTs and how it related to the CMC mediation process and storytelling.

The study shows that even though the influence of ICTs in ensuring transparency and fairness in managing electoral conflicts is intense, there is limited understanding of how ICT affects mediation of electoral conflicts. However, participants provided several examples of how ICTs can affect the modes of storytelling at the CMC.

“ICTs especially social media has a negative effect on the CMC process because the accused can send a cell phone text message to the mediators and prejudice your account before you go for the hearing. In this way it undermines the mediation process.” (Personal narrative, 2023)

Another participant agreed that:

Social media is so pervasive that it can twist your story and create doubts in the minds of the stakeholders.” (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

However, a participant had a positive view of social media and ICTs

“When you take a photo or video of the scene of the electoral offence, evidence is beyond any reasonable doubt, and it helps to quickly settle matters. Maybe it must be part of the storytelling evidence where it is available.” (FGD participant, July 2023).

A media key informant expressed the role of ICT and Social media in the following terms:

“Anyone who has a mobile device can join conversations on issues about which they feel strongly and in the electoral storytelling context, this can be very disruptive.”

When properly aggregated, ICT and social media information can either substantially inform or destructively undermine official negotiations (Templeton, 2017). The advantage of social media and ICT nonetheless is that the mediation agenda, participating parties and processes of official mediation can be contested, debated and influence decisions in real time in online platforms. This is because by the time the report is filed by a complainant, mediators could have had an idea of the issues or even photo images of the incidents and this can be helpful in meeting the ends of social justice by considering other evidence which may come through social media processes. Although such evidence is normally inadmissible in the mediation process, it provides a general understanding of context of events and the conflict.

It must be appreciated that ICTs and social media have created a whole new set of communities. The public domain is changing with new methods for communities to share information and make it public. Engaging with a designated or wider audience tends to alter the visibility of social interactions. In Zambia, the networked society arguably reduces the bonds of place and political affiliation that characterised earlier social formations and political organisations. ICTs and social media can easily disrupt the sense of community that arises as a result of geographic space and culture. The use of online interaction as a substitute for face-to-face interface creates a whole new community which may not be a target for electoral conflict management. Taken to extremes, it may even promote more antisocial human behaviour.

“At home myself, my wife and children no longer have quality time together because each one is on their phone when we come home in the evening. We are slowly losing sense of family. We can no longer chat and bond as a family like it used to be. Now, how can you keep a larger community focused when I cannot do this with my family?” (Key Informant Interview, 2023)

This participant introduces the idea of feeling isolated despite being in the presence of other people. His views were overwhelmingly supported by similar sentiments from FGD participants. Certainly, people can be in the same geographical space but virtually belonging to different communities which may pursue diverse values. This could pose a challenge to get communities to address issues such as electoral conflicts in a concerted manner essentially because the practice of online interaction weakens social ties with

those whose existence is geographically defined. Because of this, traditional oral storytelling could face hurdles in working effectively in the local communities.

The mixed view of ICTs and social media only underscores the caution that must be taken when using storytelling as part of the CMC mediation process. This is because ICTs and social media have changed the manner in which stories are told. The study also considered the evolving role of the virtual communities and concluded that they needed to be included in the design of the CMC mediation. This is because the digital age has become inevitable and is reaching communities that were once cut off from the vagaries of modern life.

8.3.3 Modern Forms of Socialisation

With the changing global developments, traditional oral storytelling is experiencing challenges to the extent of being obliterated. New forms of socialisation agents especially television and social media are so pervasive that they have taken over some of the primary functions of the family such as socialisation. To be clear, Socialisation is the process through which people are taught to be proficient members of a society. It describes the ways that people come to understand societal norms and expectations, to accept society's beliefs and to be aware of societal values (Loach et al., 2017). In contemporary times, this role is not only left to the family but also takes place at school, church, television, radio, social media and other community functions. One of the ways that makes storytelling vulnerable to the modern forms of socialisation is that nobody has control over what the community members will learn from what they experience through the different socialisation pathways.

“You can tell the story for example about how wrong it is to verbally abuse your political opponents to your group circle, but another political grouping may be promoting it through giving incentives for others to do it in order to humiliate opponents.” (Personal narrative, 2023).

This is at cross purpose with building a community that aspires to live in harmony. Because socialisation has many pathways, it renders traditional oral storytelling vulnerable to distortions and relegation on the basis of modern forms of socialisation and life styles. This is especially true in situations where media is controlled by those who

wield power and offer only their desired narrative for population consumption. It is therefore an imperative to ensure that stories for electoral conflict management are shaped in such a way that they are targeted and transmitted within the acceptable cultural norms and values to avoid intrusion of undesirable values.

8.3.4 Influence of Political Leadership

Storytelling is located within context of power relations and structures. It is therefore not free from their influence. In Madido ward, where the study took place, there is a predominance of political leadership rather than just community leadership. This could mean that the choice of storytelling anchors and the stories that are told might mimic the values of the political leadership at the particular period.

“My feeling is that you should not involve political leaders in storytelling because they will focus on serving their own interests.” (Male FGD participant, 2023).

In view of the above reality, storytelling interventions may succeed to the extent that a series of self-awareness as individuals and community are carried out so that all members of the community involved appreciate the essence of the storytelling interventions. This position is supported by a study participant who argued that:

“For any community to succeed with the storytelling approach, they would first need to engage in the process of individual self-awareness and then community self-awareness. You have to know yourself, and from that work towards community peace.” (Key Informant Interview, 2023).

First, the focus on individual rather than structural factors is important to appreciate because it brings out the expressed feelings of self and one’s power position in the community including their limitations to be active participants in peacebuilding and electoral conflict management. Second, the focus on the community entails a sense of shared recognition of the dynamics, opportunities and challenges regarding the community electoral conflicts. Third, local and national institutions need to complement and act upon each other because national issues such as widespread unemployment, poverty, inequalities, high cost of living, patronage and political divisions have damaging effects not only on the electoral process but also on the local communities themselves.

All the factors discussed above speak to the intricacies of working to integrate local and external models of addressing the resolution of conflicts in general and electoral conflicts in particular and that implementation of the storytelling model requires a bird's eye view to successfully execute.

8.4 RESULTS SUMMARY

The results have demonstrated that while oral storytelling has opportunities to be made operational in the current environment, there are factors that make this electoral peacebuilding model vulnerable. The study showed that the storytelling peacebuilding model can be vulnerable to effects of liberal peace democratic perspectives, ICTs and social media, modern forms of socialisation and the influence of local political leadership.

8.5 IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESULTS

All the above factors play a role in the way that storytelling peacebuilding method can work efficiently. For example, the personal exposure and experience with ICT and social media as well as levels of penetration of external life styles (modernity) and their assimilation influence the application of storytelling peace paradigm. Equally, the levels of democratic ethos which incline towards the liberal state have an influence on state governance institutions and the political leadership which in turn influence the way storytelling peacebuilding intervention is perceived or implemented.

The above results are important to the extent that they create awareness about what needs to be taken into account by stakeholders as they ponder a better integration of local practices like storytelling as a conflict management tool in the electoral process. This awareness is necessary for policymakers and implementers in order for them to have broader perspectives of how to handle the conflict issues.

8.6 HIGHLIGHTS OF CHAPTER FINDINGS

The study has shown that a key strength of the community's conception of storytelling as peacebuilding is that it facilitates thinking about election peace as more than mere adherence to the ECC or the absence of violence, altercations and verbal invectives

during campaigns. The conceptualisation evokes personal, emotional and cultural interpretation of the elements of peace and peacebuilding within their communities. If these elements are seen to be absent in the CMC process, then it affects the propensity by the electorates to participate in the process and report the violation of the ECC as procedurally or legally demanded because it changes the context. This conception forms the basis for shared meaning by electoral stakeholders to implement lasting and effective ways to resolve electoral conflicts and enhance community peacebuilding.

Conceptualisation and later operationalisation of storytelling as a community peacebuilding framework draws its conjectures from images and language that provides meaning by interpreting things people see and hear within their cultural norms and beliefs. This observation is in line with social learning theory which includes observation, attention, retention, motivation, and different types of modelling which has an impact on understanding electoral conflict and its resolution. Using this argument, the chapter suggests that social learning theory reconciles with the principles of understanding electoral conflicts and learning how to manage and resolve them.

8.7 CONCLUSION

The study has raised the question of what insights can be gained from understanding the context and conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding. The insights from the study inform us that communities have their own local meaning of peace during elections and by extension wield the means to prevent the disruption of that peace. As deConing (2013) argues, peacebuilding has to be understood as essentially local. This local approach requires stakeholders in the electoral process especially the CMC to shift their focus away from trying to manage the conceptualisation of peace during elections in order to ensure that the local communities achieve what they perceive as peace during elections. Instead, they should limit their own role to stimulating and supporting the local communities to manage the conflicts from their context and conceptualisation. This would help the local communities to develop the resilience necessary to resolve electoral conflicts without depending on the nationally inspired structures. Seeing it from this perspective should hopefully inspire policymakers and practitioners to find new ways of

engaging with, empowering and giving space to local communities to manage their own affairs, so as to give practical meaning to the notion of local conceptualisation and ownership of electoral conflicts, notwithstanding the factors identified above that affect storytelling as a peacebuilding mechanism. The findings of the study led to the identification of storytelling as the community peacebuilding intervention that was needed, and the community was willing to participate.

In the next chapter, the study addresses objectives 3 and 4. The chapter examines the electoral conflict storytelling community peacebuilding action and assesses the results of its implementation from the study participants' perceptions and understanding as well as that of the researcher.

CHAPTER NINE: ACTION INTERVENTION-IMPLEMENTING STORYTELLING AS COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING FOR ELECTORAL CONFLICTS IN CHONGWE CONSTITUENCY

“Along the way of life, someone must have enough sense and morality to cut off the chain of hate.”

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The third objective of this study was that through action research, it would implement a storytelling electoral conflict management and peacebuilding intervention with the Chongwe district CMC in the communities where the electoral conflicts occurred in the 2021 Zambian general elections. The fourth objective was to carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected communities. This chapter is based on both of these objectives.

The purpose of the AR as observed in the literature section is to generate practical knowledge that can contribute to the development of new knowledge or the resolution of specific practical problems within an organisation or community. It is a collaborative approach to research that encompasses strategic action, critical reflection and offers participants the means to find solutions to practical problems or improvements in practice based on individual and organisational felt needs (Tinning, 1992). Action research involves researchers being immersed within a systematic and cyclic process of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating to facilitate better practice by encouraging reflection on practice (Tinning, 1992). It is also well-suited to organisational settings where researchers act as change agents (Jackson, 1995) while also aiming to empower those operating within the organisation by promoting participants' ownership of the change process.

This study intervention was about exploring the use of storytelling as a mediation tool for electoral conflict resolution and community peacebuilding by the Chongwe District CMC in the Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province. The CMC was purposefully selected first because the researcher had an in-depth knowledge of the organisation and its operational norms, having previously served on the NCMC. Second, a strong rapport had already been established between the researcher and gatekeepers, and, as a result, the gatekeepers were interested in the potential for improving practice and organisational functioning. Subsequently, in executing the research, it was not difficult to work with the district CMC for Chongwe. The participating individuals were identified with the help of the CMC focal point person who is part of the senior management team at the Council. The cooperation of the Council was essential as it was clear that any attempts to engineer successful change for the future of the organisation needed their cooperation to materialise.

9.2 ELECTORAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MECHANISM

As noted in the introduction section, CMCs in Zambia were established to handle electoral conflicts at community level during elections. The procedure entails that the CMC must wait for an individual to submit a formal written complaint outlining an alleged violation of the ECC before intervening in a conflict. Aggrieved parties could bring disputes based on alleged violations of the code to their district CMC. Once the committee receives an official complaint, they have to hold a mediation session within 24 hours to attempt to bring the two parties to a mutually acceptable solution. It is at this point that stories from both sides are heard and considered. The main idea of the committees is to act as preventive mechanisms to avoid electoral conflicts from escalating in the communities of each district during a particular election cycle.

This study investigated how the CMCs could effectively use community-based storytelling and stories as an effective community avenue for electoral conflict management, resolution and peacebuilding through the Chongwe District CMC. The study began with the assumption that if storytelling was given more attention during the mediation sessions, a way would be found to follow up the stories and involve the communities. In this way,

the benefits would presumably accrue to more people and not only those who appear before the Committee. This would, in turn, enhance peacebuilding in the communities and make the CMC truly responsive to local needs.

The underlying notion is that even though storytelling is a traditional means of delivering knowledge, wisdom and culture, it has a central role in social movements because it constructs agency, shapes identity and motivates action (Ganz, 2001; Prasetyo, 2017). In organisations, sharing experiences through narratives can build trust, cultivate norms, transfer tacit knowledge, facilitate unlearning, and generate emotional connections (Sole & Wilson, 2002). All these attributes enhance community-building and involvement.

In the current form, the CMCs appear to lean more to formal and exclusive quasi-legal mechanisms. The mediation and reconciliation target only individuals who are involved in the electoral conflict. As a consequence, the communities where the conflict parties live are marginalised and this is contrary to the intention of a community-based approach and response to electoral conflicts for which the CMC were established.

Storytelling approach was selected as an intervention to improve the quality of electoral conflict mediation because it is one mechanism whereby communities would be involved, and stakeholders can demand accountability to their needs for recognition and voice (Chen, 2013) in the management of conflicts in the electoral process. It is not sufficient that storytelling under the CMC mediation is limited to the formal processes and yet this can be remodelled to accommodate storytelling in informal processes which can capture whole communities. This study, therefore, implemented a storytelling intervention that attempted to refocus the CMC on community peacebuilding and electoral conflict management with the above aspects in mind. The ART, community and the researcher deliberated the storytelling approach to electoral conflict resolution and eventually concluded that it was a workable solution to resolve the electoral conflicts in their community.

9.3 INTERVENTION PROCESS

In order to implement the intervention strategy, the ART had to plan the manner in which they would collect data and reflect on how the intervention was unfolding. The intervention was designed at the CMC as described under the section on the ART in Chapter 5. To successfully achieve this, field notes and reflective journals were completed by the researcher in the field to provide a descriptive account of the daily research activity.

Field notes were recorded during this process and provided primary information. Field notes are notes made by the researcher in the course of qualitative fieldwork. They document events, conversations and behaviours observed in the field, and the researcher's reflections on them (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018). Field notes are a means of documenting needed contextual information about a project. During the current study, the researcher wrote field notes during the focus group interviews. This process is explained in Chapter 5 on the section on FGDs.

Field notes were also used during the implementation of the action research intervention. Reviewing field notes allowed the researcher to capture the precise details that later on were useful for improving the discussion outcomes. The participants were invited to write personal notes of a length chosen by themselves about their opinions and experiences of storytelling including positive and negative ones.

The researcher also used a reflexive journal. A reflexive journal is a record where researchers are urged to talk about themselves, "their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process" (Mruck & Breuer, 2003:3). A reflexive journal is presented in ways that make it clear how the researcher's own experiences, values and positions of privilege in various hierarchies have influenced their research interests, the way they choose to do their research, and the ways they choose to represent their research findings (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001:325).

In addition to the reflexive journal the researcher also kept a reflective journal. Reflective journals are defined as ". . . written documents that students create as they think about various concepts, events, or interactions over a period of time for the purposes of gaining

insights into self-awareness and learning” (Thorpe, 2004:328). A reflective journal provides a better understanding of one’s thought process. In this study It was necessary because it helped to maintain analytical distance. The journal provided recorded evaluations of accomplishments and setbacks and encouraged critical consideration of the researcher assumptions, actions and own emotions in a self-conscious and self-aware way.

The above methods provided primary information about the setting, environment, behaviours, outcomes and central themes relating to the intervention process. In addition to field notes, immediately after each focus group session, a brief audio diary was completed using an electronic voice recorder. This process allowed the research team to maintain an accurate account relating to reflections on each session throughout the research process. The data sources were written-up into more coherent stories each evening. The maintenance of the field notes, reflexive journal and reflective journal provided an important source of data at each phase of the action research cycle by informing intervention decisions and were a key instrument in subsequent analysis.

9.4 PARTICIPANTS

At the inception of the study, 10 Chongwe constituency community members were contacted to participate in the storytelling electoral conflict management and peacebuilding intervention. Eight agreed to participate in the study and completed all pre-intervention measures while two did not. Fortunately, all eight attended all meetings that followed and completed the pre- and post-discussions. Four men and four women, who were all registered voters and had participated in the 2021 general elections, became part of the study team. The team had two young men and two young women. The selection of the participants took into account the location and representation of the communities that were targeted for the intervention. In addition, the contact person at the Chongwe CMC and the researcher made a total team of 10 people. During the study, the team brought in more participants who attended FGD sessions to discuss and implement the intervention activities. In all, 24 FGD participants took part in the workshops and sessions to implement the intervention.

During the implementation of the strategy, the researcher perceived three individuals to be crucial to optimal planning, implementation and monitoring of the intervention strategy. These individuals performed the roles of coordinators from each community and the focal point person for the CMC from the District Council. The two coordinators identified and mobilised the relevant participants and advised the researcher on how best to approach their communities in order to obtain the desired results. The CMC contact person provided interface between the CMC, the community and the researcher and enabled the meetings to take place at the CMC venue. The three were assigned with responsibilities which needed key relationships at the various levels of interaction within the CMC. Their functioning was reliant on sustaining relationships with all the stakeholders who were selected to participate in the research project. The intervention was carried out over a period of three months from June to August 2023.

9.5 SOCIAL VALIDATION

In line with recommendations for social validation procedures (Page & Thelwell, 2013), frequent informal and formal semi-structured interviews were used during and after the intervention to ascertain how participants perceived, made sense of and attached meaning to intervention content. Informal interviews allowed an insight into the 'real-world' value and effect participants perceived the intervention to have. Formal interviews were conducted after each phase of the intervention in order to elucidate how perceived pre- and post-intervention changes actually impacted upon practice and functioning. Finally, a short evaluation survey was developed to assess the effectiveness of the focus group phase of the intervention. It was completed by all participants immediately following each session. The evaluation provided timely feedback on the perceived appropriateness of the content, level, length and workability of the intervention. Participants were also invited to identify topics they would like to tell stories about in the electoral conflict arena and provide any additional comments or suggestions relating to the intervention format and design.

9.6 PEACEBUILDING FROM BELOW

This intervention was based on the idea of peacebuilding from below. In this case, the storytelling intervention propagates the idea of “peacebuilding from below” implying that peace processes must involve and be owned by local communities. This intervention demonstrated how storytelling can be a participatory device that encourages ownership and invites dialogue and productive action among the local community members. Part of the argument is that community members’ knowledge and experience play an integral role in informing why electoral conflict and violence are likely to occur and the ways in which conflict and violence may be prevented. It would seem, then, that applying a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach to peacebuilding and political violence prevention was a natural and synergistic extension for the field (Linabary, Krishna & Connaughton, 2017). Therefore, the study introduces a means for galvanising the community to participate in the mediation process of electoral conflicts and not just the CMC and the conflict parties that are directly involved.

The researcher and the ART team together with the community deliberated and agreed that storytelling activities alongside the current mediation process were a practical solution for resolving electoral conflicts as they involved the community, the conflict parties and the CMC mediators in a collaborative manner. The sections that follow explain the activities.

9.7 IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

A number of activities were carried out in order to implement the intervention strategy. These are discussed in the following sections.

9.7.1 Preparation, Planning and Approach

In preparing for implementing the intervention, the real-world situation that was intended to be improved through the intervention was considered. In this case, making CMC mediation more responsive to local electoral conflicts and building peace in the communities during elections. A set of theories considered relevant to the intervention such as normative theories that inform the desired state of the situation after the

intervention, theories about the intervention itself, and theories that inform the implementation process were all considered. This was followed by consideration of how the strategy would be deployed including the context to improve the problem situation.

In creating the ART, there was extensive collaboration in the initial stages of its design and implementation with the CMC leadership, who made suggestions regarding venues, time frames, FGD-length, time of day and facilities. The feedback from FGD participants and researcher reflections also helped the action research processes of monitoring and evaluating. A total of three FGDS were carried out lasting between 1 and 2 hours each, resulting in a total of 6 hours of FGD workshop time per participant. The FGD workshops were purposefully spaced four weeks apart to allow participants time to practice and reflect on the strategies proposed as an intervention. Each FGD used a number of stories from participants to facilitate sharing and learning.

9.7.2 Assessing the Electoral Conflict Management Process by the CMC

FGD Workshop 1 was a discussion about familiarity with the CMC and its processes, perceptions by the participants and whether they considered it effective. It focused on the ability to identify fears and expectations about appearing before the CMC during elections. The purpose was to improve individuals' social-awareness and perception of the electoral conflict management process; and improve participants' ability to gain confidence and freely express their views. The workshop was also about getting perceptions and views concerning the other community in the electoral conflicts. The FGD also addressed the use of storytelling method in the CMC mediation process.

The workshop further discussed efforts to collaborate and use information gathered to gain a deeper understanding of employing storytelling as a tool of peacebuilding. Specifically, it aimed to get insights into how participants felt about telling their stories to the CMC and its impact on them. It also highlighted the gaps in the current model of storytelling at CMC and opportunities for its use. As part of the AR cycle, the workshop attempted to combine personal stories and actions with current CMC organisational issues. This allowed for discussion of participants' experiences of implementing the storytelling model in electoral peacebuilding.

9.7.3 Creating Awareness of Storytelling as a Means of Peacebuilding and Electoral Conflict Management

Apart from participants assessing the electoral conflict management process by the CMC, the ART, sought to create awareness of storytelling as a means of peacebuilding and electoral conflict management which could be employed by the CMC. The FGD which was also hosted under Workshop 1 therefore involved the exploration of instances where stories were used to bring people who were formerly hostile to each other together.

Although participants were familiar with storytelling as a community resource, they certainly did not perceive it in terms of an intervention strategy for electoral conflict management and peacebuilding. Therefore, to ensure that the whole study team was able to understand and appreciate the research project, it was decided during pre-implementation stage that there must be awareness creation about the electoral conflict management and peacebuilding intervention strategy in order to maximise the impact of learning and participant involvement in the action research process.

The storytelling awareness session was designed to improve understanding of electoral conflicts and their management and to identify opportunities to use existing storytelling avenues and abilities to promote peaceful co-existence among electoral contestants. It was further aimed at enhancing optimal functioning of the CMC arising from the realisation that it can build on the storytelling model to manage electoral conflicts.

At the end of the awareness session, the study team reflected about the storytelling intervention and participants were animated to contribute their personal experiences about stories and electoral conflicts. They used the storytelling strategy to narrate and dialogue on its impact or usefulness to electoral conflicts.

Dialogue regarding diary entries from the separate FGD sessions for each community informed and assisted reflection on the content and ongoing issues the participants perceived to be important for electoral conflict management through CMC.

At the end of the session, one participant said:

“Seriously, I never saw storytelling from a perspective that can help us discuss problems during elections. I feel like telling others about the storytelling approach. It feels so powerful when you become aware of what it can do apart from the traditional way we use it.” (FGD participant, May, 2023, Chongwe)

Another FGD participant explained the following:

I think I like the idea of including storytelling in peace and civic education campaigns by ECZ during elections. It connects to people’s daily struggles and reminds us of our responsibilities in the community. (Female FGD participant, June 2023, Chongwe)

9.7.4 Performing Storytelling Role Plays

After assessing the CMC and awareness creation of storytelling as a conflict management and peacebuilding tool, the ART led participants into another session under Workshop 2 to discuss the practical application of stories in peacebuilding using role plays. Role plays engage participants in real-life situations or scenarios that can be “stressful, unfamiliar, complex, or controversial” which requires them to examine personal feelings toward others and their circumstances (Bonwell & Eison, 1991: 47). Role play exercises “are usually short, spontaneous presentations” but also can be prearranged research assignments (Bonwell & Eison, 1991: 47).

Role plays gave participants the opportunity to assume the role of a person or act out a given situation. Generally, these roles can be performed by individual participants, in pairs or in groups when mimicking more complex scenarios. In this study, volunteers told their stories to everyone in the meeting. While the participants reported perceived benefits of participating in the FGD meetings, there was a feeling that more individualised, one-to-one sessions would be better.

One of the participants proposed that

“I’d like to improve my storytelling abilities in a one-on-one setting where I can talk more openly because I don’t always feel comfortable doing it in front of others particularly to discuss more of the situations that I personally went through during elections in 2021.” (FGD participant, June 2023, Chongwe)

The researcher interpreted this to mean the participant needed a safe and respectful place to share her story. At the heart of the story discovery process is what Lambert (2013) terms the “story circle”, a safe, respectful place to share stories. In order to extend

the idea of storytelling as a peacebuilding tool, an FGD session was dedicated to the performance of storytelling role plays by participants paired from the different communities that were involved in the electoral disputes. In performing role plays, a set of procedures to guide the discussion such as complete deactivation of all electronic devices and encouraging total focus on the person speaking were adopted. Within the story circle, participants first present story ideas and receive feedback from the rest of the group, then move to a private space to narrate their stories. The participants then regroup to hear the various presentations. As each person presents, and the listener reacts, they are given the focus of the group and all other activity ceases.

Participants engage in active listening and then provide the storyteller personal responses to what was said: thoughts, ideas, emotions, visual images that come to mind, similar situations and what was learned, etc. One by one, each person receives the attention of the focus of the group's "deep listening" (Lambert, 2013). Participants classically wondered at the insights into themselves and others that they acquired because of the session. And, eventually, the shared insights led to a group bond that emphasised commonalities rather than differences.

"I no longer see the barriers that existed between me and members of the other party. We all want the same thing-peaceful co-existence. It is like someone just made us to see things differently and we hated each other for nothing. I feel relieved to talk about this now. It brings closure to my feelings about my opponents." (FGD Participant, June 2023, Chongwe).

Literally, after the intercommunity role play FGD sessions, it was clear that the participants had started to repair their relationship.

"If I hadn't come to this meeting and participated in storytelling, I don't think I would have changed my perception about our friends from the other party because the relationship was so bad. Here we are now, talking about elections issues together. It is incredible what a bit of perspective does to change relationships." (FGD participant, June, 2023).

9.7.5 Pilot ICT Based CMC Mediation through Zoom

The next session after role play exercises was to pilot an ICT based CMC mediation. This was held as Workshop 3. This entailed having the ART team splitting itself by deploying members in each of the two communities and the researcher and the CMC coordinator

at the CMC offices. Each ART team had a computer and a well-selected location with facilities to enable the community to participate in the Zoom meeting.

Bringing technology into the community can present challenges for researchers and the community in which they choose to work. This is particularly true in the case of digital storytelling, which requires the use of tools and techniques that some community members might not be familiar with. As a first step, it was crucial to carefully consider which platform was to be used in the context of the group and community skills that existed. Platforms like Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp, for example, are some of the means that have become popular for communication. Once a platform had been chosen, the ART team carried out quick tutorials for participants to ensure that everyone understood how it worked.

In this study, participants were separated into two groups with each group having access to a computer and provided with a Zoom link to experiment a storytelling session in form of mediation. The session was anticipated to last 40 minutes. However, it took almost two hours due technical and other logistics. The researcher and the CMC focal point acted as the CMC and had their own computer. One storyteller from each group was chosen to give the side of the story how they perceived the other party and why they have electoral disputes between them. Apart from internet connectivity challenges, the participants felt the process was too impersonal, accommodated only a few group members with access to a computer and therefore detached from the community at large.

The study CMC took notes and later reflected on the whole exercise. The assessment which was made seemed to suggest that the session was not successful in that the session was disconnected several times and participants in a way focused more on the technology than sharing the stories. There seemed to be no attachment to the process and the attempted discussions were rather impersonal. The conclusion was that we did not get much value for our time from this approach.

A participant observed that “the screen of the computer was too small for all of us to see. We need something like at the Cinema to follow this process. It also keeps breaking. I don’t think it is effective.” (FGD participant, July 2023. Chongwe).

Another participant observed:

“I don’t know if it is just me, I don’t feel any attachment to the person narrating the story. It’s like one of those films you see and forget about after a while. I cannot figure out properly their emotions and feelings on the screen.” (FGD participant, July 2024).

9.7.6 Development and Design of an Integration Programme to include Storytelling in the CMC

The next session in Workshop 3 was the development and design of a programme to integrate storytelling in the CMC as a peacebuilding mechanism. The ART embarked on another session to reflect on the development and design of an integration programme to include storytelling as part of the CMC mediation process. This was a joint session of members from both communities who met in one room to discuss their proposals.

From the intervention exercises, storytelling can be designed in such a way that it can be integrated into and applied in electoral conflict management processes. The discussion session by participants on this topic generated interesting views which were explored and agreed upon. Views ranged from negative to positive use of storytelling in elections such as a governing party using false stories to manipulate the voters to enabling decision makers to take decisions based on justice. For example, it was suggested that the influence of narrations on electoral violence risk perception and intention to maintain peace targeted at the general public should become part of peace and voter education. Storytelling in this context becomes a method to increase risk perception about electoral violence and behavioural intention to address it.

Another example which was highlighted by participants where storytelling can be potentially applied and integrated is the use of electoral violence patterns and locations. In this instance, participants suggested that storytelling can be used as one of several methods for gathering narratives to build local, historical knowledge about electoral violence patterns and most prone sites for electoral conflicts over several election cycles. This would be targeted at decision makers for electoral management in the country. In this way, the design and development of electoral conflict management programmes by CMC would benefit immensely with the integration of the storytelling model in their philosophy and implementation stages.

Other participants supported the idea of recording stories and making the voices part of the conflict management procedure for those attending the CMC sessions. This would allow those who come before the CMC to reflect on and appreciate their actions in relation to others. A participant advised that:

“Please record these election conflict stories and let those who appear before CMC listen to them before the start of the sessions. These must also be played out for voters to listen and make their judgement about behaving in a certain way. Just ensure that these recordings send a message that is well thought out and you can distribute to community radio stations.” (FGD participant, July, 2023, Chongwe)

One participant further proposed that CMC should train some people to narrate stories aimed at discouraging insults, hostility and violence during elections. My suggestion is that:

“Apart from just sending people to create awareness about peaceful elections and the exercise of voting rights, ECZ should train people here in our area as storytellers with carefully planned stories to influence voters against violence of all forms including issues of equality and social justice.” (Male FGD participant, July 2023, Chongwe)

In all the workshops, the participants allowed the researcher to ask reflective questions relating to the expressed, experienced, desired and ultimate behaviours involved in the storytelling processes that were discussed. Thus, the workshops guided participants through the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) which encouraged deliberate reflection on concrete experiences, the formation of possible new behaviours, and experimentation to actualise these. The workshops enabled participants to come up with a step-by-step plan for building and maintaining effective relationships using storytelling in their communities and CMC.

9.8 PROPOSED STEP-BY-STEP PLAN FOR MADIDO COMMUNITY

The step-by-step plan for Madido ward shown in Table 8 was followed by a participative process of reflection and review of the things that can work or may not work to implement the storytelling model.

Table 8: Madido community plan

Item no.	Activity	Responsibility	Time framework
1.	Identify storytelling capacities in the communities	ART CMC	Before 2026
2.	Carry out an assessment of the competencies for enlisting possible anchors	ART CMC	Before 2026
3.	Design and delivery of training in storytelling of electoral conflicts	ART CMC ECZ	Before 2026
4.	Identify and set up electoral storytelling community centres	CMC ECZ	Before 2026
5.	Launch of storytelling community CMC centres	ART, Local leadership and CMC, ECZ	Before 2026
6.	Record, store and disseminate stories that have been vetted and cleared on community radio stations	CMC, ECZ	Before 2026

This participative process led to the generation of ideas that resulted in the development of a basic framework for using storytelling as a community peacebuilding mechanism. The next section discusses the framework.

9.9 DEVELOPMENT OF A BASIC STORYTELLING COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING FRAMEWORK FOR ELECTORAL CONFLICTS

From the implementation of the storytelling intervention and the several interviews and document reviews, the participants and the researcher generated a basic storytelling community peacebuilding framework for managing electoral conflicts. The framework was a result of reflections and insights into what could constitute essential components of a storytelling community peacebuilding mechanism. The framework is a series of steps that any peacebuilder can apply and implement. While the processes appear linear, in practice several of these activities overlap.

The storytelling peacebuilding framework being proposed is aimed at helping to build sustainable peace anchored on traditional oral storytelling as an available local resource. Under the storytelling approach, the following steps are followed as shown in Figure 3.

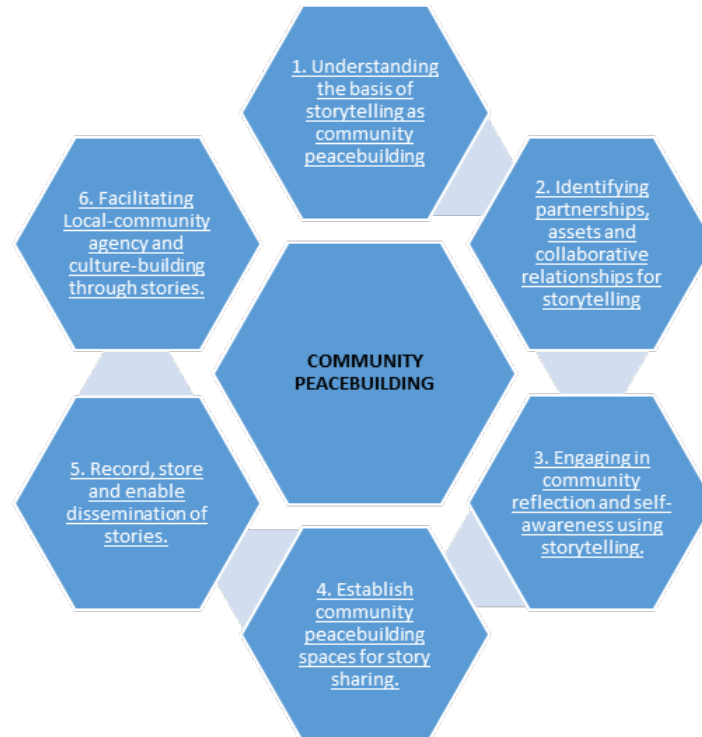


Figure 3. Storytelling community peacebuilding model.

The framework is premised on the understanding that there is still a way in which electoral conflict management and peacebuilding can be durable and sustainable using the existing CMC structures. Indeed “for a peace process to become sustainable, resilient social institutions need to emerge from within, i.e. from the local culture, history and socio-economic context” (de Coning 2016: 167). The framework is, therefore, a generic basic design which aims at stimulating and facilitating the capacity of societies to self-organise (de Coning, 2016:173) for sustaining peace. The framework is discussed in detail in the following sections.

9.9.1 Understanding the Basis of Storytelling as Community Peacebuilding

The underlying assumption is that storytelling is a form of Indigenous knowledge which is an adaptive survival-related process. Therefore, its adaptability to community

peacebuilding in electoral conflicts will be easy and sustainable. The need for understanding the basis of storytelling arises because needs of any community evolve, and new challenges arise. To this extent, it is important to analyse and evaluate the approaches, strengths and challenges of existing structures and collaborators in the electoral process. This method allows for identification of any new services or points of leverage that may help better accomplishment of organisational goals. For any peacebuilding effort to be sustainable, it has to make sense for and serve the interests of the people directly involved.

9.9.2 Identifying Partnerships, Assets and Collaborative Relationships

Collaborative relationships provide the opportunity for organisations to work together towards a common goal or purpose. Each organisation brings its unique expertise, knowledge and resources to complement one another and provide comprehensive support to their communities. Collaboration increases access to services for priority population targets, improves the ability to coordinate the sharing and use of resources, and allows for a more integrated approach to identifying and tackling barriers to peaceful elections. This stage also includes asset mapping. Asset mapping serves to identify and document a community's existing resources, services and key partners. Mapping these assets can help build new connections within a service area, highlights election peacebuilding barriers and develop a reference tool to address these barriers. This process is an essential step because it helps the community to understand the services and organisations available in the community and identification of those that may support the accomplishment of the overarching goals of the peacebuilding activity.

9.9.3 Engaging in Community Reflection and Self-Awareness

The process of self-awareness includes thinking about ourselves such that we become aware of our characteristics, sustain this awareness and use it as we behave and interact with others in the community especially during election periods. This requires building capacity to reflect and be self-aware as individuals and as collectives. The engagement requires not only participation but also inclusiveness of diversity in the community. It is a

process of rediscovering what the community really wants and how they should get to what they want to be. In this particular study to get to peaceful, free and fair elections.

9.9.4 Establish Community Peacebuilding Spaces

This will involve identifying new or existing infrastructure where storytelling activities and peacebuilding will be carried out. It will also catalyse the identification of most appropriate available local resources as well as election conflict peacebuilding anchors in the community. This will embrace the management and coordination of efforts to achieve the goals of the peacebuilding activity of storytelling. This aspect will enable measures to build trust and community ownership of the spaces.

9.9.5 Record, Store and Enable Dissemination of Stories

Community concerns about elections, personal and community experiences and any other information on political conflicts will be recorded, stored, considered and repackaged with the consent and agreement from the storytellers. It should carry the required values for election peacebuilding before official dissemination. The dissemination can be through the various channels that currently exist such as radio, television, websites etc.

9.9.6 Facilitating Local-Community Agency and Culture-Building

These will be activities related to enhancing community agency and culture with regard to values that contribute to conflict and peacebuilding during elections. The local-community storytelling of tales will take place with a view to identifying tale values that contribute to either conflict or peace. It also entails critical intra-community consideration of ways in which destructive storytelling that contributes to conflict might be changed to constructive storytelling that contributes to peace. The agency building will also enable local-community decision-making and follow-up with regard to the tale values concerned.

Having identified the basic storytelling community peacebuilding model, the discussion now turns to the emerging issues in the implementation of the intervention.

9.10 EMERGING ISSUES

The qualitative findings resulting from social validation showed that all of the participants perceived the storytelling sessions to positively impact their behaviour and relationships within the other party and the CMC. The primary area of benefit was an increase in self-awareness and the use of stories to reach out and create a common framework of perceiving the electoral conflicts. Participants reported the sessions to have improved their “awareness of what binds them as communities and understanding of the need to communicate in ways that reflect humanness and empathy for each other. In turn, participants perceived that the use of storytelling models impacted the “restoration”, “productivity” and functioning of “relationships”, as the following quotation from a participant suggests

“It is imperative to share feelings, and listen to the feelings of others, to a point where it can be cleansing and calming. This is something I can apply not only in electoral conflict management, but in other spheres of life generally.” (FGD participant, July 2023)

The implementation of the intervention clearly demonstrated that it is possible to integrate storytelling as a method of electoral conflict management into the current CMC mediation procedures. What will be required is a review of both the storytelling and CMC mediation approaches to make them complementary and ensure that they serve both the electoral mediation and community peacebuilding ends. This will ultimately need the hybridisation of the local and modern to bring about a mediation instrument that will deliver the much-needed electoral justice.

9.11 EVALUATION STAGE

9.11.1 Evaluation of Electoral Conflict Management and Peacebuilding

The definition of evaluation in peacebuilding is “the extent to which the objectives and activities of the intervention(s) respond to the needs of the peacebuilding process” (OECD-DAC 2008:39; Scharbatke-Church, 2011). The evaluation can be carried out in the short, medium or long term. The evaluation takes into account the context, input, process and product in order to ascertain effectiveness.

Evaluation in peacebuilding is important to answer to a set of interconnected needs and purposes. First, the results of the evaluation of sole electoral conflict management interventions provide the intervening actors and stakeholders with information on how to improve the intervention design and target the intervention more to its corresponding goals. Second, evaluations of electoral conflict management interventions, particularly those conducted in a participatory way involving owners and stakeholders of the intervention aid in strengthening the accountability of the intervening organisation in relation to its respective constituencies. Third, evaluations can support a culture of reflection and learning among the involved stakeholders. Lastly, evaluations help practitioners and scholars refine their theories about the causes and dynamics of electoral conflict.

On the other hand, peacebuilding and electoral conflict management processes are also extremely vulnerable, making them difficult to assess in the short run; ultimately, only sustainable peacebuilding amounts to success. Thus, it is essential to always evaluate whether current interventions are on the right trajectory to contribute to sustainable peacebuilding and conflict management.

9.11.2 Process Evaluation

Process evaluations document the process of an intervention's implementation. Process evaluations help stakeholders to see how an intervention outcome or impact was achieved. The focus of a process evaluation is on the types and quantities of services delivered, the beneficiaries of those services, the resources used to deliver the services, the practical problems encountered and the ways such problems were resolved. Taken a step further, process evaluation can also look at the processes of an intervention, its implementation and infrastructure together, to judge the capacity of an organisation to deliver on its promised outcomes.

The community seemed to agree that there were sufficient resources within the community to undertake storytelling interventions in electoral conflict management so long as there was leadership and an institution to anchor the process. It was further observed that the implementation of the intervention process brought diverse members

closer and helped them to overcome their prejudices and stereotypes of others. A participant explained that:

“When we started the meetings I was so nervous and uncomfortable but as we progressed the environment just yielded, and things began to move. We started owning the process slowly.” (FGD participant, August 2023, Chongwe)

Another participant noted that during the role play intervention process he had observed as follows:

“I became more aware of other people’s emotions and feelings as we listened to these stories. This is helping my personal situations as I interact with others. I also think that I have gotten a better understanding of various elements of the elections conflict environment on one hand, and my personal reactions to them on the other. I think I have a broader view of community and better control over my impulsive response to others.” (FGD participant, July 2023, Chongwe)

It was clear that the process helped the participants to understand the environment and that they became more interconnected with each other much better than before they were involved in it. Process evaluation played a role in adjusting the way the implementation of the intervention was being done. Information from process evaluation was useful for understanding how the storytelling intervention’s impact and outcome were achieved including for purposes of intervention replication. Examining outcomes without analysing how they were achieved fails to account for the human role involved in getting to desired outcomes and the true costs of the intervention.

Evaluating the process is just as important as evaluating the outcomes. It is called a “logic” model – and therefore there is a chain of cause and effect. This means if an intervention has the right resources at the very beginning of the chain (inputs) then it is assumed that the aspired outcomes will be achieved.

9.11.3 Outcome Evaluation

Any peacebuilding intervention such as storytelling in electoral conflict management is built on a number of assumptions, or “theories of change”, about how the intervention contributes to peace. In this study the theory of change can be stated as, “We believe that by using storytelling at CMC it will lead to increased ownership, participation and reduced electoral conflicts in the communities during elections.” For example, “If we train

key leaders in storytelling skills, they will become more effective advocates for peace during elections through nonviolent means". Peacebuilding intervention outcome evaluation, therefore, aims to determine whether the intervention affects a key conflict driver positively and helps to manage the unintended effects of the implemented intervention. In assessing the intervention activities of the storytelling model for conflict management as was implemented during the study period, preliminary evaluation is encapsulated in the following direct quotations from the participants:

One female participant expressed herself as follows:

"I like the storytelling approach because it is a more proactive rather than reactive approach compared to what happens at the moment. We only talk about electoral conflict management when there are elections. This in my view is a reactive approach and is wrong." (FGD participant, August 2023, Chongwe).

Yet another participant had this to say:

"I believe that the storytelling activities we have done during this research project are very enlightening and my proposal is that the CMC should mainstream storytelling in all CMC activities. This will have a long-term effect on how we resolve electoral conflicts at community level." (FGD participant, August, 2023, Chongwe)

Furthermore, another participant observed that:

"This storytelling method you are introducing to us is very good, but you need a strategy for human resources to manage electoral conflicts throughout. Build the capacity of some of the local figures here, connect them to CMC for support and ensure continuity of storytelling in the communities." (Youth FGD participant, August 2023, Chongwe)

One participant said:

"By the end of this storytelling project in elections, we the members of the different political parties were actively engaging in consultations and discussing how to peacefully resolve common problems among us during elections." (FGD participant, August 2023, Chongwe)

Participants in all phases of the intervention perceived benefits in the usage of storytelling through enhanced interpersonal dynamics inside and outside of the research workshops.

Others were ambiguous about the impact of the storytelling sessions on electoral conflict management but acknowledged its benefit for relationship enhancement, therapeutic feeling and strategy learning, as one participant summarised:

“I now look back and evaluate my approach to other people and see that my attitude and approach are characterised by self –awareness and empathy. I don’t know whether the impact of me changing will resonate with my political party colleagues. I don’t know whether these stories touch people the same way. Anyway, let’s try it. I think this storytelling thing is somehow better at changing negative thoughts and emotions into positive ones.” (FGD participant, August 2023, Chongwe)

9.12 PEACEBUILDING STORYTELLING EXPERIENCES

Storytelling experiences influence and shape the psyche of any community. This makes storytelling a potent instrument for peacebuilding and electoral conflict management. Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways that leaders have, to influence, teach, and inspire (Boris, 2017). In the first place, storytelling forges connections among people, and between people and ideas. Stories convey the culture, history, and values that unite people. When it comes to our countries, our communities and our families, we understand intuitively that the stories we hold in common are an important part of the ties that bind (Boris, 2017).

Every person or community has their own story to tell and understanding stories from the perspective of that particular person or community will help others to empathise with the storyteller and decolonise one’s mind and build peace. The quotations below are some of the experiences by the study participants

A participant told us the following at the end of the intervention sessions:

“Before, we didn’t share any information with each other, everyone just got on with their political business. I did not trust these guys. But now we seem to have stronger relationships that are more genuine with our friends from the opposition who were at the time in power; We realise that we were fighting for the wrong reasons during elections. This storytelling project has improved communication between our parties in the communities.” (FGD participant, August 2023 Chongwe).

Another noted:

“I am careful of how I go about doing things now. I wouldn’t probably have tried to be so tactful in putting across my point of view before these sessions. Now I always try to consider the impact on others and the narrative that will be made about my behaviour. I thought I did before, but now I am a bit more conscious of why people could be acting in certain ways, or what they may want out of a situation, and indeed how that impacts upon their behaviour. I think of all these connections before I act.” (FGD participant, August, 2023, Chongwe).

Storytelling experiences demonstrated that in using the storytelling peacebuilding model, connection and belonging matter. When a personal story is told, it becomes part of connecting with community stories; a way of questioning, reflecting and authentically representing our own realities (Fraser, 2018). We are related to each other and to the world through stories, and stories allow us to give meaning to events and experiences, ultimately converting information into knowledge” (Fraser, 2018:208). This view is also supported by Ledwith and Springett (2010:115) in their work on participatory practice which emphasise that “story is a route to engaging community in self-inquiry and knowledge”; additionally, stories can serve as a “prerequisite to critical participation in society”.

Because a number of stories seemed to have resonated with almost all the participants during the intervention, the immediate signal after a story was told was opening up to communicate and the emergent change of the mood in the room. Participants opened up to each other and seemed to have yielded their fixed positions to accommodative postures as they exchanged views on why there was conflict in the community during elections. It was no longer about being reactive but pro-active in discussing how they could collaborate across the political divide to address electoral conflicts in the community. Clearly storytelling had an effect on the attitude and behaviour of the study participants.

Another participant expressed storytelling as a way of preventing future conflicts:

“Stories about persistent political party clashes in particular areas of the constituency or ward can be kept or re-narrated, for example some parts of the ward near Lusaka city are notorious for violence whenever there are elections. This knowledge can enable CMC to prepare and take preventive measures.” (FGD participant, July 2023, Chongwe).

It is evident from the above that storytelling is potentially an early warning mechanism. It is one of several methods for collecting narratives to build local, historical knowledge about electoral conflicts or violence patterns including data on the most prone sites for electoral conflicts over several election cycles. Consequently, such storied data can serve as an early warning mechanism for community conflicts or violence that affects the electoral process. The mechanism can be effective due to its easy availability, affordability and accessibility.

In a sense, storytelling proved to be a way of uplifting and giving ownership of the electoral conflict management process and meaning of peacebuilding to the marginalised members of Madido ward in the Chongwe constituency. As a result, the storytelling experiences inspire us that it holds promise for the electoral process in Zambia and complements the electoral mediation process currently obtaining.

The following section discusses some of the identified lessons from the storytelling intervention for electoral conflicts in Madido ward of the Chongwe constituency and district.

9.13 REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The first consideration is that the formal sector electoral conflict management processes such as the CMC must be accompanied by intensive community awareness, social dialogue and possibly cultural programmes. This might encourage community involvement in election issues and promote acknowledgement of the bad electoral practices during elections. The community engagement would most likely create a good entry point for establishing inter-political party cohesion and unity at the grassroots levels.

The second consideration from the storytelling intervention is that peacebuilding is much more than extending local ownership. It is about reflecting on how problem-solving approaches have failed to pay attention to processes of emergence, self-organisation, adaptation and transformation (de Coning, 2018). For example, does electoral mediation through CMC produce better results for the disputing parties when accompanied by self-reflective methods? Is the storytelling approach discussed in this study more transformative and sustainable for the CMC compared to the current practice? Or do these work better alongside each other? These are important questions in deciphering the lessons that ensue from the storytelling intervention in the study. The study cannot answer these questions with certainty unless the storytelling activities are applied over a long period of time compared to the study time.

The third consideration from the study intervention is that peacebuilding communities need to have strong legitimacy and networks to consolidate their activities. Beyond

political parties and civil society, there is need to work with religious groups to mobilise the required moral and social capital in the political community concerned. This will help to embed the desired values such as tolerance and respect for each other's rights during elections.

The fourth consideration is that while storytelling is a viable community peacebuilding model it cannot be transferred in its entirety and expect it to work well in another context because each model has a history that is specific to the context within which it emerges. Once it is divorced from that history, it loses the context within which it had meaning. For example, each community has socio-economic conditions that inform their perception of political issues and elections. This will motivate their responses to the storytelling model and reflect the level of significance or premium they place on it.

The fifth consideration from the storytelling experience is that it may be possible to identify best practices or lessons from the situation that we dealt with but to universalise it in a manner that is transferable to another context may pose challenges. There may be a need to focus on learning from the contextual environment before generalising with certainty the value of the lessons we have learned from the study. The current mode of knowledge flow and transfer is largely from the centre to the periphery. This top-down information flow may render those at the top unable to learn from knowledge repository at the bottom.

The sixth consideration is that every intervention has both intended and unintended outcomes. Thus, there is need to be mindful of the way we monitor and evaluate the peacebuilding interventions. There is need to avoid only monitoring and evaluating for the anticipated results. Any intervention of a socio-political nature will lead to a variety of responses. Monitoring only for the intended outcomes will result in us missing out on a great deal of important information about how the intervention is evolving. Monitoring for all dimensions will therefore assume great importance for peacebuilders to enable the intervention to adapt, evolve and replicate.

The seventh consideration is that there is need for appropriate balance between external resources and the degree to which the local system has the freedom to develop its own

self-organisation. Self-sustaining peace is directly linked to, and influenced by, the extent to which a society has the capacity and space to self-regulate (de Coning, 2018). Therefore, to sustain the storytelling intervention being proposed for electoral conflicts in this study, it must be a product of a home-grown, bottom-up and context-specific process owned by all stakeholders in the roll out of CMC mediation programmes.

9.14 OBSERVATIONS AND RESULTS

Using an AR approach, we evaluated the effectiveness of the storytelling intervention for improving individual and organisational functioning. In qualitative terms, the findings indicated that the FGD sessions on storytelling were perceived to be effective at restoring relationships between participants and bringing the CMC closer to the community. It demonstrated perceptions of greater relationship quality and closeness. The intervention was perceived to lead to improvements in participants' relationships. The social validation data supported these general findings, with participants perceiving the sessions to be effective in improving relationships and enhancing both individual and organisational functioning. Empirical evidence during the study demonstrated that the storytelling peacebuilding intervention was possible, and its effectiveness only depended on the choice of the approach that was taken to implement the storytelling peacebuilding activity. For example, use of role plays proved more effective than conducting computer-based Zoom mediation for the study community.

In quantitative terms, an important finding was the self-reported post-intervention increase in seeing storytelling as a peacebuilding tool rather than just a means of communication. In other words, the community shifted their conflict resolution paradigm and perceived more ways of handling electoral conflicts. Although participants became more aware of storytelling as a means of healing and connecting to the other party, the actual implementation of the intervention strategy, however, was more difficult and often triggered further emotional responses that required coping efforts for some participants who were directly affected by the electoral conflicts.

Another finding worthy of note in the implementation phase was the seeming importance of reflexivity in and reflection on action for learning and behaviour change. As highlighted

by the social validation data, the combination of intervention content (storytelling awareness) and methods employed (i.e., end of session reflections) facilitated more reflexivity in transactions requiring telling a story, listening to others and reflection on the successes and failures of the various practical efforts.

The implementation of the storytelling intervention also demonstrated that the CMC was still somewhat detached from the local community and more integration with the community would make it effective and owned by the people. It, therefore, requires a little more work to get the CMC to operate at the level where the intervention can work better. The use of storytelling anchors from within the communities could play a central role since they will derive their legitimacy, credibility and influence from a contextual socio-cultural or religious basis. Anchors will also lend the necessary personal closeness to the parties of the electoral conflict giving them strong bonds of trust that enable necessary attitudinal changes among the major political contestants during elections.

9.15 RESULTS SUMMARY

The findings of the study have illustrated that storytelling is potentially an early warning mechanism. Storied data can serve as a reference point for early warning of electoral community conflicts or violence due to its easy availability, affordability and accessibility. Second, the variety of storytelling activities and electoral conflict sharing and learning experiences that were part of the community intervention reflected an interesting sense of self, place and community. The study used storytelling of past community electoral conflicts as a way to critically reflect on who the community were, envision a more just and peaceful electoral process in the future, and connect with each other not as political adversaries but community members who share a common goal of ensuring a peaceful environment in the community at all times. Through multiple forms of creative interaction, the study participants were able to share their lived experiences with one another. In the process, the participants gained a valued window into one another's lives as part of a generative space where their political and election-related struggles, frustrations and joys were heard with empathy and their strengths were recognised. Community members'

stories and experiences were truly a source of inspiration and renewal. The workshop sessions reflected a sense of community through the stories.

9.16 IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FINDINGS

While storytelling may be cited as an early warning system in varying situations, this study has contributed to the body of knowledge about the subject in relation to electoral conflicts and peaceful elections. The study points to an untapped readily available resource of storytelling that has been neglected within the right context and yet can detect the vulnerabilities responsible for electoral conflicts without the need for too much investment and resources. This is significant because it would reduce dependence on external support to set early warning mechanisms that could be costly and difficult to sustain. The findings of the study call attention to the use of locally available resources to improve early warning especially in communities that experience electoral conflicts in the context of Africa and enable the local communities together with their national institutions to implement preventive policies.

9.17 HIGHLIGHT OF STUDY FINDINGS

The results of the study show that although storytelling was underutilised in the electoral mediation process at CMC, as a strategy and relational approach, it is an effective local tool for both CMC electoral conflict management and community peacebuilding. Furthermore, the storytelling intervention demonstrated that CMC still requires to get closer to the communities as it is somehow detached from the local communities. Deliberate efforts on the part of CMC and ECZ to implement continuous activities is necessary in order for voters to truly own and effectively participate in the CMC processes.

The results of storytelling intervention demonstrate that the transformative theory by Lederach holds true for using storytelling to change relationships and transform conflict. In this regard, storytelling as community peace building is primarily ingrained in enhancing the quality of relationships and the systems in which those relationships are embedded. This relational approach ensures transformation of relationships during social interaction.

Henceforth, this theory has helped us understand the place of storytelling in the community and how it can foster peaceful relationships that can transform electoral conflicts to bring about peace.

9.18 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the storytelling intervention outcomes tend to agree with the observations made by Senehi (2002) that storytelling exercises can enable mutual recognition, shared power, agency, honesty and a critical mindfulness by all the participants in the face of observed injustices in their community. Indeed, electoral stakeholders in Zambia have, until recently, overlooked the role of storytelling in electoral conflict management and organisational functioning to oversee elections. The present findings indicate that both CMC approach and the storytelling intervention can be enhanced to contribute to improvements in individual, relational and organisational functioning, particularly by integrating the storytelling framework in a more peacebuilding fashion. There is much to be done to advance our conceptual and methodological understanding in this area; however, the present findings provide sufficient support for the exploration of storytelling as a useful tool in community peacebuilding during elections in Zambia.

Further, these findings offer academics and practitioners alike an insight into the potential value of such interventions, yet caution must be taken regarding the design of storytelling interventions. To elaborate, CMC must resist the urge to repackage their services in order to accommodate storytelling as a fool proof intervention to organisational efficiency. Instead, they should provide tailored interventions to promote individual and organisational learning by orchestrating multiple visions, values and goals into coherent organisational plans. Such approaches may allow for the identification of blind spots in the electoral process and reveal areas for organisational development and growth that will facilitate sustainable individual, group and organisational flourishing.

The results of the storytelling intervention have also shown that storytelling is an engaging approach to educate voters about the experiences of electoral conflicts during elections in Zambia and raised questions about how it can contribute to the development of a more flexible and friendly conflict resolution process that is centred on the communities but also

responsive to the electoral legal demands as laid out by the ECZ. The study has demonstrated that storytelling is therefore potentially viable but should be brought down to the lower levels of community if the CMC is to use it to serve their purpose of preventing electoral conflicts, building peaceful communities and reconciling political contestants.

The next and final chapter focuses on conclusions, reflections and recommendations made in the study.

PART V

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSION, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides the summary of the entire study, research process, conclusion and makes some recommendations and suggestions of areas for further study.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the final chapter of the thesis and presents an overview of the whole research study, the procedures followed and the findings generated from this study. All the information generated is based on the aim and objectives of the thesis. The chapter ends by applying the research findings to propose suggestions and make general conclusions, as well as formulating recommendations. The chapter concludes by proposing possible areas for future research. The data-collection process of this study employed key informant interview sessions, FGDs, personal narratives, CMC record review, observations and the AR component which involved implementing the storytelling intervention together with the participants to resolve electoral conflicts.

10.2 THE STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The overall aim of the study was to investigate the use of storytelling as a mediation tool for electoral conflict resolution and community peacebuilding by the Chongwe District CMC in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province.

The research objectives were:

- *Objective one:* To explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appeared before the CMC in Chongwe district.

- *Objective two:* To analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district.
- *Objective three:* Through action research, implement an intervention of storytelling peacebuilding model with the Chongwe district CMC in the communities where the conflicts occurred.
- *Objective four:* To carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected communities.

10.3 SUMMARY OF STUDY FINDINGS

This section of the thesis provides a summary of the whole study and discusses the study findings in relationship to the research aim, objectives and research questions. The study on *Storytelling and Electoral Conflicts: A Community Approach to Peacebuilding* was carried out in Madido ward in the Chongwe constituency located in Chongwe district of Zambia. The context of the study involved the use of storytelling as a peacebuilding tool for electoral conflicts. During the research intervention, it was evident that participants in the study were willing to use storytelling because they felt it was an approach that they were already dealing with on each and every day of their lives. They felt at ease to share their own stories.

The departure point was the introduction of stories of a political rather than social nature that dominated in the local area. Because of the nature of party politics in Zambia which are generally confrontational and fraught with suspicion, it took some time for the participants to open up and share stories that relate to politics and the electoral process. However, after some interaction and clarification of the research project, it was clear that storytelling in the room led to changes in the perspective from which we look at and view each other and the conflict, to one that sees peace as revolving and anchored in the quality of relationships (Klem, 2018; Ryan, 2008; Taylor & Lederach, 2014).

This study was premised on the idea that stories provide a glimpse into the ways of life of the people and assist in the identification of remnants of their local culture and understanding of peace and its context (Cormier, 2018). Storytelling was chosen for the

study because it engages with memory and identity, where space and time are important. Apart from this, storytelling is perceived to be low tech and low cost and often requires less time than other approaches (Senehi, 2021).

The study is supported by three interrelated theories. The first by Lederach on conflict transformation. The second by Allport on the need for group contact and the third by Bandura on social learning. The study has argued that contact leads to social learning which in turn brings about transformation of relationships. This is tied to storytelling of electoral conflicts because a story that is told when people are in contact with one another leads to social learning and transforms relationships. This inevitably has an impact on community peacebuilding. All these theoretical assumptions and pillars were the guiding principles in the process of executing this study including the conduct of the ART during the storytelling intervention in electoral conflicts of the Chongwe constituency. The researcher also explored the phenomenon of storytelling, its practice, role, use, effectiveness and challenges when applied to various situations, specifically focusing on electoral conflicts in Zambia. The study demonstrated that while there are numerous studies that have been carried out throughout the world on storytelling and community peacebuilding, it is clear that they did not address the issues of community electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding which this thesis has done. Scholarly studies have not provided deep reflections and analysis on the use of storytelling alongside the mediation process to address electoral conflicts.

Generally, the reviewed literature shows that the use of AR for academic discourse especially peace studies and conflict resolution relating to elections and storytelling is not widely available and used among Zambian Intellectuals. The studies which were available for cross referencing during the research expedition include Fumpa-Makano (2019), Mukunto (2019), Banda, Hinfelaar and Ndulo (2020) and Magasu (2022) who have written on election violence from different perspectives, but do not address the storytelling dimension and community peacebuilding. However, Mukunto and Fumpa- Makano applied AR in coming up with their findings while Magasu discussed CMCs.

The results of the study show that although storytelling was underutilised in the electoral mediation process at CMC, as a strategy and relational approach, it is an effective local

tool for both CMC electoral conflict management and community peacebuilding. This is despite the vagaries of the digital age and the predominance of the liberal peace paradigm. The study findings indicate that both the CMC approach and the traditional oral storytelling intervention can be enhanced to contribute to improvements in individual, relational and organisational functioning to resolve electoral conflicts. This complementary arrangement forms a hybrid model which promises a comprehensive and inclusive approach to electoral conflict management by the CMC.

This study has confirmed some of the major peacebuilding theories that emphasise the viability and integration of traditional or local approaches to the existing peacebuilding models. For example, Mac Ginty (2010) argues that hybrid approaches can strategically amalgamate top-down and bottom-up strategies, capitalising on the strengths of both governance levels. This approach strengthens the relational space which goes beyond procedural or legal discourse. Indeed, in recent times the scholarly literature on the 'local turn' in peacebuilding has placed more premium on a bottom-up or grassroots approach, inclusive of the role of local communities. By striking a balance between national-level policies and grassroots initiatives such as storytelling, the hybrid approach would contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive peacebuilding process during elections in Zambia. This study is significant to the production of hybrid forms of peace and the ongoing struggle to create and maintain spaces where more emancipatory and transformative thinking on peace can emerge (Poppellwell, 2017). Others have demonstrated that local peace initiatives assist in rebuilding vital bonds of trust, solidarity, and mutual accountability in the communities (MacGinty, 2008; UN, 2023).

The study strengthens these perspectives and should influence the direction towards peacebuilding efforts that pay close attention to the community context and local ways of doing things in which a conflict has occurred (Funk, 2012; Lederach, 2014; Lederach & Appleby, 2010; UN, 2023). Despite the short period of the intervention, storytelling community intervention proved to be an inclusive and people-centred approach to electoral peace with a promise of sustainability, effectiveness and responsiveness to peacebuilding efforts.

10.3.1 Overall Aim of the Study

The results of this study were clustered according to each study objective and the main theme identified. The following main themes which also constituted the discussion and findings chapters were identified:

- i. Community electoral conflicts, storytelling and CMCs.
- ii. Hybridisation of CMC electoral mediation and oral storytelling models to improve the process of electoral conflict mediation.
- iii. Context and conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding for electoral conflicts in Chongwe constituency.
- iv. Action intervention-implementing storytelling as community peacebuilding for electoral conflicts in Chongwe constituency.
- v. Conclusion, reflections and recommendations.

Each of these themes was broken down to sub-themes which formed the sections of the study in the chapters.

The main findings of this study agree with the assumption that despite the practice of oral storytelling being common and well-understood in the study communities it is not sufficiently used as an effective local community mediation avenue for electoral conflict resolution and peacebuilding by the CMC during elections in Chongwe constituency. This is arguably due to the ever-changing conflict management context driven by the digital age and the predominance of the liberal peace paradigm. However, the study has demonstrated that the relational approach of storytelling makes it an effective local tool for both electoral conflict resolutions for conflict parties and community peacebuilding. The above finding gets traction with scholars who argue that Indigenous knowledge has been displaced not simply by the usual colonising influences of the liberal state but equally by the rise of global intellectual imperialism (Mahuika, 2019; Nepia, 2019; Saikia, 2023) and now the digital age.

The study has also concluded that there are possibilities of improving the CMC mediation process by addressing both the use of storytelling and the remodelling of the current CMC practice so that the two are complementary within the same process. This will lead to the

hybridisation of the mediation process and enable it to address both the electoral conflicts brought by conflict parties for mediation and the community concerns where the conflict takes place. Such a hybrid model would address the relational and legal-based mediation outcomes. Therefore, hybridisation promises a comprehensive and inclusive approach to electoral conflict management by the CMC. Decentralisation of the CMC to local levels that are more manageable will be a condition precedent to enable storytelling strategy to complement the mediation process appropriately. In other words, the results of the study suggest that it is possible to remodel the CMC architecture on one hand and use oral storytelling as a strategy for relational space on the other in order to ensure that the electoral mediation by the CMC is pitched as both a conflict management and community peacebuilding model.

The study also demonstrated that a key strength of the community's conception of storytelling as peacebuilding is that it facilitates thinking about election peace as more than just adherence to the ECC or an absence of violence, altercations and verbal invectives during campaigns. The conceptualisation evokes personal, emotional and cultural interpretation of the elements of peace and peacebuilding within the communities. If these elements are seen to be absent in the CMC process, then it affects the propensity by the electorates to participate and report the violation of the ECC as procedurally or/and legally demanded because it changes the context. This conception forms the basis for shared meaning by electoral stakeholders to implement lasting and effective ways to resolve electoral conflicts and enhance community peacebuilding.

Lastly, the findings of the study have illustrated that the storytelling intervention is potentially an early warning mechanism as storied data can serve as a reference point for early warning of electoral community conflicts or violence due to its easy availability, affordability and accessibility. Further, the storytelling intervention outcomes have agreed with the observations made by Senehi (2002) that storytelling exercises can enable mutual recognition; shared power; agency; honesty and a critical mindfulness by all the participants in the face of observed injustices in their community. Clearly, the storytelling intervention has demonstrated that it can lead to improvements in individual, relational and organisational functioning. However, it is important to understand that prior to these

improvements there is need for creating both self and community awareness in line with the concept of “decolonising peace” to obtain the best results from this particular community peacebuilding approach.

Notwithstanding the success stories about storytelling, it is ever at the risk of being undermined by multiple sources of information driven by the digital age and the continued use of the international liberal perspectives to address conflicts. The results show that while storytelling is an excellent approach to electoral conflict management, it has risks that need to be managed. This is because it can easily be used as propaganda leading to the creation of narratives that suit those who control the channels of communication, state institutions or storytelling anchors. Once used as propaganda, storytelling can disrupt democratic elections, sow suspicion and justify injustices in the electoral process.

10.3.2 Objective 1

This objective set out to explore the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts between the various stakeholders that appear before the CMC in Chongwe district

To meet the requirements of the objective, the study dedicated Chapter 6 to the exploration of the practice, role and effects of storytelling in the electoral conflicts among the various stakeholders in the CMC in Chongwe district. The main sub-themes under this objective were:

- community electoral conflicts;
- practice of storytelling in electoral conflicts under the CMC;
- the role of storytelling in electoral conflicts; and
- effects of CMC mediation.

The study findings show that:

- There was prevalence of electoral conflicts in the communities during elections or political meetings and rallies. The nature of electoral conflicts was mainly verbal abuse and intimidation, tearing down campaign materials, assault, harassing those wearing opposing party campaign gear, disruption of mainly opposition meetings by police,

threats of evictions from market stalls and threats of violence based on political affiliation and sometimes ethnicity by ruling party officials. The perpetrators were mainly unemployed party youths whose motive and actions were largely orchestrated for both political and economic ends although there was attribution of these conflicts to political party territorial control as well. The confounding factor in these conflicts was that reports to police never yielded any results as community members were advised that nothing much could be done as these cases were about politics. Unfortunately, too, while electoral conflict management mechanisms through CMCs exist, there are challenges of availability, accessibility and affordability.

- The CMC mediation process does not perceive storytelling in its cultural context as an important component in that its focus is on whether the electoral laws and code of conduct have been flouted and thereafter attempt to reconcile the conflict parties. The CMC is largely unconcerned with the storytelling as a method of conflict resolution, post-conflict reconciliation or individual healing or co-existence back in the community. Study participants observed that there was no sense or feeling of telling a story to the CMC; rather, they saw it as a form of tribunal and called for the decentralisation of the CMC electoral mediation. The participants argued that decentralisation of electoral mediation would enable the process to be efficient, participatory and inclusive. The study has therefore confirmed its assumption that storytelling is not given sufficient attention as a peacebuilding tool under the CMC mediation.
- The role of CMC in storytelling of electoral conflicts was to clarify and confirm the written complaint and apply conflict analysis based on the ECC and then make a verdict. Little attention was paid to recognition of the pain and dignity of the complainant or listening to their experience and feelings. Thus, the CMC misses the benefits of using storytelling and its cultural context to build relationships and engage in collective reflection whereby sharing emotions contributes to the creation, maintenance and strengthening of social bonds that in turn can stimulate change not only for the disputants but also the communities, which, in the final analysis will foster genuine reconciliation.

- The study also confirmed that the storytelling during mediation is confined to conflict parties and mediators and usually tends to exclude the communities in which the conflict occurs. There is no significant role that is played by storytelling as a method of conflict resolution. The results show that while storytelling is an excellent approach to electoral conflict management, it has risks that need to be managed. This is because it can easily be used as propaganda leading to the creation of narratives that suit those who control the channels of communication, state institutions or storytelling anchors. Once used as propaganda, storytelling can disrupt democratic elections, sow suspicion and justify injustices in the electoral process.
- The study results indicate that the CMC mediation process does not genuinely alter relationships but serves a symbolic role. All study participants, regardless of the method of data collection, unanimously observed that there was little or no positive effect on the patterns of interactions by conflict parties after they had been made to reconcile by the CMC mediation. As shown in this study, the format of storytelling does not address conflict stories under their beneath surface-level depictions of events. It also does not explain the assumptions of disputing parties or their expectations of each other and the roles they cast on each other.
- Further, there was no evidence of follow up in the community by CMC after attending to or reconciling the parties to an electoral conflict. All participants of the personal narratives affirmed that there was no constructive interaction or discernible pattern of relationship after they had been to the CMC mediation process. Ideally, the mediation process must lead to the re-establishment of the broken relationship and empowerment of the parties to the electoral conflict and their communities who have the most to gain from free, fair and peaceful elections. Such empowerment should culminate in better social cohesion and sustainable peace.
- In a way, the failure by CMC to follow up in the community after the mediation flies in the face of the rationale for establishing the CMC to respond to community electoral conflicts. The CMC process should go beyond an agreement between the conflict parties and begin to engage communities to promote co-existence where they live and prevent future electoral conflicts.

10.3.3 Objective 2

This objective was to analyse how storytelling could improve the process of mediation by the CMC in Chongwe district.

This section deals with the first part of addressing the objective whose main theme was the hybridisation of CMC electoral mediation and oral storytelling models to improve the process of electoral conflict mediation. The sub-themes under this objective were:

- Conditions precedent /factors to be taken into account to improve storytelling and CMC mediation.
- Remodelling the CMC architecture.
- Prospects of integrating storytelling into electoral conflict mediation.

The findings of the study are:

- Evidence showed that storytelling had the potential to improve the CMC mediation process provided that the storytelling itself is improved through consideration of a number of factors. Among these were a better understanding of the motivations of the contestants at CMC, the setting for mediation, method of reporting, location of the mediation sessions, the extent of audience reach and the language applied during the process.
- On the other hand, the remodelling of the CMC should include a review of legislation and procedures, decentralising CMC from district to community level to introduce a certain degree of self-governance, which reduces demands for violent aspirations during elections, ensuring continuity of CMC activities outside election periods in order to entrench the culture of peace, anchoring CMC on both informal and Indigenous knowledge systems and formal procedural mediation process. The approach should further promote inclusion of marginalised groups as well as mechanisms to manage gender dynamics in CMC processes.
- The study showed that it is possible to improve the CMC architecture by incorporating the use of storytelling so that the process serves as both a conflict management and community peacebuilding model for electoral conflicts. Such a hybrid model would

address the relational and legal-based mediation outcomes. Therefore, hybridisation promises a comprehensive and inclusive approach to electoral conflict management by the CMC. It is imperative to observe that the CMC potentially has a readily available resource in oral traditional storytelling to effectively meet the ends of electoral justice and peaceful co-existence in the communities.

- The study also reviewed prospects for integrating storytelling into the electoral mediation system so that it can complement the CMC to make it more efficient. The complementarity between storytelling and the CMC process should inevitably embrace technology to cater for an evolving virtual community detached from physical interaction yet potent in influencing the electoral atmosphere during elections. These measures could make CMC a more inclusive and effective peace infrastructure.

This section dealt with the second part of addressing the objective whose main theme was the contextualisation and conceptualisation of storytelling as community peacebuilding

The main sub-themes under this objective were:

- Context and conceptualisation of storytelling as electoral conflict community peacebuilding.
- Operationalisation of storytelling as electoral conflict community peacebuilding.
- Factors that render the operationalisation of the storytelling electoral peacebuilding model vulnerable.

The study shows the following:

- The conceptualisation of peace and context during elections appears to be what enables the community under study to respond to the criteria set out by CMC for them to participate in the electoral conflict management process. The study seems to suggest that the responses by community members to report cases to the CMC are based on their personal, emotional and cultural interpretation of the elements of peace and peacebuilding within their communities. If these elements are seen to be absent in the CMC process, then it affects the propensity by the electorates to participate and

report the violation of the ECC as procedurally or/and legally demanded. The integration of storytelling into CMC mediation process may be a solution to the community responses to the CMC.

- Context plays crucial role and situates the electoral conflicts and understanding of peacebuilding. Conceptions of peacebuilding and peace varied from an opportunity to be heard, creation of a sense of justice, sense of empowerment, dialogue, feeling respected, a platform for individuals to relive and recount their electoral experiences and how they are made to feel better, creating political and civic space, forgiving after hearing the other side of the story, flexibility and room to express one's ideas, thoughts and feelings before others unhindered. The study also found that peacebuilding is keeping political rivals sensitive to community expectations and conducting peaceful campaigns during elections.
- Storytelling as a strategy and relational approach to conflict management in the electoral process can open possibilities whereby electoral stakeholders have a safe, supportive space built on trusting relationships, consistent engagement over time and connection of the electorates as a community of voters and their realities.
- Storytelling is a viable intervention strategy for resolving political and electoral conflicts in Zambian communities because it is common and in harmony with practices that people understand very well. Apart from that, it is a familiar, accessible and user-friendly Indigenous approach to community peacebuilding in many Zambian communities particularly those in the rural and peri-urban settings. This is because rural and peri-urban settings are predisposed to the storytelling culture and would embrace the practice much more easily compared to the typical urban dweller.
- The storytelling peacebuilding model can be vulnerable to effects of liberal democratic peace perspectives, ICTs and social media, modern forms of socialisation and the influence of local political leadership. All these factors tend to overshadow and stymie the growth of local approaches including storytelling because they are seen to be internationally or externally correct.

10.3.4 Objective 3

This objective was to use action research to implement an intervention of storytelling peacebuilding model with the Chongwe district CMC in the communities where the conflicts occurred.

The findings were that:

- There is need for creating both self and community awareness to apply storytelling as a peacebuilding tool. This particular realisation ties in with the concept of decolonising peace which arises “from a decolonisation of the mind; from the cognitive and emotional understanding that individuals do not necessarily need expert outsiders and their resources to shape their daily lives, or more importantly, to bring them peace.” (Fontan, 2012:23; Rodriguez Iglesias, 2020).
- Storytelling is potentially an early warning mechanism because it can be used as one of several methods for gathering narratives to build local, historical knowledge about electoral conflicts or violence patterns and most prone sites for electoral conflicts over several election cycles. This would be an important premise for prescribing electoral prevention measures and applying deeper or more focused efforts to ensure that electoral conflicts in a particular area is well anticipated whereby necessary measures can be devised to avert any occurrence. Consequently, such storied data can serve as an early warning mechanism for conflicts or violence in the electoral process over many electoral cycles. In this way the design and development of electoral conflict management programmes by CMC would benefit immensely with the integration of the storytelling model in their philosophy and implementation stages.
- For electoral conflict management to be sustained for the long term, with the aim of building trust, lasting relationships and ultimately robust mechanisms that last beyond the timescale of a single crisis or electoral campaign cycle, there is need to establish effective feedback loops for transmitting accurate, timely information between local and national structures. This could be done by building on the investment of existing networks and local mechanisms to ensure that inclusive and participatory community electoral conflict management capacities are not just communicated to and

maintained during a critical time such as during elections but must be strengthened to be permanent points for conflict resolution. As things stand at the moment, the CMC is not rooted in the communities and seems to operate on an ad hoc arrangement spurred by funding that comes with elections. This is a poor approach to investment in a peacebuilding strategy that is sustainable.

- Study participants were animated about storytelling and participated with the familiarity that showed that the approach was local and an integral part of their lives. In addition, a number of study participants underwent some sort of catharsis during the implementation of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention and illustrated how sharing emotions contributes to the creation, maintenance and strengthening of social bonds which can possibly stimulate change. It also demonstrated that it was an active process and had a mutual effect on the 'listener' and the 'teller'. It also showed that it was a good way to educate voters. This made it possible to break the participant barriers and build new relationships as well as foster collective reflection on electoral conflicts and its management.

10.3.5 Objective 4

This objective was to carry out an evaluation of the immediate outcomes of the storytelling peacebuilding intervention model in the affected communities

The main sub-themes under this objective were:

- Pre and implementation of the intervention
- Development of a basic storytelling community peacebuilding design framework for electoral conflicts
- Evaluation of the process
- Observations and results
- Reflections and lessons Learned.

Under this objective the study showed that:

- The variety of storytelling activities and electoral conflict sharing and learning experiences that were part of the community intervention reflected an interesting

sense of self, place and community. The study used storytelling of past community electoral conflicts as a way to critically reflect on who the community were, envision a more just and peaceful electoral process in the future, and connect with each other not as political adversaries but community members who share a common goal of ensuring peaceful environment in the community at all times. Through multiple forms of creative interaction, the study participants were able to offer up their lived experiences to one another.

- In the intervention process, the participants gained a valued window into one another's lives as part of a generative space where their political and election related struggles, frustrations and joys were heard with empathy and their strengths were recognised. Community members' stories and experiences were truly a source of inspiration. The workshop sessions reflected a sense of community through the stories.
- Participants in all phases of the intervention perceived benefits in the use of storytelling. All the participants perceived the storytelling sessions to positively impact their behaviour and relationships among themselves, with the other party and the CMC although some participants were ambiguous about the impact of the storytelling sessions on electoral conflict management despite their acknowledgement of its benefit for relationship enhancement, therapeutic feeling and strategy learning. The primary area of benefit was an increase in self-awareness and the use of stories to reach out and create a common framework of perceiving the electoral conflicts.
- It is possible to develop a basic generic design for community peacebuilding which aims at stimulating and facilitating the capacity of societies to self-organise and manage conflicts. The study has shown that for adaptation and replication of the storytelling community peacebuilding model to succeed, support for local human resources, for example, in anchoring storytelling and consistent dissemination of information would be some of the most important activities that would require significant effort, time and resources.
- Storytelling activities demonstrated that they could lead to dialogue, consensus building and change of perceptions which occurred within the study sessions. The

activities also showed that storytelling approach helped participants to vent out and manage their emotions. Such reactions are important if people are to avoid the repetition of their electoral malpractices or violent reactions or hateful experiences. All these aspects could lead to long-term peacebuilding in the electoral process if storytelling was integrated as proposed in the CMC mediation.

10.3.6 Review of the Research Methodology and the Research Design

The study used an action research design whereby an ART was initially set up. This group actively engaged in identifying and recruiting key participants for the study. The participants had to meet the criteria of being voters and resident in the communities where the reported electoral conflicts occurred. The study used a qualitative methodology that drew data from five key sources: (a) FGDs; (b) Key informant interviews; (c) Personal narratives; (d) record reviews of the CMC files; and (e) observation. In addition, a review of extant literature on peacebuilding was carried out. Thematic analysis was used to analyse research findings. Data analysis was carried out by first coding, organising into themes and analysing the new information in terms of how it informed the research questions and their ongoing peacebuilding practice.

The methodology worked well in that it had various methods which were triangulated to confirm some of the data, but this exercise took a lot of time. The other major challenge with the approach of this study was developing a continuing relationship with the study community grounded in trust so that difficult issues could be raised and discussed to improve the quality of information that was being collected. Creating an understanding devoid of suspicion was crucially important and challenging at the same time. Again, the challenge of time was inherent in this relationship-building considering that the study period had deadlines.

10.4 CONCLUSION

This study allowed the researcher to appreciate the use of AR as a strategy for community peacebuilding in electoral conflicts and enabled the researcher to become immersed in the study community to an extent that he felt part of the community. It was amazing how

stories that were shared could change the atmosphere in a room and lead to feelings of sympathy and empathy. As the researcher, I felt a sense of restoration and realised I had become a bridge for the community while listening to the stories of the participants. Without doubt, storytelling demonstrated that it is a powerful tool that touches the very core of human feelings and creates bonds that one can never imagine. The study was a small project, but it did succeed to bring diverse electoral actors of the community to come and reason together. It is possible for local communities to own the peacebuilding and electoral conflict management process as long as the authorities recognise some of the facilitating values that lie in Indigenous knowledge systems. Complementarity between modern forms of conflict resolution and Indigenous forms can create an ideal way of addressing electoral conflicts. As long as CMC can make the process work without waiting for elections, it can leverage the community resources and knowledge to build sustainable electoral peace.

10.5 KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY IN ELECTORAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND PEACEBUILDING

An appropriate implementation of the storytelling intervention at community level as demonstrated in this study has the potential to reduce electoral conflicts as well as build peace. The intervention is recommended because it focuses on marginalised groups and broadens participation in the resolution of electoral conflicts. Storytelling is an ever-present resource in the community thereby making it a sustainable approach to peacebuilding. Storytelling as a community peacebuilding approach can spur interaction, lead to dialogue, enable consensus building and facilitate change of attitudes and perceptions.

The knowledge generated from this study is useful for policymakers in developing laws and policies to curb electoral conflicts in the communities during elections by way of analysing and designing peace interventions that are sustainable, located in the community and predisposed to promoting peaceful co-existence, enhancing diversity and social inclusion as well as cohesion among community members before, during and after elections. Another important dimension of this study in contributing to peacebuilding

discourse is that while storytelling has largely been used as folklore in society, the study demonstrated that the storytelling can also be applied in deepening electoral community peacebuilding and interaction among political contestants whereby they begin to shed prejudices and work together to solve common challenges. Storytelling as demonstrated in the study is also critical in enhancing social learning and transforming post-electoral conflict relationships among political contestants, community rivals and voters in ways which promote tolerance, co-existence, community cooperation and social cohesion.

This study makes a contribution in the peacebuilding field by identifying an already existing alternative technique within the culture and practice of the Zambian electorate that can improve the mediation process used by CMC to resolve electoral conflicts in Zambia. The study has presented a peacebuilding model which has been tested in the community and proved viable and can be replicated in other contexts. This finding is valuable because it draws attention to the need for complementarity between the methods used by informal and formal institutional processes as key elements of peacebuilding effectiveness. The study also confirms some of the major peacebuilding theories, particularly recent ones, in which the need to link peacebuilding methods to local ways of doing things is necessary. The study is also in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. (United Nations, 2016).

Furthermore, observations by other researchers that the increasing processes of globalisation have necessitated the incorporation of traditional approaches to conflict resolution into peacebuilding theories and practices, that have long been ignored by Western scholars on the basis that they lacked an empirical heritage (Boege, 2009; Schiff, 2013; Wanda, Muchemi & Kefa, 2019) makes this study relevant to the debate on Indigenous methods of conflict resolution discourse. In addition, the study is significant because it enhances the understanding of the role that communities play in peacebuilding, using restorative and Indigenous approaches such as storytelling in the resolution of electoral conflicts. As the UN New Agenda for Peace (2023) briefly explains, addressing the root causes of conflict and fragility, preventing conflict and peacebuilding

rest in supporting locally owned and nationally led peace and development pathways. Locally led, inclusive and people-centred prevention and peacebuilding efforts can empower communities who have the most to gain from social cohesion and sustaining peace (GPPAC, 2020).

With the paucity of published materials and studies on storytelling and its use in AR especially about the electoral process in Zambia, the study thus provides a basis for further studies in the application of the storytelling intervention in various areas of human endeavours using the action research approach. By gaining a deeper understanding of how stories function in elections and peacebuilding contexts, this thesis has developed a new storytelling-based model and contributed to the body of research on Indigenous approaches to building peace. It also encourages practitioner enquiry, reflection and collaboration as components to further articulate the field and expand practice.

10.6 PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

Without putting the burden and responsibility on communities themselves to negotiate sensitive political spaces on their own, ECZ and CMC with their community partners can engage a collective approach of support through the process of storytelling presented in this research study. Conflict management especially electoral mediation through storytelling, as revealed in this study, suggests potential outcomes when committing to practices that honour voters' lived experiences and providing productive space for participation in peacebuilding based on connection, dialogue, individual and collective action. The creative processes involved in collaborative storytelling include practices of negotiation and problem-solving as part of working together to create peaceful elections. This collaborative research with CMC illustrates some of the different ways of engaging in community in order to enhance social connection and political stability. This research is not prescriptive; instead, it suggests that even unpredictable circumstances are a part of peacebuilding in the community and that relationships can be enhanced as a result of those uncertainties. A relational approach as demonstrated by this thesis is a critical component of using creative methods to imagine a way forward together to confront electoral injustice, support community problem-solving and promote spaces for reflection,

learning, collaboration, connection and community peacebuilding where everyone can flourish.

Storytelling based on voters' lives was a significant source of information gathering that enhanced connected knowing during the research and allowed for developing goals for community-based action. An intentional approach to self-reflection, storytelling and resulting dialogue based on electoral conflicts have produced positive results. Based on this research, a practice of storying (Keevers et al., 2010) could be especially beneficial as part of establishing a renewed sense of connectedness as political parties and voters begin to appreciate hybrid capacities of institutions. Today's challenges call for a renewed focus on shared action through collaboration or coalition building that provides extended support networks for communities that face continued uncertainty of electoral conflicts.

The preliminary evaluation exercise demonstrated the success story of a community-based project collaborating with a district structure whose measure of success is that the project opened possibilities as it generated new ideas and new perspectives about use of storytelling particularly in electoral conflicts. The study showed that it is possible for CMCs to adapt and accommodate storytelling at the same time avoid a rigid and strict application of procedures during the mediation process.

The self-reported post-intervention was the increase in seeing storytelling as a peacebuilding tool rather than just a means of communication. The intervention also demonstrated that local actors can be effective participants in resolving their own electoral conflicts.

Regardless of the positive elements noted, the preliminary evaluation also showed that the ART is influenced by their composition and whom they are working with. In this instance, the community trusted the researcher who was part of the ART as a link to the CMC authorities. It was also evident that the actual implementation of the intervention strategy was more difficult and often triggered further emotional responses that required coping efforts for some participants who were directly affected by the electoral conflicts.

Lastly, the preliminary evaluation showed that the storytelling intervention had possibilities of expanding owing to the presence of community radio stations in every

constituency. This would facilitate the sharing of stories to a wider audience and spread the election peace and tolerance. It was also clear that to achieve the purpose of peacebuilding using stories the approach must be deliberate and intended as some stories can be destructive and spawn conflict. The evaluation also showed that the intervention can easily be negatively affected by the social media and digitisation of communication.

10.7 ENDING THE STORYTELLING INTERVENTION

The storytelling action cycle was driven by the aim and objectives set out in the study. Consequently, the cycle ended with the carrying out of a preliminary evaluation exercise. Although the cycle ended, the ART was desirous of further collaboration using the storytelling peacebuilding model and promised to lobby for its integration in the CMC mediation process with the CMC in Chongwe and the ECZ.

The participants in the project provided assurances that they were ready to continue discussing the use of storytelling further as long as they had the necessary support after the completion of the research project. They indicated that they would still require support and encouragement from the researcher to convince the election management authorities to buy into the idea. Thus, it was proposed that they phoned the researcher from time to time to provide updates on the process of trying to integrate storytelling or some of its aspects into the electoral conflict management mediation process.

10.8 REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH EXCURSION

Following an AR approach inevitably demands that at the end of the research process, a self-introspection exercise occurs. This section discusses the reflections. Undertaking this study was not only a deep experiential journey of self-awareness but also learning and empathising.

The AR study helped broaden perspectives about what may be insignificant to the majority and yet so crucial to individuals. The desire for respect and to be listened to may seem mundane to the general public but bring meaning, happiness and peace to

individuals in the community. According Mezirow (1996), it is only in the telling and listening that understanding can occur: then, solutions should be easier to develop.

The study enabled the researcher to clearly navigate the interactions between theory and practice. Sitting in a storytelling workshop with rival political party supporters, bringing them under the same roof, seeing them talk about their fears and expectations about the electoral process and experiences in a manner that manifested solidarity for human dignity was a worthwhile experience for the researcher. The storytelling escapades have such a strong bearing on the nature of the relationship between rival political party supporters. The researcher was quite overwhelmed by the sense of achievement that his team made away from desk review of literature and the usual intellectual approach to reasoning. This collaborative effort was not only deeply satisfying but also served as a realisation of how Indigenous approaches to resolving problems are neglected in the country and communities, yet the communities are available and ready to engage on matters that affect them. The missing link appears to be the appropriate strategies for entry and use to tap the local knowledge and resources to work alongside or in combination with the modern structures.

The end of the study was an opportunity to recognise that political tension and indulgence in electoral malpractice were largely driven by perceptions. This was demonstrated by the fact that discussions about political issues and elections between the study participants from rival political parties had considerably improved after the storytelling exercises. The focus was on those issues that were common to both camps of the political divide. It was a time to realise that a community peacebuilding approach can, after all, achieve results when it is well thought out and owned by the communities. The study participants insisted on praying together and offering a praise song at the beginning and end of the intergroup storytelling interventions. This was evidence that political tension was waning, and a sense of oneness was taking hold.

The observed changes corresponded with the theoretical frameworks of conflict transformation, group contact and social learning which underpinned this study. Storytelling proved to be a user friendly and effective intervention strategy in bringing relief and enabling participants in the study to appreciate the view point of the others

without necessarily being confrontational. Storytelling can certainly advance the cause of sustainable peace and promote constructive ways of managing electoral conflicts among people from opposing political persuasions. This was clearly demonstrated in the Chongwe constituency of the Chongwe District of Lusaka province during the AR. As a result of this study, the researcher has a whole new perspective on electoral conflict resolution and hopes communities can be made aware of the value of oral traditional storytelling in dealing with political and electoral conflicts. This research experience has also demonstrated that a combination of practical experience and classroom experience has a lasting impact on both the researcher and the research community. Although the study addressed only a minor part of the political problems, it has come up with a possible solution to electoral conflicts for communities and provided a model for working with CMCs in the country.

10.9 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The study required a lot of time and follow-up with participants and was thus confined to Madido ward. The study also produced copious volumes of information which were a challenge to manage and make sense of. Furthermore, the study focused only on those cases where complaints had been received and the individuals and communities were involved. As such, the results of this study cannot be generalised to other situations beyond the Madido ward, Chongwe constituency and Chongwe District CMC to which the research sample relates although lessons will be learned for application to other areas.

10.10 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

By employing storytelling as an indigenous peace building tool, the study unravels and underscores the use of untapped potential of community-based approaches in resolving electoral conflicts. The study has contributed to theory and practice by demonstrating the human and relational aspects of peacebuilding, which are often overlooked in conventional conflict resolution paradigms.

This study not only validates the relevance of action research in generating impactful and sustainable outcomes but also bridges the gap between traditional knowledge systems

and modern peace building frameworks. The proposed storytelling-based peace building model offers a framework that communities and policymakers can adapt to foster dialogue, empathy, and social cohesion. The integration of this model with the existing Conflict Management Committees (CMCs) holds significant promise for locally enhancing electoral peace in Zambia and beyond. This study also provides a critical lens through which to view the interplay of indigenous practices and global peace building efforts. It advances scholarly debates and offers practical recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

10.11 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings from this from this study, the following recommendations are made:

- a) There is need for remodelling the CMC practice so that both storytelling and the current mediation practice can complement each other so that it is a platform where people listen to each other by way of sharing emotions and feelings and address the electoral offences according to the law. This, in essence, implies remodelling the current CMC mediation format.
- b) Decentralising CMC structures especially with the inclusion of storytelling practice at the community level would have some advantages in that there would be improved voter or citizen motivation to have their matters heard in a familiar setting where they live. In addition, CMC members lower down the chain of authority can make decisions to suit their local area and satisfy contestants. Decentralising the CMC would also be less costly for community members and allow the local community to take ownership and more responsibility for the conduct of the voters and contestants in their community.
- c) In order to make conflict management and peacebuilding sustainable, there is need for local capacity building that can take advantage of storytelling as an already existing community resource. Storytelling only needs to be integrated in the conflict management practice and this will enhance community peacebuilding infrastructure.

- d) The CMC must build capacity at the lowest levels of community by investing time and other resources in between election cycles and not during an election period as building a culture of peace is a long-term process that requires consistency and thus continuous practice and awareness in the community.
- e) The CMC should support local communities affected by electoral conflicts to engage continuously and effectively with local community processes that support peaceful elections, inclusiveness and equal participation of men and women in the electoral process.
- f) Peacebuilding interventions must be an integration of the bottom-up approach and top-down practice where the two forms are collaborative. This would enable durable and sustainable peace to be achieved during the electoral cycle. Communities must be involved in the formulation of intervention strategies that are intended to benefit them as that promotes ownership of the peacebuilding intervention. In this way, the peacebuilding programmes for the communities will not be forgotten and fail.

10.12 AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Based on the key findings from this study the following thematic areas are recommended for further research:

- Connecting CMC electoral conflict management and mediation to reconciliation, healing and coping skills.
- Locating oral traditional storytelling as a peacebuilding mechanism within the liberal national and international peace infrastructures.
- Comparing the efficacy of storytelling as a community peacebuilding intervention for electoral conflicts in urban, peri-urban and rural communities.

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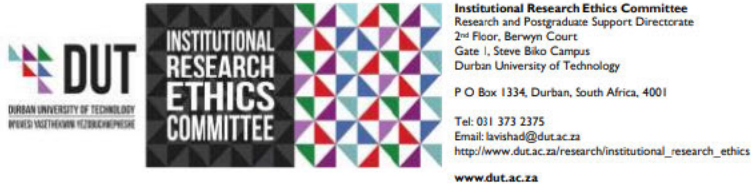
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL.



1 August 2022

Mr M L Habasonda
University of Zambia
GMS dept., P.O. Box 32379
Lusaka
Zambia

Dear Mr Habasonda

Storytelling and Electoral Conflicts: a community approach to peacebuilding, Munali, Lusaka, Zambia.
Ethical Clearance number IREC 085/22

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letter.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely

Prof J K Adam
Chairperson: DUT-IREC

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF PERMISSION TO ECZ (THE GATE KEEPER)

The Director,

Electoral Commission of Zambia

Lusaka

1st June, 2021

Dear Sir

RE: PERMISSION TO BE ATTACHED TO THE CHONGWE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

My name is Lee M Habasonda, I am currently registered for a PhD in Peacebuilding at the Durban University of Technology. I would like to be loosely attached to the Chongwe district conflict management committee to research on storytelling and electoral conflicts using the mediation cases that the committee has handled.

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 “Storytelling and Electoral Conflicts: a community approach to Peacebuilding”.

The study intends to use action research to contribute to strengthening the community approach to electoral peacebuilding through conflict management committees. The study will be centred on electoral conflicts in Chongwe constituency that were handled and mediated by the Chongwe district conflict management committee during the 2021 general elections in Zambia.

The idea is to follow up on the cases of mediation and reconciliation in communities where the conflict parties live and use the storytelling model to develop, implement and evaluate an intervention strategy to enhance its use by the conflict management committees. 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 participants. I do hope that I will be granted permission to work with the Chongwe district conflict management committee to undertake my study.

Should you have any problems or queries then please contact me on +260977858482/ +2600766421765, my supervisor Dr. Sylvia Blanche Kaye on +27-31-373-6860 or the Institutional Research Ethics Administrator on 031 373 2375. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: Research, Innovation and Engagement Prof S Moyo on 031 373 2577 or moyos@dut.ac.za.

yours Faithfully

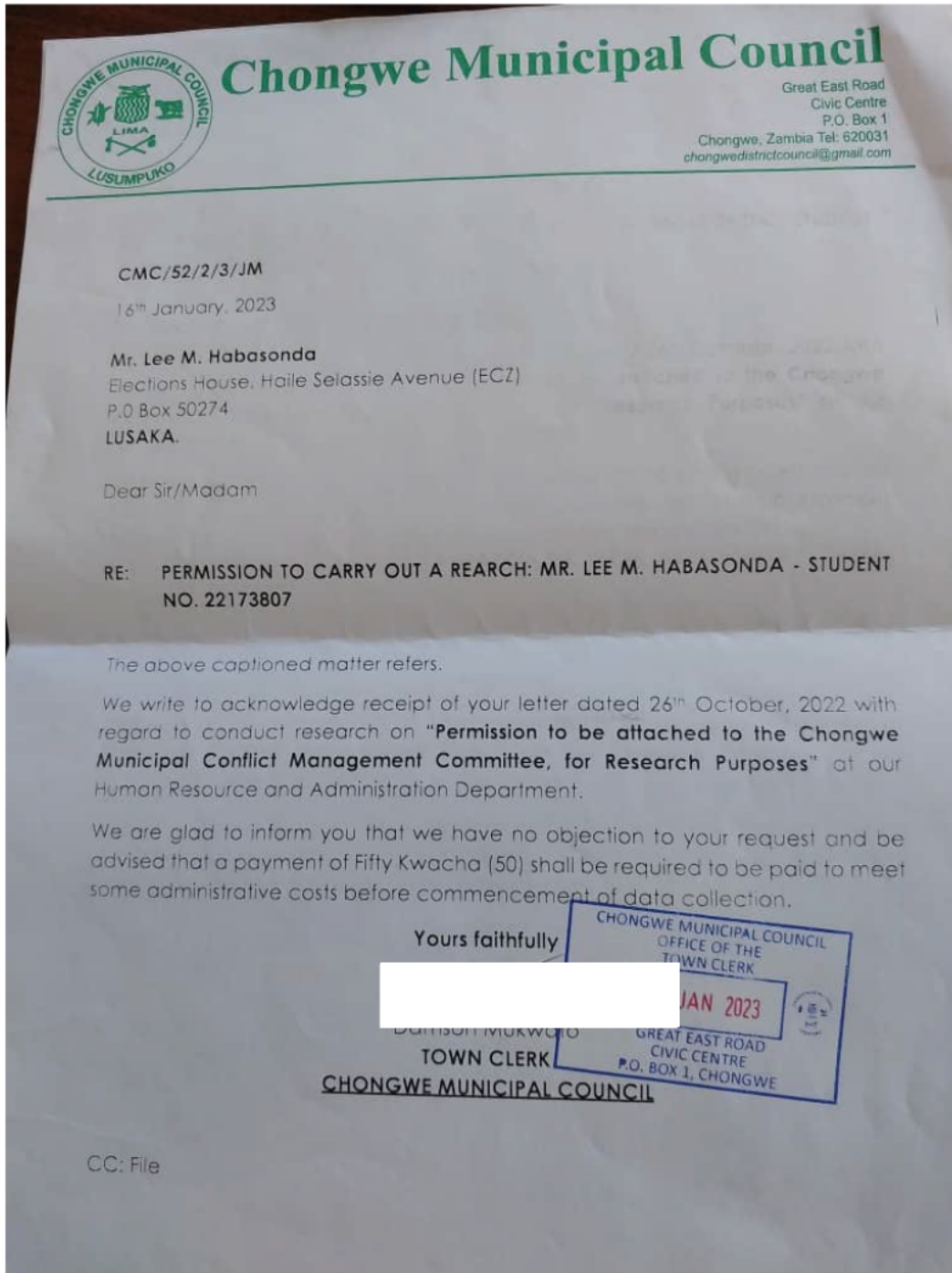
Lee M Habasonda

Student: 22173807

Phone: +260977858482

Email: lee.habasonda@unza.zm.

APPENDIX C: GATE KEEPERS LETTER



APPENDIX D: LETTER OF INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM



Key Informant Interview Research Tool

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: My name is Lee Habasonda and I am studying for a PhD Degree in Peacebuilding with Durban University of Technology. I am undertaking an action research study titled, storytelling and electoral conflicts: a community approach to peacebuilding in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province.

Ethical Note

Would you agree to be interviewed for the study? The interview will take approximately 60 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 on +260977858482 or my supervisor Dr Sylvia B Kaye on Tel: +27-373-6860

APPENDIX E: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.

Interview questions

1. Are you aware of the prevalence and nature of electoral conflicts in the community including the mediation process by the Chongwe district conflict management committee that takes place during election periods?
2. If yes, explain.
3. Do you think it is a good idea for CMCs to invite only persons who are involved in the electoral conflict to appear before the committee to tell their stories?
4. Is it important for the community where the accuser and accused come from to be involved in the mediation and reconciliation process to tell their stories about the conflict? Justify.
5. Are stories a good way of understanding and resolving electoral conflicts? Or Can stories be understood as a form of peacebuilding? Motivate.
6. Do you think the hearing of stories of the conflicting parties during mediation and reconciliation process should be held in the community or continue to be heard at the civic center?
7. Is there any way that storytelling can improve the mediation process at CMC?
8. How can we involve the communities in resolving the disputes through the CMCs?
9. Do you think the current mediation and reconciliation process is satisfactory for conflict resolution and community peacebuilding? Why is it so or why not?
10. Do you think there are any advantages of holding mediation meetings in the communities where electoral conflicts occur?

End.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX F: FGD PROTOCOL

Interview Guide for community members on electoral conflict mediation by CMC

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: My name is Lee Habasonda and I am studying for a PhD Degree in Peacebuilding with Durban University of Technology.

I am undertaking an action research study titled storytelling and electoral conflicts: a community approach to peacebuilding in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province.

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 on +260977858482 or my supervisor Dr Sylvia B Kaye on Tel: +27-373-6860

Instructions

- i) Group members to introduce themselves
- ii) Respect each other and allow everyone to contribute.

Male	Female
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The specific FGDs questions are:

In your view, how has the Chongwe constituency been exposed to electoral conflicts in the last general elections? What is the nature and frequency of these conflicts?

Have you taken any electoral conflicts to the CMC?

What happens when one takes a complaint to the CMC?

What effect has the mediation by CMCs had on:

a. The attitudes of members of communities towards the CMCs in Chongwe?

b. The behaviour of members of your community?

c. The electoral conflicts and reconciliation process in the community?

V. How can community members in Chongwe apart from the conflict parties also tell their stories to the CMC to ensure that conflicts in the communities do not escalate?

VI. Are stories a good way of resolving electoral conflicts in the community? In other words, can stories be understood as a form of peacebuilding? Motivate.

VII. Are there ways of promoting storytelling in the mediation process by CMC in Chongwe? If yes name them and explain their effectiveness?

VIII. In your view, what contribution can storytelling make in community peacebuilding working together with the CMC in Chongwe?

IX. What challenges do you think the storytelling approach to community peacebuilding is likely to face working alongside the CMC mediation process in Chongwe?

X. What do you suggest to address these challenges?

XI. How can the community participate in making the mediation process locally owned in the community and include all the affected members to reconcile?

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX G: PERSONAL NARRATIVE GUIDE

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: My name is Lee Habasonda and I am studying for a PhD Degree in Peacebuilding with Durban University of Technology.

I am undertaking an action research study titled storytelling and electoral conflicts: a community approach to peacebuilding in Chongwe constituency of Lusaka province.

Ethical Note

Would you agree to give a personal narrative for the study? The interview will take approximately 60 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 analysed together with other narratives and only the overall 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 on +260977858482 or my supervisor Dr Sylvia B Kaye on Tel: +27-373-6860

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself.
2. Tell me about the electoral conflict that got you to the CMC.
3. How did you actually handle it?
4. How did you communicate to others?
5. Did you feel you were telling a story at the CMC?
6. What are your views about the role of storytelling at CMC?
7. What are your views about the CMC mediation and reconciliation process?
8. Is there a role for the community?

9. Are stories and storytelling a way to further bring the work of CMCs into the community?

10. From your experience, what is the best way for CMC to resolve electoral conflicts and enhance reconciliation for both individuals and communities?

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate it.

APPENDIX H: OBSERVATION STUDY GUIDE FOR WORKSHOPS AND SESSIONS

Item no.	Area of observation	Notes
	Behaviour –what, by whom and where, power relations	
	Conversation- what, by who, where? Who is dominating and driving the agenda	
	Context/situation –what else is happening around?	
	Process- who is doing what and how is it being done? dynamics	
	Patterns of interactions- timing, nature and action intervals	
	Setting –who is present, sitting positions, recognition protocols etc.	

APPENDIX I: REGISTER OF ATTENDEES FOR FGDS

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Register of Attendees for Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Item No.	Name	Surname	Organisational affiliation

APPENDIX J: POST WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

Questions for the ART team and participants.

1. What kinds of changes or connections did you see in participants in the storytelling workshop?
2. Please describe from your perspective how storytelling might be used for electoral conflict peacebuilding programs?
3. Where do think stories and storytelling would work best as a tool for Electoral conflict management and community peacebuilding? What situations or settings where storytelling would not work as a tool for community peacebuilding?
4. How did this workshop using storytelling, connect to electoral conflict management mediation process?
5. How do you feel being involved in this kind of workshop will make it easier for communities to be formally involved in electoral peacebuilding work in the future?
6. How has your perspective changed since the start of the workshops? If so, in what way?

APPENDIX K: ELECTORAL CODE OF CONDUCT

*Supplement to the Republic of Zambia Government
Gazette dated Friday, 12th August, 2016*

647

GOVERNMENT OF ZAMBIA

STATUTORY INSTRUMENT NO. 62 OF 2016

The Electoral Process Act, 2016 (Act No. 35 of 2016)

The Electoral Process (Code of Conduct) (Enforcement) Regulations, 2016

ARRANGEMENT OF REGULATIONS

Regulation

1. Title
2. Interpretation
3. Notification of breach of Code
4. Referral of complaint or allegation
5. Determination of complaint by district conflict management committee
6. Review of decision by National Conflict Management Committee
7. Decision by Commission
8. Disqualification of candidate or political party

*Copies of this Statutory Instrument can be obtained from the Government Printer,
P.O. Box 30136, 10101, Lusaka, Price K8.00 each*

IN EXERCISE of the powers contained in section *one hundred* and *twenty-five* of the Electoral Process Act, 2016, the following Regulations are made:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. These Regulations may be cited as the Electoral Process (Code of Conduct) (Enforcement) Regulations, 2016.</p> | Title |
| <p>2. In these Regulations, unless the context otherwise requires, words and expressions have the meaning assigned to them in the Act.</p> | Interpretation |
| <p>3. (1) A person who witnesses a breach of the Code or alleges that a candidate or political party has breached the Code shall notify the Commission of the breach of the Code, in writing.</p> <p>(2) The Commission may, on its own motion, take notice of any breach of the Code.</p> | Notification of breach of Code |
| <p>4. The Commission shall, within forty-eight hours of receipt of a complaint or allegation of breach of the Code, refer the complaint or allegation to the district conflict management committee in the area in which the breach occurs for determination.</p> | Referral of complaint or allegation |
| <p>5. (1) A district conflict management committee shall—</p> <p>(a) upon receipt of a complaint, issue a notice of hearing to the candidate or political party complained against and to the complainant, specifying the date, time and venue of the hearing;</p> <p>(b) attach the written complaint or allegation to the notice issued to the candidate or political party under paragraph (a); and</p> <p>(c) hear the complaint or allegation within twenty-four hours of the receipt of the complaint or allegation.</p> <p>(2) The determination of a matter before a district conflict management committee shall be by consensus and in the absence of that consensus, according to the votes of the majority of the members present and considering the matter.</p> <p>(3) A district conflict management committee shall, at the conclusion of a hearing, evaluate the facts and make recommendations on the matter to the National Conflict Management Committee.</p> | Determination of complaint by district conflict management committee |
| <p>6. (1) The National Conflict Management Committee may, where it considers it necessary, adopt a recommendation made by the district conflict management committee.</p> | Review of decision by National Conflict Management Committee |

(2) The National Conflict Management Committee shall, after review of the decision of a district conflict management committee, make recommendations on the matter to the Commission within forty-eight hours of the review.

Decision by
Commission

7. (1) The Commission shall hear a complaint within seventy-two hours of the receipt of the recommendation on the complaint of the National Conflict Management Committee.

(2) The Commission shall afford the parties to the complaint an opportunity to be heard on the recommendations submitted by the National Conflict Management Committee.

(3) The Commission may adopt, modify or vary the recommendation made by the National Conflict Management Committee.

Dis-
qualification
of candidate
or political
party

8. The Commission shall, where it finds a candidate or political party in breach of the Code, disqualify the candidate or political party from participating as a candidate or political party in an election in the district, constituency or ward concerned.

Made by the Electoral Commission of Zambia this 9th day of August, 2016.

JUSTICE E. E. CHULU,
Chairperson

JUSTICE C. S. MUSHABATI,
Member

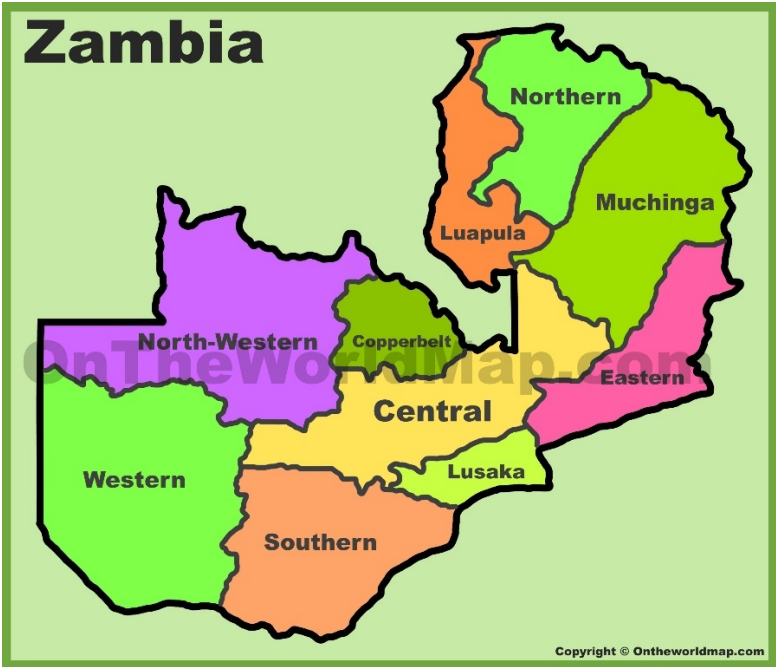
DR. F. NG'ANDU,
Member

DR. E. J. SIKAZWE,
Member

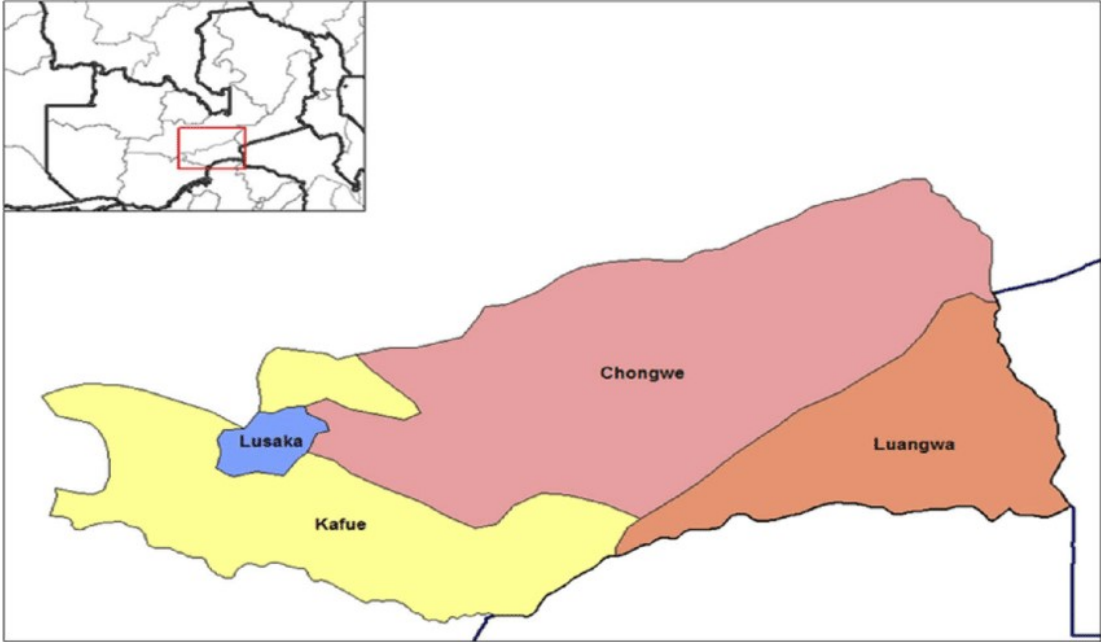
D. MATONGO,
Member

LUSAKA
[EC.101/5/2]

APPENDIX L: LOCATION OF STUDY MAPS



Map of Chongwe



APPENDIX M: TURNITIN REPORT

APPENDIX N: EDITING CERTIFICATE