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Harnessing African Wisdom through Community Entrepreneurship: The Adoption of the Zunde Ramambo Concept in Zimbabwe: A Case of Mambo (Chief) Neshangwe in Chikomba District-Chivhu Area

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Abstract:

Community entrepreneurship has been at the heart of the Shona people in Zimbabwe. In it has been a long-time practice of the chiefs and communal populace in which they had to take care of the have-nots in order to sustain family ties and community parse. This paper focuses on the Zunde culture as an entrepreneurial drive that reduces poverty and upgrade community living standards, especially rural societies in Zimbabwe. Chief Neshangwe in the Chivhu area was selected for case reference and the major finding was that, indeed there was active entrepreneurial efforts to ensure that individuals and society at large enjoys from projects undertaken under the guidance of a given chief or Mambo. There is however need to enhance and involve every member of the community in these projects and promote a culture of creativity and innovation. A model to enhance food security coined ZUCHA is proposed for adoption by policy makers.

Keywords: Community entrepreneurship, Zunde raMambo, Social welfare, ZUCHA

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is a country that is situated 16 and 32 degrees east. Its land area is 390 757 square kilometres and the current population is around 15 million (CSO, 2013). Chivhu is a town located along Masvingo-Harare highway and is about 150 km from Masvingo. Chief Neshangwe area is found in the Eastern side of Chivhu, about 80 km from the town, and adjacent to Buhera District. Almost 90% of the population in the area is Shona speaking, with 10% constituting other tribes such as the Tonga and Kalanga (UNICEF, 2000). The majority of families in this area survive through farming hence the issue of food security-the Zunde raMambo (ZrM) concept being a central theme in the study.

1.1. Overview to Shona Culture

Positive scholarship on African culture, in general, and the Shona culture in particular cannot be disputed. Chimhundu (1980), Samkange (1980), Hamutyinei (1999) have undertaken studies focusing on Shona culture, setting a precedent for future researches. The common theme from these studies is the selflessness, unity, love and passion that the Shona people have over one another. In his book, *The Genuine Shona*, Gelfand does observe that the Shonas have a high moral system where he says: "the Shonas have clear concepts of the virtues and vices and they have much to say about the aberrations of personality. So, they have a definite idea of what constitutes behaviour in their society and its importance. Good relations between one man and another are bound to suffer if one should commit an anti-social act" Shona virtues were socially determined and in line with their conception of virtue (Mangiza, 1985). According to Shona culture, life is lived in the community. Thus, to be a human being is to attire one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and on that basis, establish humane relations with them. The Zunde raMambo concept cannot be discussed in isolation without hinting on this brief background of what it is to be a Shona.

1.2. Zunde raMambo Concept

An understanding of the concept of Zunde is critical in understanding this study. Zunde is a Shona word that refers to a large gathering of people participating in a common activity or it is plenty of grain stored for future use by people in a particular community (Stathers et al, 2000). Simply put Zunde loosely refers to Chief's granary (Dhemba, et al, (2002). Zunde raMambo is a traditional social welfare (Social community entrepreneurship system) in Zimbabwe (Stathers et al, 2001). The Chief is expected to look after the welfare of his/her people and Zunde is one way. Historically, and even today, the primary objective of Zunde is to ensure that:

- A Given community have adequate food reserves that can be used in times of food shortages.
- Increase community sociability
- Solve domestic and family problems
- Promote self-reliance among communities

The practice itself provides a safety net (social enterprising) for villagers and does guarantee food security at all times (Dhemba, 2000). The continuous spells of drought in many parts of Zimbabwe requires contingency and social entrepreneurship plans to ensure that when there is a dry spell, families are not found wanting. It should be noted that this form of social security existed before the colonization of Zimbabwe. In general, the implementers of the Zunde raMambo in Zimbabwe are the Chiefs. Chief Neshangwe, like his counterparts in Chikomba district-Chief Mutekedza saw it fit to adopt the Zunde raMambo concept, in order to ease poverty in his area. This study therefore was carried in Chikomba District where Chief Neshangwe area lies.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The present experiences in which families, especially in the rural areas face food shortages due to unreliable rains is a cause for concern. This problem has been exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in which many of the families are child-headed, making life miserable for many families in Chief Neshangwe area. Support by non-Governmental Organisations, and Social welfare institutions are not an answer to these permanent foreseeable problems in our communities. This study is motivated by the need to engage both communities and policy makers to practically consider entrepreneurial strategies needed to eliminate the food insecurities faced by our people through promoting “the Zunde raMambo practice” which in this study is coined me ‘community entrepreneurship’.

1.4. Research Questions

Give the above statement of the problem above, the study posits the following questions:

- Is the Zunde raMambo practice a panacea to problems of “food insecurity” and entrepreneurial enhancement in the rural Zimbabwe?
- What support services are needed to strengthen this community social entrepreneurship practice?

1.5. Research Objectives

The above research questions need to be translated into enumerable tenets: Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

To assess the significance of Zunde raMambo practice as an intervention measure as well an entrepreneurial driver to avert problems of food insecurity in the rural Zimbabwe

To identify key support services required for the successful implementation of the Zunde entrepreneurship drive.

1.6. Significance of the Study

Zunde raMambo is a traditional practice (akin to social community entrepreneurship in the modern world) whereby the Chief oversees the production of crops and collection of yield for communal consumptions in times of needy. This study provides insights both at National and local levels in terms of what strategies should be put in place to provide safety nets (food security) in times of needy. Government is able to formulate practically-oriented policies based on the Zunde operational model, discussed in this study. The Chiefs and the community will benefit by adopting the tents of community entrepreneurship, and recommendation from the study. Researchers interested in this concept can further interrogate this type of research and link with other disciplines; hence contribute to knowledge gaps in the discipline.

2.Literature Review

As already alluded to, it is difficulty to translate the word Zunde into English. Zunde is not a cooperative or club of persons but merely a practice embedded in African wisdom, a culture of bringing people to share their labour, their social, economic and spiritual life. Historically the Zunde practice operated at three levels: the household, the village and at the Chief level (Sibanda and Mhunduru, 1999). The Chief of a given area is the custodian of the practice. What happens is that the responsible Chief, assigns a place of land for the purpose (Zunde raMambo) at his/her compound. Members of the community provide their labour on a voluntary basis even though they do not all necessarily benefit directly from the harvest. The members of the community take turns to participate in the entire production process from ploughing and sowing to weeding (Mararike, 2001).

Historically, and even today all members of the community were entitled to benefit from the reserves, with priority given to older persons, widows, orphans and persons with disabilities. Traditionally, the food reserves benefited the Chief’s soldiers, given their role in protecting the entire community. Travellers and destitute also benefited while ceremonies as well as funerals and any other social gatherings could be given a share. The community was thus motivated to provide their labour for Zunde raMambo voluntarily because they benefited from the security and protection provided by the soldiers.

The Zunde raMambo philosophy was perceived not only was a crop production activity whose main objective was to address food shortages, but was also perceived as a social, economic and political rallying mechanisms (Mararike, 2001). This voluntary participation helps to sharpen community sense of belonging and identity. Thus, it does reinforce solidaristic relationships in the community. To me this practice is indeed an entrepreneurship show, a community solidarity and innovativeness, a purposeful partnering approach to social, economic and spiritual security. It is fundamental to point out that Zunde raMambo schemes disappeared during the colonial period (pre-1980 period) following the establishment of new power structures by the colonial regime (Sonza et al, 2000). This new power structures curtailed the powers of responsibilities of Chiefs. The move was possibly just meant to kill the creativity within communities and create gaps such that communities would eventually become beggars.

2.1. Revival and or-reengineering the Zunde raMambo Concept

Ten years after independence, there was general talk from all corners of the country, for the need to revive the Zunde practice. The traditional leaders had complained to government about the growing levels of malnutrition in rural areas and the general levels of poverty (Sibanda and Mhunduru, 1999). The HIV/AIDS pandemic also left a lot of families headed by children raising fears of food security for the affected families. The continued absence of rainfall and HIV/AIDS pandemic, and the disintegration of the extended family system necessitated the need to have the Zunde raMambo practice re-established in various parts of the country. This practice will continuously be referred to as the “African food Security model” as the “food contingency model in an important development to the upkeep of ubuntuism/hunhuism, which was discussed in detail in one of Gwakwa’s papers on the Betrayal of ubuntuism/hunhuism in Africa. The re-establishment of the Zunde raMambo concept is a move to revive and restore African wisdom and the much-cherished indigenous knowledge system—a community entrepreneurship practice needed to enhance performance of communities from social to economic spheres.

2.2. Role of Chief Makoni

In discussing the revival of Zunde raMambo, in Zimbabwe, it will be an incomplete story, if the role of Chief Makoni is not given attention. The issue is that during the 1994/95 agricultural season, Chief Makoni in the Makoni District of Manicaland Province, decided to revive the Zunde RaMambo practice. Mambo Makoni was able then, to designate land for Zunde raMambo in order to grow food crops for distribution to the needy whenever the need arises. Thus, the programme worked on the basis of mobilising people to work in the designated fields on a voluntary basis (Dhemba et al, 2000). Zunde raMambo is now practised countrywide and has even caught global attention. For example, the food and Agricultural Organisation, a United Nations body, acknowledge in one of its reports that Zunde raMambo could be an important mechanism for community mobilisation to improve nutrition security: (Moho, 1997). Of significance to note is that after having pioneered the Zunde raMambo programme, Mambo Makoni is now working on mobilising his people and support another cause, that borrows heavily from Zunde raMambo. The Makoni District Household Tree Planting Programme whose objective is to rainforest the region.

2.3. Role of Government

The government is a key stakeholder in the Zunde raMambo practice. In fact, government has to plan a critical role in marketing and promoting the practice to all Mambo and communities, bearing in mind that the success of the Zunde practice will reduce governmental burden on its fiscus. The moment communities are able to self-sustain their food requirements through various entrepreneurial innovations; government can then focus its energy and resources on other sectors of the economy. The role of government should be in terms of formulating working policies, markets and promotion and providing inputs to the process (Traditional Leaders’ Act, 1988). People in the communities will take ownership of the processes and the programme if they are guaranteed support. This may call for the establishment of incorrupt structures that will see the effective and efficient delivery of services.

2.4. Voluntarism Philosophy

The nature of Zunde programmes is purely based on volunteering individual services. Given the nature of Zimbabwe culture, people are willing to provide that service without being coerced to do so. Community participation is based on the respect that the Chief commands from his people. The study reiterates that community participation in the context of Zimbabwe should be viewed from its historical and cultural perspectives. Under colonial rule, people did not participate in their development (Sonza et al, 2000). According to observations of many stakeholders, after independence there was emphasis and enthusiasm to build the nation, which enhanced a participation approach in development programmes including in the area of food security and nutrition. Again, as alluded to earlier on, there is also the cultural context to it where involvement through respect is vital. If a traditional Chief invites community members to participate in what a chief proposes, they will do so because they trust his concern for their welfare. While appreciative of the revival of Zunde studies undertaken by the Universities of Zimbabwe/University of Health (2000) and by Dhemba (2000) indicate that in some area, communities had little understanding of the objective of the Zunde. Some community members felt that perhaps they were producing food for the Chiefs, participating where the plots for such farms were provided by the Chiefs.

2.5. Levels of Zunde Hierarchy

As already alluded to earlier on, the where three basic levels at which the Zunde philosophy operated and still operates:

2.5.1. Zunde raMambo at the Chief’s Level

The chief set a piece of land where his subjects would come and cultivate and the food was used to feed disadvantaged members of communities and feed guests who would be hosted by the Chief. Around 1950s and during the war of liberation, the practice was temporarily shelved as a result of many factors including influence of western cultures, reduction of polygamy, introduction of supplementary feeding programmes and their settlement of the rural communities soon after independence (Stathers et al, 2000).

2.5.2. Zunde at the Village Level

Villages are headed by Kraal heads and this is still the case to date. The village head had also to allocate a piece of land for purposes of getting yields which were meant for Zunde.

2.5.3. Zunde at Household Level

Polygamism was quite active in Chief Neshangwe area before the coming of the whites. The polygamy men would allocate a piece of land to each wife. The husband had his own land which would be cultivated by everyone. The grain from the husband's granary would only be distributed to wives facing as serious challenge in terms of their food requirements.

2.6. Data Gathering Methods

The study employed a combination of a number of conventional data gathering methods. The first step was to undergo a thorough diagnosis of existing studies on the subject matter

(Literature review). In this case the study used library and archival material to build the background information concerning the study at hand. The second approach which was more intensive was the use of contemporary techniques. This became the primary method in which first hand inquiry became the focus. I visited Chikomba District and spend one working week in Chief Neshangwe area where I carried out in depth interviews with the Chief himself, his people including the sadunhu (Headmans) and sabhukus (village heads). In total, thirty-eight (38) interviews were carried. Conveniently, 15 villagers gathered at a "beer gathering" and "nhimbe" event when I carried field visits. Hence, two adhoc focus group interviews were held at the respective places. I also used observations technique in the process. The qualitative techniques were adopted more in comparison to quantitative. My belief, like those who subscribe to multi-disciplinary approaches, is that no data gathering techniques is sufficient on its own in exploring adequately development dynamics. Triangulation of research methods, therefore provides reliability and validates findings of this study.

2.7. Reflection on Some Ethical Issues

Doing social science research in a village setting is not as easy as we may assume, if proper protocols are not followed. Firstly, there is need to access villagers' expectations on the nature of research and my role was inclined to ensure the application and employment of ethical tenets that did not injure the cultural aspects of the people in the area. Given that research is an exploration of social reality which is expected eventually to assist sections of the community or individuals to fulfil their survival strategies. Some major challenges included difficulties on interviewing wives whose husbands were not present. We then had to retain sufficient professional distance in order to gauge the extent of internal social differentiation. Ethical issues in rural settings requires one to be patient and listen with what we will refer to as "three ears" in order to be able to get to the root of what one is seeking. This enabled us to work hand and glove with the villagers who freed themselves and provided information on Zunde raMambo without resistance.

3. Results

The results of the study are presented in two stages. The first presentation of results is from desk review research and the second part is results from primary study from Chief Neshangwe, his leadership and the people under his chiefdoms on the subject of the Zunde philosophy. Data was gathered through interviews, observations and discussions. Evidence from literature reviewed shows that Zunde raMambo practice was reviewed around mid-1990s after pressure was exerted on government to provide and support community to avert poverty in rural areas and food security at large. The traditional leaders Act Chapter 29:17 of 1998 provide a basis on the role of Chiefs of which the Zunde project is one. Researchers such as Claude Mararike (2001), Tagwirei J and Graner T, 1994, Mott-cw/University of Zimbabwe, 2000, UNICEF,2000, Souza T, Katenen S and Mtisi S, 2000, Jothan Dhemba et al, 2000; Stathers et al,2000) have been enumerated in the study of Zunde raMambo and community programmes. In many cases, the studies concurred on the importance of Zunde raMambo and also on the challenge it meets in implementation. However, my study is somehow two thronged and different to many of these in that, I have attempted to provide a working model that the government can adopt and implement for sustainable management of Zunde raMambo. This model is called Zunde Chapter (ZUCHA).

The starting point was to get to know whether their Chief had taken heed of the need to establish "the Zunde granary" and hear how he operationalised it. The Chief indicated categorically that, Zunde practice was prevalent in his area, and was actively practised. He alluded that, "he has allocated close to one hundred hectares land for that purpose in his area. During the rainy season, people in his chiefdom, cultivate, sow, weed and harvest the crops which included maize, rapoko, round nuts and groundnuts. Apart from the allocated land for the purpose of Zunde, he explained that he has empowered Headman and Village heads to also identify pieces of land designated for that purposes, and they also create sub-granaries. This then is an element of de-centralising the Zunde practice, which makes the community feel honoured and respected hence are able to volunteer their services without being co-erced. Below is a brief of my interview with the Chief:

3.1. Researcher: Can you please shed light on the Zunde raMambo programme

Mambo Neshangwe: As a people, guided by our culture and moral values, we agreed to start re-establishing the Zunde raMambo granaries, which I am in charge of. This has been on far more than a decade now. What I did, is that we had our meeting with headmen, Kraal heads and Village Committees, and our people to discuss on food shortages in the area. I then allocated a piece of land specifically for that purpose. Communities under my chiefdom make turns to work in the field, and we have chosen one day per week for that purpose. The programme is purely voluntary and we do not force anyone. We are doing very well although we meet a number of challenges. We encourage people to bring in new ideas as part of community enterprising process".

3.2. Researcher: Thank you Mambo, so who are the beneficiaries of the system?

Mambo Neshangwe: We have identified people who are expected to get a share of the proceeds such as old people, orphans, child-headed families, destitute, my soldiers and employees get a share. Sometimes, if they are funerals and other important gatherings, we provide for. In fact, all members of the community benefit. It is not easy to say who exactly but when there is drought; affected families will receive aid from our Zunde.

3.3. Researcher: What challenges, are you facing?

Mambo Neshangwe: Ah, we have quite a number of them; we need government support to provide inputs for farming. Sometimes these inputs delay, and affect our timing. The other major challenge is that rains are not predictable, and hence we fail to harvest meaningfully, making the project unhelpful. Lastly, we have people in the communities who do not want to participate in these programmes, especially the youth; they do not turn up for duty. We are however continuing to sell the benefits to them of involving themselves in continuing programmes.

3.4. Researcher: Thank you Mambo, I wish you success in your endeavour.

The above is a summary of the long interview which took more than two hours.

The same sentiments disclosed by the Chief were also disclosed by the headmen and people in the communities.

“We are happy that during times of shortages of food, we seek help from our Reserves though not satisfactory”

“The families that have been affected by HIV/AIDS pandemic and our elders’ communities are supported heavily from this programme.

“With the death of the extended family system, Zunde has come at the right time.

“The problem that we have, is that some people politicize this thing, and hence do not volunteer their services, yet at one time they become beneficiaries”

The general consensus by more than 90% of them respondents is that the Zunde raMambo was an important practice, and a gesture of goodwill. To them it represented more than the need to provide food security, but provided a social bond and eased communication under the same Chief.

4. Discussion

Based on information gathered, the Zunde raMambo is a practice that needs to be popularised as it has multiple benefits. First and foremost, maintaining food reserves is a noble thing to do, where the future is uncertain. In fact, from a cultural position, we can only be well, if others are well. That is the basis of ubuntuism. Zunde raMambo takes care of the needy in our society. It calls for community entrepreneurship. It is both a social and economic intervention tool and hence brings happiness to many families, communities and government at large. The sustainable adoption of the concept is the duty of every person while there was little evidence of community-initiated activity, except in the case of 60% of the groups, traditional community participation could occur out of respect for the Chief rather than as an outcome of self needs, especially with inputs in this area. Where the Chief commanded, and enjoyed the respect of the people, it was easy for him to mobilise them, but that did not necessarily imply participation has been undertaken (Mararike, 2001). The study shows that in general, community involvement is a key ingredient towards the attainment of Zunde goals. The success of the Zunde raMambo under Chief Neshangwe can be attributed to continuous engagement of the community and empowering them to make suggests which are adopted for implementation. The longer threat is that several non-Governmental organisations come to provide food hand-outs in the area, and this undermines the Chief’s power to mobilize his people, who know very well that, for the same cause, they will receive free handouts at no cost. Institutionalising and provision of sustainable sub-programme seem lacking and hence, the need to re-form strategies on enhancing the Zunde raMambo concept. The major strength appeared to be reduction in malnutrition, reduction in criminal activities as men and boys devote their time to Zunde activities and entrepreneurial skills development. On the same note the challenges faced included villagers no longer having time to do other activities as they could be called for duty even on undesignated days and they were not getting fed during the Zunde project. In addition to this the study shows that storage facilities for the grains were inadequate, problems and shortage of draught power and lack of rainfall resulting in continued droughts.

5. Recommendations

There is need to create a National Zunde strategic framework formulated under what the study refers to as: ZUNDE CHAPTER (ZUCHA). This framework will provide for the creation of a National ladder Zunde system organised under the following system:

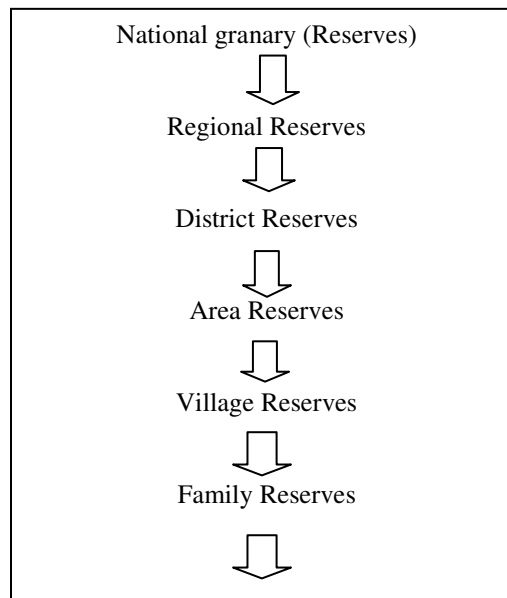


Figure 1

Source: Self-created (2016)

The six-ladder Zunde concept, above will assure enough food security for the nation during times of need. If properly implemented, the system will see a reduction in food imports from the region, as the country will be self-sufficient both at community level –thus reducing the burden on the country’s fiscus. A policy framework should be put in place, to manage the Zunde programmes. Donor organisations can be insisted to be stakeholders and all wishers. The ZUCHA model above should be viewed purely as a social phenomenon meant to provide socio-economic security to the nation as a whole. It is our opinion that the Zunde practice can be extended to the urban areas, and can be also be widened to mean more than “food security”- an area that may need further research.

The government can provide irrigation schemes in various parts of the area meant to resuscitate and keep alive Zunde family. This offering will provide a sustainable approach to ZUCHA. Government can introduce Zunde levy, to buy inputs and equipment needed for the sustainability of the projects initiated by communities. The levy also means that every individual is making a contribution towards the Zunde raMambo practice, whether in the urban areas or rural areas. The Zunde concept should be applied to other social and economic activities in our communities, as is reflected in Mushandirapamwe/Nhimbe (cooperatives) concept.

6. Further Research

A more diversified National research on Zunde programmes need to be undertaken. The other area that needs attention is research on the applicability of the “same concept” to other areas of society. How can Zunde be adopted as an “entrepreneurial engine” for diverse practices in our society?

7. Conclusion

Zunde raMambo is an appropriate community response to the problem of food security. The entrepreneurial genre- expected of any community with innovative minds. For the community, volunteering means giving up one’s time to work in the fields for the benefit of the under privileged members of the community. The community also takes a philosophical stance about social and community entrepreneurial volunteers, they do not consider themselves as volunteers but rather consider Zunde raMambo as helping them. For communities, fulfilment comes from meeting the food requirements of orphans, widows and older persons and those affected by drought. While they are challenges such as continuous droughts, high production costs of inputs and politicization of the system, it should be borne in mind that Zunde raMambo is a noble community entrepreneurial practice, food requires suitable management, and it does not benefit local communities only, but has direct implications on our fiscus and Gross Domestic Product. The study reiterates on the need for a sustainable way to popularise it -the adoption of the Zunde raMambo National framework, under the proposed ZUCHA model.

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