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Biting the bullet: civil society, social learning
and the transformation of local governance

by

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Abstract

This paper combines a focus on three concerns:

(i)   How can those involved in multiple actor development interventions and different types of social provisioning negotiate and manage their inter-relations across social divides with respect to their interests, goals, and outcomes of action?

(ii)   How can such a process lead to institutional sustainability, where inclusive norms and practices of participation, partnership and Social Learning become entrenched.

(iii)   How can researchers in development management work consciously to assist actors in the process of building institutional sustainability and new forms of local governance? The paper discusses research which has begun to explore these issues. The research takes an action-oriented approach to analysing the structured and active representation of roles and interests in development initiatives, and especially to how socially hierarchical structures might be managed to create a positive change in the status of hitherto socially excluded or marginal groups.

It is suggested that this research may help to inform the construction of new forms of local governance based on partnerships across socially differentiated groups.

Introduction

The current concern with the role of civil society in public action on development and social provisioning [i] raises many conceptual and practical questions. Among them is whether the concept of civil society inherently homogenises social divisions which instead need actively to be confronted and negotiated. In this paper, we use the term state-civil society, taking civil society to be associational life outside the state. Such associational life is often highly fragmented in organisation and action, and increasingly so with the growth of NGOs. Calls for partnership and synergy may attempt to address fragmentation, as well as establish new state-civil society relations. However if underlying social divisions (and their causes) are not addressed, partnership and synergy is likely to be extremely fragile if non-existent.

The first section of the paper provides a preliminary discussion of some of the ideas and framework which inform this research. The second section outlines the context of an embryonic waste recycling project in Bindura, Zimbabwe and discusses the approach to the research of this case study. In Section 3, we analyse the outcomes of a workshop in which the framework was applied. Finally, we reflect on some of the implications of the process for institutional sustainability in the Bindura case.

1.   *Partnership, participation and institutional sustainability*

A key hypothesis for this research is that social divisions have to be overtly recognised, actively negotiated and represented if there is to be (a) greater coherence of action, and (b) inclusion of hitherto excluded groups. In this respect, there are several main concepts which inform the basis of our investigations [ii].

First, the concepts of participation and partnership are of particular concern. Participation and partnership are seen as embodying positive norms and practices in the current development literature, something to be encouraged. They are nevertheless value-laden terms, each with a wide range of meanings that are often contested. Thus, Harriss (1999, p.227) points out that partnership 'is a term which has come to be used very loosely, to refer to almost any kind of relationship between individuals and groups... [where]... straightforward contracting relationships are quite often described as 'partnerships'... or asymmetrical relationships between northern and southern NGOs, in which the language of partnership thinly veils direction based on power differences...'. In similar vein, participation by those affected by an intervention can range from simply consulting them

while the decisions concerning the intervention are made elsewhere, to their participation in its exact form after the principled decisions have been taken, to their full participation in the intervention's definition and implementation.

Pragmatic arguments in favour of partnership and participation in development interventions centre on improving their effectiveness. Thus it is claimed that partnership and participation:

- lead to more effective interventions because they are inclusive processes where all actors or stakeholders can indeed take a positive stake in their success; they thus avoid problems of exclusion and fragmentation;

- lead to more effective interventions because they reveal the complex social dynamics that surround them and thus enable intervenors to take these into account when planning and implementing interventions;

- specifically improve cost effectiveness of social development because they bring on board civil society actors who take ownership of interventions and are an added resource in their implementation.

This last is a strong argument in the current partnership literature, where new institutional arrangements of partnership between state, private and civil society actors (welfare pluralism) are seen as ways of both sustaining and improving the effectiveness of social provision while making it cheaper, and of avoiding problems of social exclusion and fragmentation that are associated with purely private provision. (Mwabu, Ugaz, and White, 1998; Robinson, and White, 1998)) It is now accepted that no country in the world can sustain a system of social provision that is solely state-run, but this argument is particularly pertinent to cash-strapped developing countries which are liberalising their economies and trying (sometimes desperately) to reduce their public budget deficits. The argument is applied even though the non-state resource is less in developing than developed countries.

While the claims for partnership and participation are similar at the pragmatic level, a further, strongly normative, claim is often made for participation: that it can lead to 'empowerment' of disadvantaged and hitherto 'invisible' individuals, groups and sectors, and organisations. Partly, such empowerment can be seen as 'power to', meaning increasing the capacities of individuals to make decisions that affect their lives, and partly as 'power over', meaning increasing the power of some individuals and groups who are

stakeholders in an intervention process, while decreasing that of other, traditionally dominant, stakeholders (Johnson & Mayoux, 1998, p. 149). These authors also point to the possibility of 'power with', where power is not zero-sum, but where it is possible to negotiate joint action with others that does not lead to the diminution of anybody's (or group's) power (ibid, Rowlands, 1995, p. 102).

If the above represent the claims for participation and partnership, what are the counter-arguments? These revolve around the following:

- Power relations between different stakeholders cannot simply be wished away. In particular, the unequal power relationship between outside agency and project beneficiaries makes it difficult to obtain sincere participation because this relationship is subject to manipulation and dependency (Michener, 1998). Thus, the more powerful may exert and extend their 'power over' during participatory and partnership processes, and this may be aided by the internalisation and acceptance of those power relations by the less powerful. The tendency of participatory (and by extension, partnership) processes to seek consensus may only conceal that such consensus is more apparent than real, and actually represents the wishes of the most powerful players (Johnson and Mayoux, 1998, pp. 165, 166).

- The complex social dynamics are not necessarily revealed. Indeed, the least powerful actors are not necessarily represented, or even known about by intervenors, in participatory and partnership processes precisely because they are the least powerful. Thus they tend to be less literate, less able to articulate their interests, or, because of their socio-cultural position within local social dynamics, excluded from taking their seats at the participatory/partnership tables (ibid, pp. 163-165).

- Empowering outcomes cannot be assured. The deeper power relations between women and men, for example, may prevent women from communicating their key concerns for fear of the consequences (ibid, pp. 165, 166).

- With respect to the cost effectiveness argument, civil society actors end up paying twice for social provisioning! They not only pay for social services out of taxation, rates or through cost recovery measures, but they are also asked to provide resources of their own for this provisioning.

At a different level, a critique of participation (but which in our view can equally be applied as a critique of partnership) is that it is often predicated on voluntarism, in other

words it depends on more powerful individuals, groups, organisations and institutions voluntarily giving up some of their power within the participatory processes. Such voluntarism, at an individual level, is particularly espoused in the writings of Robert Chambers, where he argues that development professionals should put themselves last ('reversals'), and hand over the stick to the least powerful, usually the beneficiaries of development interventions. Thus:

> '... the question 'Whose reality counts?' can be answered more and more with 'Theirs'. The issue is whether we, as development professionals, have the vision, guts and will to change our behaviour, to embrace and act out reversals...'

> 'We can all think for ourselves, use our personal best judgement, and help others to do the same. We can all define responsible well-being in our own ways for ourselves. We can all celebrate local and personal diversity... And most of us have ways to empower others, the weak, poor and vulnerable, to express their realities and make them count.

> Good changes flow from personal decision and action...' (Chambers, 1997, p. 237)

Other writers, however, argue that the above sentiments can be no substitute for institutional arrangements of transparency and accountability (in other words, an *institutionalisation* of participation), as in the following critique of Chambers:

> 'At the end of the day, public participation -- and the participation of the poor -- are not normative questions but democratic rights. These rights need to be enforceable regardless of the values and attitudes of either the public or those who seek to champion them. To argue otherwise is to risk a situation in which the right of participation becomes contingent on certain values and attitudes.'
> (Brown, 1997, p.226)

Linked to participation and partnership is another conceptual arena, that of the sustainability of the outcomes of interventions and the processes and structures required in any given instance for sustainability to be realised.

Indeed, drawing on both the normative and pragmatic arguments in favour of them, participation and partnership are often listed as preconditions for sustainability. Of the many debates and approaches to sustainability, we are concerned with two main threads.

One is whether an intervention can lead to sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development both as a set of means and ends is debated within environmental, economic, and socio-political perspectives (see, for example, Lélé, 1991). Concerns frequently mentioned are whether there is sustainable resource use and whether development processes reach, involve, benefit and empower the poor and excluded and are not simply concerned with economic growth. These and related concerns focus on the range of issues involved in sustainable livelihoods. However the technical and social relations which govern the control, access, and use of resources, and distribution of output, are formalised and embedded in institutions. New technical and social relations thus involve changes in institutions, and new institutions also need to be sustainable.

The other main thread which thus concerns us about sustainability is institutional. Given the fragmented, multiple actor world in which development interventions occur, how can different actors establish norms, rules, behaviours that give substantive meanings to terms such as participation and partnership and which enable them to work together not simply in a given, boundaried project arena but on a longer-term and more sustained basis? This second thread, that of institutional sustainability, has some elements of the synergistic approach now being promoted by the World Bank (1997) among others. However, the rhetoric of synergy can easily ignore social differences and some of the problems involved in participatory approaches to development: how can different social groups with different interests, values and concerns work together over time in common programmes of action?

The paper suggests that social-learning practices (where the lessons learned are collectively interpreted and agreed) can assist the expression and accommodation of social differences in development programmes. Furthermore, such practices can help establish norms, values and behaviours which provide a basis for institutional sustainability beyond the life of specific interventions or projects (Johnson and Wilson, forthcoming).

Much development activity is organised in projects. Projects are artificially boundaried arenas of activity which in practice reflect the social relations of which they are part (even if they are seeking to change them). Thus, we suggest, looking at projects or interventions can reveal the dynamics of state-civil society relations. They can also be a site for the construction of institutional sustainability based on partnership and participation.

The key issue for this research thus concerns how the different actors can be included in the construction and application of frameworks for social learning across social divides described above. The issue essentially revolves around the possibilities for institutionalising inclusive negotiation of these frameworks among the actors which, we suggest, can be achieved by consensus and structured agenda-setting.

To this end, we have elaborated our own a priori and broad framework agenda (Johnson and Wilson, 1997) for use in planning and implementing development intervention. This agenda involves actors or stakeholders negotiating and testing four key areas of concern and debate that have appeared in the development management literature: (i) shared meanings of sustainability and sustainable development (op cit; Carley and Christie, 1992); (ii) individual and collective assumptions behind suggested courses of action (Bell, 1998; Johnson and Wilson, 1996); (iii) agreements over accountability in the sphere of action (Edwards and Hulme, 1995, pp.9-14); (iv) investigation of intervention processes in order to attribute [iii] outputs and outcomes over time (Fowler, 1995; Johnson and Wilson, 1996). The negotiation of this agenda is intended in turn to help stakeholders set future agendas that:

> lead to accommodations of their different interests;

> set parameters for performance assessment and feedback processes which lead to sustained action-learning cycles;

> help institutionalise norms and practices that contribute towards sustainable development in the longer-term.

Finally, we should add at this point that while this framework and 'a priori agenda' have the characteristics of a model, we see them as the basis not simply for enabling social learning and institutional sustainability arising from multiple actor interventions, but as a framework which can be changed and adapted by application. This process we call 'annotation'.

2   Action research in Bindura

The research framework and a priori agenda were given an initial test in a recent pilot project involving participatory research into a multiple actor intervention on waste management in the mining town of Bindura in Zimbabwe. The authors spent one month working with key actors from a Zimbabwean NGO (Environment 2000), the

Environmental Health Department of the Town Council in Bindura, and other state, private sector, NGO and local entities who were developing a partnership to set up a recycling scheme that would both resolve some waste management problems and provide livelihoods for the widows of AIDS victims in one of the local communities.

2.1 The case

The focus of the research was an initiative to resolve some of Zimbabwe's urban solid waste management (SWM) problems in a given locality. Urban SWM in Zimbabwe suffers lack of infrastructure and resources to meet the growing waste from growing urban populations. In addition there are environmental concerns about how waste is disposed of, most vocally represented by Environment 2000 (E2000).

Both nationally and locally, there has been a call to involve the 'community' in the resolution of these waste management problems (Government of Zimbabwe, 1995). In Bindura, this suggestion was given serious hearing when a local, church-based group approached E2000 to assist it in setting up a recycling project designed to provide livelihoods for the widows and orphans of AIDS victims. When the church group then took its idea to the Environmental Health Department of the Town Council, the initiative was transformed into a wider project of setting up a steering committee to establish an Environmental Action Group (EAG) [iv]. The committee comprised a cross-section of public and private sector interests as well as voluntary associations and NGOs. The first project of the embryonic EAG was to set up the proposed recycling scheme. However, this scheme was also seen by the Town Council and other public sector Environmental Health representatives in natural resources, health and education as a means of involving the participation of 'the community' in SWM [v].

Our own involvement was established in a meeting of the steering committee of the EAG in which the committee was seeking help to write a project proposal. The meeting agreed that we could carry out some research into activities of the group and facilitate a workshop which would enable the group to explore the ramifications of the proposed project, discuss how best to organise it and create the basis for writing the proposal. It is important to note that at this stage, the supposed beneficiaries of the project, the widows of AIDS victims, were not involved in the steering committee nor in discussions of the organisation of the project. The subsequent role of the widows is discussed further in Section 3. The workshop would represent, therefore, their first formal involvement.

2.2   The approach

Our study broadly followed the ideas of participatory action research. There are three main reasons for adopting this approach. First, we were not only in the position of observing and trying to understand social processes in development interventions but we were also ourselves intervening in the process by suggesting that actors test a framework that we planned to apply at the workshop. Second, the research process involved constant 'annotation' of the framework – by us in terms of people's response to it and its match with a given situation, and by actors/stakeholders in the intervention as they adapted it for their needs and interests. Third, our hypothesis was that our framework could help multiple stakeholders to set an agenda for action which would enable them to engage in a social learning cycle and institutionalise (and therefore sustain) new norms and practices. In this sense, we were participating in (and will need to continue to participate in) a process which has yet to be played out. We were researching not just 'what has been/what is' but also 'what might be' in which we have (or can have) a role. Overall, the subject-object relation of much research was particularly inappropriate in this case because we were evidently part of our own research process.

Although there was overlapping activity, in broad terms the research sequence involved us in:

- reading reports, surveys and minutes of meetings

- carrying out interviews or having group discussions with key actors

- carrying out a matrix analysis of values, interests and goals of the key actors derived from the interviews and discussions

- preliminary testing of the framework that we intended to apply at the workshop

- carrying out the workshop

- debrief of the workshop outcomes and framework with facilitators discussion and agreement about follow-up.

This sequence of research practices does not impart the dynamics of the research or of the process of beginning to construct institutional sustainability based on state-civil society partnerships and participation of excluded groups. In particular, the research process was considerably more iterative and non-linear than this sequence suggests.

Particularly important to the research process was the workshop with all the main actors/stakeholders in the Bindura recycling initiative. This workshop enabled participants to engage with the a priori agenda outlined in Section 1 above. The workshop had two main aims. First, it would enable stakeholders to clarify their aims and organisation to enable them to draft a project proposal. To do this, it would work through a series of activities to test and apply the framework agenda outlined above. Second, the workshop was designed to help participants move towards establishing and institutionalising norms and practices as partners in the recycling scheme. The activities were highly-structured, based on a set of questions (see Table 1) and stakeholders worked through them in four small groups over a day, each group facilitated by one of the researchers or members of staff of the supporting NGO, Environment 2000. One group was consciously selected by the facilitators to include members of the Widows Association and people known to them so that they could work entirely in Shona. The other groups were formed by giving every person a number. In this process, one proved to be predominantly professionals from local government and state bodies, which, although unintended, enabled an interesting comparison of positions on the project and on views of the social relations involved. The other two groups were more varied in composition.

Table 1 The 'agenda' at the Bindura workshop

Workshop questions	Intention behind questions
What is the project expected to achieve? What activities will be undertaken by the project? What do you need to do in order to set up the project?	To agree in each workshop group a basic narrative summary of the workshop in terms of agreed goals, activities and inputs.
What do your answers to the above questions depend on?	To agree in each workshop group key *assumptions* about the project.
How will the project last?	To agree in each workshop group what needs to be done to make the project sustainable and to identify further assumptions associated with *sustainability* of the project.
Which are the organisations involved in this project? Do any organisations have to be created? What are the jobs or roles of organisations involved in the project? Who will make decisions, and about what?	To agree in each workshop group who are the key stakeholders in the project and to establish core *accountabilities*.

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What things would you like to find out in order to keep track of the project? How can you find out about the things you have listed so that everyone involved can learn from the project?	To establish in each workshop group the importance of monitoring and evaluation and to agree what this might consist of and how it might be carried out.
If you discovered that only half the households were sorting their waste, how would you find out why the others were not doing it? If you found out that the incomes of the people doing the recycling had improved, how would you know if it was because of this project or for some other reason?	To introduce in each workshop group discussion of *attribution* when interpreting monitoring and evaluation results.

There are evident similarities between the questions in Table 1 and 'logical framework' (or logframe). Logical framework consists of a 4X4 matrix, with the left hand column consisting of a narrative summary, with boxes for 'overall goal', 'specific goals or purposes', 'activities or outputs' and 'inputs'. The right-hand column is for assumptions associated with each of these boxes, and the middle two columns are for indicators of success and means of verification respectively [vi]. There are however some differences between logical framework and the questions asked at Bindura. The questions that structured the Bindura workshop would only translate to three rows of narrative summary, the wider or overall goal having been removed and the specific goals or purposes being expressed by 'What do you expect the project to achieve?'. Given that this was the first attempt to bring all stakeholders together in such an exercise, it was important to preserve a degree of simplicity and accessibility in the exercise and to enable the widest discussion by not trying to cover too much ground. An even more important point, however, is that the framework used at Bindura formed the starting point for a dynamic process of negotiation and learning, not a static or linear exercise. The questions used in the workshop were an 'agenda' for the group to explore its own internal dynamics, values, interests and expectations. As will be seen below, there were surprises for some participants as their assumptions about the project and its organisation came into question. At a deeper level, assumptions about the nature of community, and state-private sector-civil society partnerships, were tested and social hierarchies and differences made more explicit. However, the process also gave the stakeholders a handle on their own inter-relations and the basic issues for negotiation.

2.3   A comment on participatory action research as a process

In carrying out the workshop, in particular, we discovered some critical lessons for action research about the heterogeneity and roles of experts. We identified at least four kinds of expert: international 'open learning' experts (i.e. ourselves); national experts (staff from E2000); insider/outsider experts in Bindura (environmental health officers and technicians from government and private companies, and officials from ministries); insider experts (different civil society individuals and groups: church leaders, members of voluntary groups such as religious groups, an HIV support group, a widows association, and an informal traders' association - all of whom had specialist knowledge to bring to the workshop dynamics and to the project). Furthermore, there was complex interaction between us as researchers and other participants in the workshop. At times we 'handed over the stick' and listened. At times we intervened quite deliberately to enable something to happen (as did others). One example of such an intervention was our determination to engage the participation of members of the community where the project was to be carried out, in particular the presumed enactors of the project, the members of a widows association. Thus we aided E2000 in raising the profile of the widows by including them in our interviewing process. With E2000, we agreed that there should be a Shona-speaking group in the otherwise English language workshop so that the widows would feel able to discuss the agenda in their own terms, as long as they worked through the structured activities of the workshop. In addition, both we and E2000, as joint facilitators of the workshop, asked questions, made suggestions, and provided frameworks for discussion - all legitimate things that facilitators do, but nevertheless having an effect of pushing (or at least suggesting) certain thought processes and ways of accommodating interests within the context of the proposed project. [vii]

3.   Participation, partnership and development intervention in Bindura

As indicated in Section 2, the impetus for the Bindura intervention was premised on *partnership* between the Town Council and different state and civil society actors, and *participation* of the community with respect to SWM in the town. These arrangements, moreover, were envisaged at multiple, overlapping levels, involving individual residents, societal groups and sectors (e.g. the private sector, Christians, widows of AIDS victims), and organisations (e.g. Environment 2000, the Widows' Associations, the embryonic Environmental Action Group).

The workshop in Bindura on the proposed recycling scheme involving widows of AIDS victims was an attempt to address many of the issues concerning participation and

partnership that were discussed in Section 1. Thus it sought to involve the weakest stakeholders (the widows themselves), to reveal and take account of the complex social dynamics, and to bring on board a wide section of civil society actors. Its broader aim, however, was to start a process of institutionalising participatory and partnership norms and practices for the design, implementation and learning from the project.

3.1 Waste management and income generation for widows of AIDS victims in Bindura: partnership

Waste Management issues in Bindura are framed within the Zimbabwean national debate of how to sustain and develop systems in a country where the infrastructure is rudimentary, as manifested in inadequate collection and disposal on open dump sites, and where key exacerbating factors are rapidly growing urban populations and cash-strapped local councils [viii]. Two possibilities emerge:

- sub-contracting and/or privatisation of waste services;

- community participation in waste management.
  (Government of Zimbabwe, 1995, pp. 42-46)

Within Bindura Town Council, the second option is at present the favoured route, although the first has not been ruled out. The Environmental Health Officer (EHO) for the town argued during his interview prior to the workshop that where privatisation has occurred elsewhere in Zimbabwe it has not been a success. Contracts have been given to firms that do not have the capacity to do the job effectively and there have not been effective regulatory mechanisms on the part of the local authorities concerned. In several cases privatisation experiments have been such failures that waste management services have returned to council control. All in all, the EHO said that he wants to wait and learn from the various privatisation experiments before trying it out in Bindura. As for sub-contracting, he stated there may be a pilot scheme in one part of the town in the not-too-distant future.

In contrast to this scepticism over a privatisation solution, the EHO strongly believes in community involvement in, and responsibility for, waste management, a view echoed by all the professional stakeholders interviewed in the town. This community involvement is strongly allied to the need for education and a culture change among the residents (see Table 2), while acknowledging that at present waste management is viewed as the responsibility of the Council (the residents pay for the service out of their rates).

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Thus, the EHO and other professionals clearly see the way forward in terms of new norms and practices on the part of 'the community', and in new institutional relations of partnership between the Town Council and 'the community'. Although there are slight differences in emphasis between the different professionals, their common belief in community involvement that is predicated on culture change and education amounts to a waste management paradigm for Bindura.

Table 2 The Bindura 'professionals': interest and views on community

Professional interviewed	Interest in the Bindura recycling project	Position on community involvement and education
Environmental Health Officer, Bindura Town Council	'Project's success is my success'.	Need for community involvement and change of attitudes. Aware of responsibility to community of Town Council with respect to waste management.
Environmental Health Technician, Trojan (Anglo-American) nickel mine	Professional motivation.	Need to educate the community in Town Council/community partnership (but with Town Council in charge).
Forestry Commission Extension Officer	'We are part and parcel of the community'.	Need to change attitudes and awareness among ill-educated community.
Environmental Health Technician, Ministry of Health	'Interest... because same as what I do in the community'	Community involvement in waste management needed; community attitude change.
Education Officer for agriculture and science subjects, with extra responsibility for environment within the school curriculum	As a resident in 'the community'. General professional motivation.	General understanding of Civil Society involvement in change. Need to sensitise schools to waste management and environmental issues.
Natural Resources Officer, Department of Natural Resources	Appropriate because environment is a major concern of the Department.	Need for community mobilisation and ownership.

In Bindura, therefore, the cost-effectiveness argument for a state-civil society partnership is strengthened by the apparent failure of the privatisation alternative and is overlaid by a strong normative argument emanating from environmental health and allied professionals about people taking responsibility for the waste they generate and more broadly a healthy environment, and the culture change and educational programme needed to achieve this.

The repeated use of the word 'community' by these professionals raises the issue of what they understand by the term, and especially, who they would include under its umbrella. The definition of 'community' is never easy, however. *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, for example, lists at least three that are relevant: (i) all the people living in a particular area of place (e.g. the town of Bindura, or, even more locally, one of its high density suburbs); (ii) a group of people having a religion, race, profession or other particular characteristic in common (where examples in Bindura might include the environmental health professionals, the Christians, the widows, and the poor); (iii) the condition of sharing or having certain attitudes and interests in common. These definitions overlap: for example, the people living in a high density suburb of Bindura might all be 'poor' (although this raises a further difficulty in defining 'poor' and the extent to which some residents are more poor than others) and they will undoubtedly share some (but by no means all) interests. Thus, although the word 'community' implies an identity between people by virtue of where they live, and their common characteristics and interests, it also hides their diversity. The question of who is included is often the most difficult to answer. It is not surprising therefore that the question is usually glossed over, and 'the community' is defined more by implication than explicitly.

For the professionals concerned with SWM in Bindura, it seems that the 'community ' includes:

- the private sector who, at least in the eyes of the Town Council EHO, should take more responsibility for the waste it generates;

- all residents, particularly those who live in the relatively cramped and growing high density suburbs and who have to be educated to take greater responsibility for the waste they generate;

- the professionals themselves, who generally see themselves as being both a community in the sense of belonging to the same profession and therefore sharing the same concerns and interests, and personally as residents of the town of Bindura (See Table 1).

Clearly, each of these communities is more complex and diversified than identified. Within the private sector, there are the nickel and gold mines with their polluting impacts from airborne emissions and, in the case of gold mines, ground pollution. Then there are service industries, extending from the larger shops to informal traders, which generate

potentially recyclable waste -- paper, plastic and glass. The Town Council EHO also singled out sugar cane processing, a relatively new development in the area which is leading to a large increase of organic waste on the streets.

Divisions among the professionals (plus their relations with 'the community') are discussed in Section 3.2, but as this particular project is aimed at recycling waste collected from a high density suburb, it is the social divisions among its residents that are of immediate interest. The common assumption among the professionals interviewed before the workshop was that this community could be treated as a largely homogenous mass which needs educating to separate its waste so that a needy group, the widows, can collect the recyclable components, and generate income from sale or re-use.

An important outcome of the workshop, however, was to challenge this assumption of homogeneity and thereby begin to examine the complex social context in which the project is conceived. The key initial assumptions recorded by the four workshop groups are shown in Table 3, but it was the debrief of facilitators after the workshop was over that produced interesting elaboration, particularly from the group that had conducted its business in Shona. It will be seen from Table 3 that this group largely comprised the widows who were primarily and understandably concerned with the income generation potential of the project.

Table 3 Aims of the project and some of the key assumptions about the aims, activities and inputs identified by workshop groups

Group composition	Project aims	Selected key assumptions
Group 1 Environmental Health Officer, Bindura Town Council; Environmental Health Technician, Trojan Mine; Environmental Health Technician, Ministry of Health; Environmental Health trainee, Bindura Town Council; Kunirivana Home Based Care Project representative; Facilitator: UK academic researchers.	*Long term:* Cleanliness, hygiene, combat diseases, help Bindura Town Council in Waste Management; Education of the community. *Short term:* Help widows improve income; Practical education of the community.	*Long term:* project will set a good example and will spread; *Short term:* economically viable project; *Short & long term:* sufficient support from the residents; Widows will prioritise. Funds available for start-up.

Group 2 Kunirivana Home Based Care Project representative; Informal Traders Association of Zimbabwe representative; Christians on the Move representative; Environmental Health Technician, Bindura Town Council. Facilitator: Environment 2000 representative.	Educate people about waste problems; Employment creation & income generation, especially for the needy people.	Community will work together and will feel that waste management is not just the Council's problem; Project will show fruits and the running costs will be covered; Funds available for start-up.
Group 3 Kuinirivana Home Based Care Project representative; Informal Traders Association of Zimbabwe representative; Education Officer, Ministry of Education; Extension Officer, Forestry Commission; Development Activities for People to People (DAPP) representative; Facilitator: Environment 2000 representative.	Poverty alleviation through job creation & income generation; Clean, healthy environment; Community participation & awareness; Human and other resources for training available.	There is a market; Standards of living will improve; Community will participate and people want to learn; Local authority supports the project; Funds available for start-up.
Group 4 Church pastor, member of Christians on the Move; Apostolic minister, also involved with widows association and Kunirivana Home Based Care Project; Widow; Widow; Widow; Facilitators: Environment 2000 representatives.	Keep houses clean; Generate income; Create employment; Stop air pollution; Stop diseases; Less illegal dumping and potential hazards.	Bindura Town Council makes a bye-law to ensure that residents give waste for recycling; Transport, site, tools and equipment available from council; Waste available; People willing to join in (churches, social welfare, companies); Commitment from all participants.

One of the Shona-speaking group's (Group 4) written assumptions was that waste would be available [ix] and another that the Town Council would pass a bye-law recognising the widows as the only authorised collecting agents. These concerns turned out to be

connected to a further set of assumptions around the value (potential and actual) of waste to other members of the community. Thus, the assumption that sufficient recyclable waste could be collected was challenged by the widows on three grounds:

- there is already a significant amount of waste recycled for private purposes in the high density suburb. Paper is used for toilet paper. Plastic is often melted in paraffin to create a floor polish [x];

- local schools collect recyclable/re-usable waste both for direct use in classrooms and for fund-raising activities. This was clearly perceived as direct competition and, moreover, the schools are already established in these activities;

- if the widows were to demonstrate that waste recycling is a viable business, their monopoly within the high density suburb would be unlikely to last long, as other groups within the community would spontaneously establish businesses to exploit the opportunity. This last was the basis for the Shona-speaking group's advocacy of a bye-law in order to maintain the widows' monopoly.

The workshop, therefore, through its discussion of assumptions, served to highlight the actual and potential divisions within the residential community targeted and the likely impact of these divisions on the project. This came, moreover, from a particular group of stakeholders at the workshop -- the 'beneficiaries' -- for whom the income-generation part of the project is anything but a 'pilot' . The concern of the widows can be contrasted with the broad and rather diffuse vision of community involvement taken by the other groups (see column 2 of Table 3). The widows' view of community involvement (and of partnership) was more focused than that of the other groups, as they wanted both firm commitment of the residents to release their recyclable waste and support from other forms of association (churches, local government offices and the private sector), some of it quite precisely formulated (for example, technical inputs from the council).

The workshop also revealed differences in emphasis in the aims of the project. Another group comprised mainly environmental health and allied professionals, and to these the project was clearly seen as a pilot that would begin the process of changing attitudes and practices among the community towards waste management, and which would hopefully serve as a model to be replicated elsewhere. The income generation for a needy group, while clearly felt to be beneficial and important, was to this extent a secondary aim.

More differences were revealed when the workshop tried to identify who exactly the project beneficiaries should be, which in turn served to highlight further that 'civil society' cannot be perceived as homogenous and that there is therefore no simple civil society-state relationship. Within the workshop, one stakeholder implied that the beneficiaries should be drawn from 'needy people' in general and not restricted to widows. Even among those groups who assumed that only widows would be beneficiaries a division emerged between those who felt that all widows were potential beneficiaries, and should be selected on need, and those who felt that only Christian widows should be selected (some of the Widows' Associations are aligned to Christian groups). Yet another stakeholder felt that selection should not simply be based on need but also on potential to make the project work (this stakeholder stated that the selection criteria should include possession of the right attitude and a willingness to work hard).

In summary, the workshop revealed therefore that state-civil society partnership is not a relatively simple bi-polar affair, as the latter has many poles!

3.2 Waste management and income generation for widows of AIDS victims in Bindura: participation

The Bindura workshop was both itself an attempt at a participatory exercise and part of a wider participatory process which had seen two previous broad-based workshops result in the setting up of the Environmental Action Group Steering Committee. It is pertinent, however, that the widows were only brought into this wider process after insistence by Environment 2000 at a meeting of the Environmental Action Group steering committee 18 days prior to the latest workshop. It is also evident that having the widows form the majority of a Shona-speaking group at this workshop was effective in that the group discussed concerns that were not raised by the other groups and which probably would not have been raised at all if the groups had been more randomly composed and/or all conducted their business in English. At least the forum enabled these concerns to be put on the table as requiring discussion, negotiation and clarification.

Having one of the four groups comprised mainly of widows and a second mainly of professionals meant, however, that laying issues on the table was probably all that the workshop could achieve. Their negotiation between stakeholders is a matter for the on-going process, but one particularly important issue that the workshop revealed concerns the structures for carrying the project process forward and the processes of continuing participation and accountability that they imply.

These suggested structures emerged from a rudimentary stakeholder analysis, which asked groups to identify stakeholders and also specify what their roles in the project might be. One interesting aspect of this analysis is that only two of the four groups mentioned the residents as a stakeholder, and only one of these suggested that they might have a role - alerting the management when things were not working properly - beyond the sorting of waste in their houses.

A second important aspect concerns confusion over the management and accountability roles revealed by the stakeholder analysis. The Widows' Association, Christians on the Move, the Environmental Action Group and the Town Council were each perceived by different groups as having a management role, with most confusion centring on the Environmental Action Group. This was felt to be a key player by three groups, but there was no consensus regarding whether it should play a 'hands-on' day-to-day management role or a more strategic role, or both. What was clear, however, was that nobody, including the widows present, felt that the widow-beneficiaries should have exclusive management control, although the group comprising largely professionals did suggest that day-to-day management be carried out by a sub-committee comprising both widows involved directly in the project and EAG members. Figure 1 indicates those stakeholders which were suggested by different workshop groups as having management roles, together with our construction of the overlaps and linkages between them.

Figure 1: Systems map of management actors as perceived by different groups at workshop

— This suggested link to form an EAG/Widow sub-committee for day to day man.
(Group 1)
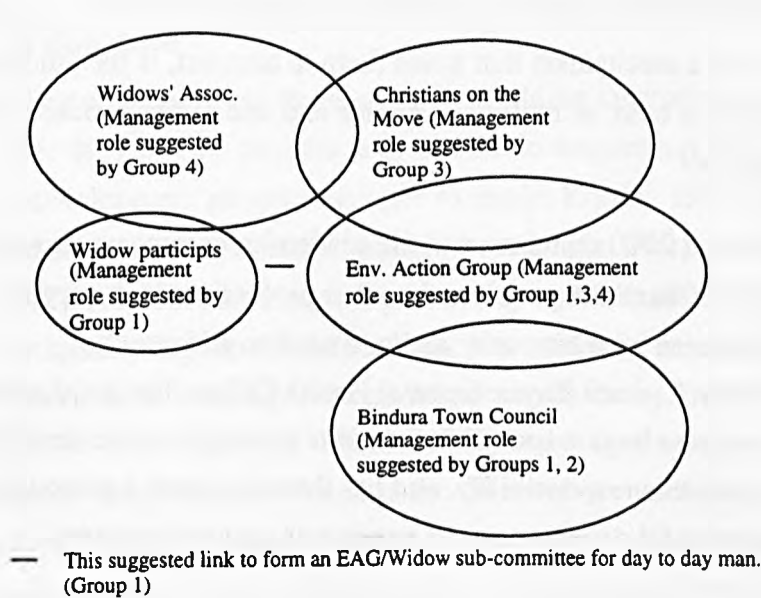
Note 1: (See Table 3 for exact composition of each of the groups).

Note 2: Overlaps indicate overlaps of membership.

Note 3: Precise management role for EAG varies. Groups 1, 3 and 4 give it an overview/long term role; only 3 & 4 a practical day to day management role (although Group 1 suggests it provides members for a joint management sub-committee with widow participants).

Note 3: Only an overall vision and co-ordination role is seen for Bindura Town Council (Groups 1 and 2).

Note 4: Widow participants only seen as having a management role as part of sub-committee with EAG members (Group 1)

The workshop therefore highlighted management responsibility and accountability issues which have to be resolved. These issues bring us back to the Brown critique of Chambers reviewed in the Introduction to the paper.

At first glance the workshop discussions supported Brown and revealed some of the weaknesses in the Chambers approach. Certainly they highlighted the need for proper accountability mechanisms which would institutionalise the terms of participation of all stakeholders to be put in place. The workshop (and indeed the whole process so far) also served to highlight the fact that the experts are not themselves homogeneous either professionally or personally, bringing together environmental health professionals, local educationalists, a forestry extension worker, members of a national NGO (themselves with differing backgrounds) and two researchers-cum-educationalists from the UK! It would be strange indeed if such a diverse set of people did not differ in how they decide to act if voluntarism, rather than a mechanism that holds them to account, is the guiding principle. Voluntarism, after all, is built on individual choice and one might choose to put her/himself last, another might not.

Thus, in general, the Environment 2000 members and the academic researchers showed at various points empathy with the Chambers position, the other professionals in varying degrees had a pre-dominant concern with hierarchy and/or a need to educate the community. Moreover, the Town Council Environmental Health Officer has good reason for not putting himself last, because he is responsible for waste management in the town, is expected to be accountable for this responsibility, and has therefore both a personal and professional interest in the successful development of waste management systems.

All the above supports Brown's critique, but, having said that, introducing management and accountability is also about building norms and practices, that is, it is about institution-building. These norms and practices have to be accepted by stakeholders, they cannot simply be imposed rules that rely on coercion for compliance. In other words, there is a voluntaristic element in institution-building. Thus, the Town Council EHO and other local professionals did not accept the involvement of the widows at the workshop *only* in response to pressure from Environment 2000 (tacitly supported by the academic researchers). The interviews prior to the workshop made clear that they support community involvement (and by extension, involvement of the widows) both in principle and as a way towards helping solve environmental issues. They were receptive, therefore, to ideas of how this might be operationalised and it is instructive that the suggestion for a project management sub-group comprising widows' and EAG representatives came from the workshop professionals' group.

A conclusion of this paper, therefore, is that, of course, proper management and accountability mechanisms have to be negotiated and established between stakeholders in order to entrench agreed terms of participation, but that the institution-building that this requires starts to a large extent with persuasion and voluntaristic effort. There has to be, for example, some readiness on the part of the experts to entertain the idea of extending accountability mechanisms so that the 'beneficiaries' of an intervention can become part of the management structures. To this extent, the outcomes of the Bindura interviews and the workshop began to transcend the Chambers-Brown debate.

4 Social learning and institutional sustainability as a process and as an outcome

A key element of our framework for building institutional sustainability is social learning. Over the past two decades, a considerable amount has been written about social learning in development programmes (for example, Korten, 1984; White, 1987; Rondinelli, 1993) and about organisational learning (for example, Morgan, 1986; Argyiris and Schon, 1978). As with participation, partnership and the role of social capital, learning, and particularly organisational learning, has become a keystone of much development rhetoric. Ten years ago, Hulme asked why learning from experience in development was such an elusive process (Hulme, 1989) and supported the proposals by Korten and others that development interventions should involve community organisations and should experiment rather than prescribe. However, there remain questions about who learns, what is learnt, how it is learnt, and how the learning is used. These questions are

particularly pertinent in multiple actor partnerships where social hierarchies are involved, and recent research and writing has grappled with some of the issues raised. For example, Alsop and Farrington (1998) have suggested how monitoring systems can be 'nested' within given groups of actors but combined with mechanisms for sharing information and knowledge with 'linked nests' in contexts where there are multiple stakeholders; while Thompson (1995) has looked at how training can assist participatory approaches to action within bureaucracies and between bureaucracies and other organisations in areas of intervention and can help promote institutional change.

The framework behind this research suggests that an important step in institutionalising multiple actor learning is investigating and making explicit (i) stakeholders' assumptions and perceptions about what the success of their activities will depend on over time, and (ii) what they will separately and jointly need to do so that they keep track of what is going on in terms of their vision as the intervention unfolds. The latter in turn requires forms of monitoring and evaluation but in ways that all actors are participant to the understanding and interpretation of processes and outcomes. Institutionalising multiple actor learning thus requires a framework for negotiation that seeks accommodation and agreement but which does not attempt to hide plurality, social difference and hierarchy. We suggest that our framework might provide some of the procedures and mechanisms to carry out (i) and (ii) above and lays the foundation for an ongoing process of action learning.

It is not suggested that this process is without conflict. For example, in the Bindura recycling project, inasmuch as there were different views about partnership, community, aims, beneficiaries, organisation, responsibility and accountability analysed in Section 3, there were also different assumptions about what needed to happen in the longer term (Table 4). While the 'professionals' group' was predominantly concerned with how the project would be managed and about forms of accountability, the 'widows' group' was more concerned with how livelihoods would be sustained and developed. However, among the latter there was also a concern about their own internal dynamics and 'abiding by the rules'. More generally across the stakeholders, there was some agreement about the need to recruit more people into the project, have proper contractual arrangements with the Town Council for carrying out the recycling and continue expanding activities.

To some extent, these assumptions about the longer-term progress of the recycling scheme mirror the different perspectives of the professionals and the beneficiary/enactor widows outlined in Section 3. This tension could be the source of a partnership (on the

basis of ensuring organisational probity and transparency in return for security of employment and incomes) or it could be grounds for a struggle over control of the project. Acknowledging the different perspectives is a source of learning between actors. Managing the differences well would be another learning point. However, thinking about the project in the longer term proved to be the hardest part of the agenda in the workshop. The debrief with the facilitators after the workshop suggested that, for some participants, particularly the widows, thinking ahead beyond immediate survival is a learning curve in itself.

Table 4 Selected assumptions about the project longer-term

Group 1 ('professionals')	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4 ('widows')
Mechanisms for profit sharing	Members to enjoy benefits		
Transparency of accounting	Publicise profits		
Mechanisms for recruiting new people	Getting more (needy) people on board		Recruitment of new members
'Avoiding politics'			
Contractual arrangements needed		Town Council should have contract with the project	Contracts needed
	Expand more recycling co-operatives	Creation of other projects	Alternative income-generating projects
	Review meetings and reports		
	Continuous public education		
		Markets for recyclables available	Secure markets; market information needed
		Ongoing training of project members; building capacity	
			Participants must abide by constitution

A key issue at this point in the agenda-setting and negotiation process was the recognition that monitoring and interpreting the progress of the activities was an essential part of the project partnership. In spite of the difficulties of thinking ahead, all the groups had ideas (some of them very ingenious) about how they would monitor processes and 'measure

performance'. However, many of their ideas also had implications for skills development and capacity-building within and between the partners. Much more difficult at this stage (and at the end of a long day in which all had worked hard at the agenda) was thinking about the dynamics of partnership and participation in the longer term. The most searching question that groups had to answer in that respect was how they would deal with problems that might arise. Groups were given the hypothetical problem of non-cooperation of households in sorting waste for recycling, and the discussion which ensued revealed interesting differences in emphasis about what could be done. For example, while the group of professionals concentrated on processes of discovery (the need to talk to the collectors, have a meeting with the residents, hold discussions within the EAG), the group involving the widows was more concerned with practical incentives (and sanctions) to induce the households to sort their waste, with handling the possible competition from other waste collectors and recyclers, and with setting up alternative projects. Although such differences are reflections of the social worlds of the actors, they also have implications for the dynamics of the partnership and decisions about future action as they imply fundamentally different interpretations of what the cause of the problem might be. In particular, it raises the extent to which action could be taken independently by particular groups within the partnership if they saw their interests being threatened by processes and events in the wider environment.

Thus different emphases were evident at this point: for the professionals, the main ongoing concern was the overall management, accountability and transparency of the activities; for the widows, the dynamics of involving the community of which they were a part and realising adequate livelihoods were central issues. The question for the future is whether there will be separate learning processes taking place in parallel and focusing on different concerns, or whether and how such learning processes can be 'nested' and linked to reinforce the partnership.

At this point, the research enters the speculative realm as the pilot study gives way to follow-up participatory action studies at a later date. However some open conclusions and reflections can be suggested. First, initial reactions to the framework by the workshop's participants and the local facilitators were positive because, through an a priori agenda, they had been able to identify quickly key commonalities and differences. At the same time, the hitherto excluded but critically central group of the widows was now on board in the project. There was general excitement but also some anxiety at the prospect of trying to build a state-civil society partnership based on participation and a rather more

differentiated view of 'the community' than had previously been envisaged. The potential for transforming local governance in waste management had been created with both a professional and a community interest in its success. Second, the framework behind the research had itself been reviewed (and annotated) in our interaction with the state actors, NGOs and private sector representatives, although we cannot document the annotations here. However, the facilitating NGO, Environment 2000, has continued to use the framework with other embryonic partnerships, adapting (annotating) it in relation to different needs and dynamics. Finally, we are aware that the process and argument that we have analysed is just the beginning of exploring how and whether institutional sustainability can be actively constructed across social divides, and the role that might be played by researchers.

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i For the purposes of this paper we talk about development (or development initiatives, or public action on development) and social provisioning in the same context. They need further elucidation, but there is not the space to do so here for this particular paper.

ii There are key concepts related to this research which we do not address directly in this paper. One such is social capital. The concept of social capital both contributes to and raises a number of questions about state-civil society relations. One question is whether social capital can help to oil the wheels of such partnerships. Another is whether such partnerships are necessarily dependent on the existence of social capital. A further question is whether social capital can be consciously constructed. Is social capital only relevant within given groups (however defined) or can it be created between groups, even when they are socially hierarchical? Inevitably, there has been some concern with the vagueness of the concept (is social capital about relations between individuals or groups?)

and some circularity of argument about the role of social capital (e.g. if things work, it exists; if they don't, it doesn't; see for example, Portes and Landolt, 1996).

iii Understanding what may cause or influence what, and interpreting processes and outcomes, are key but difficult aspects of learning from interventions.

iv EAGs are the brainchild of E2000; several now exist across Zimbabwe.

v The concept of community is addressed in Section 3.

vi The categories and the words used to describe them in logical framework vary.

vii We acknowledge too a wider agenda of enabling different sectors of the population of Bindura to find ways of working together.

viii Nevertheless, most local councils in Zimbabwe recover the full cost of SWM services through tariffs, but these tariffs go into centrally-controlled budgets where any surplus is used to cross-subsidise other council services (Government of Zimbabwe, 1995, pp. 4-6)

ix Group 3 also shared this assumption.

x The re-use and recycling of waste for private purposes was mentioned by widows during interviews with them, rather than at the workshop itself

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