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Campaigners for Human Rights

## **COVID 19 Exposes the Urgent Need for Devolution** **Communities Speak-out on Devolution** **Report I: Bulawayo, Masvingo & Beitbridge**

### *Devolution Dialogue Transcends COVID 19 Restrictions*

Some two weeks ago, the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (ZimRights) launched an important resource: Guide to Understanding Devolution with a goal to empower communities in engaging in the devolution conversation. Because of the COVID 19 pandemic, the Guide was released in digital format through ZimRights media channels as well as through provincial WhatsApp groups. Over 7 000 people have since downloaded the Guide from the ZimRights website and thousands more have received it via ZimRights' 11 provincial WhatsApp groups. Last week, ZimRights proceeded to convene virtual community dialogues in Bulawayo, Masvingo and Matebeleland South. Each meeting was attended by an average of 65 participants from across the provinces with one of the groups registering as much as 142 participants. The zeal with which the provinces embraced the community

dialogues showed the importance of continually investing in tools to ensure citizen participation even in the middle of COVID 19. ZimRights invested in ensuring that Whats App mobilisation reached even the most marginalised communities and that the Guide was shared with all the participants to ensure maximum participation.

While ZimRights acknowledges that virtual meetings are not accessible to all people who may wish to participate because of the digital divide, it is also true that even physical meetings are never really accessible to everyone due to the physical divide and the logistical nightmare of travel in a difficult economy like Zimbabwe. ZimRights has made arrangements to make sure that the Devolution Guide will be translated and made available through community structures to all members who may have failed to participate in the virtual meetings.

At ZimRights, we believe that it is possible to combat COVID-19 and still allow citizen voices on critical matters. It is in this spirit that Community Dialogues on Devolution will be held across the country and the outcomes presented to Parliament and other stakeholders.

### ***Key Issues on Devolution***

From the three convenings of the week, a number of issues emerged. In this report, we summarise these issues and the way forward.

#### *Community Views on Devolution in General*

- ‘Devolution is here to help us a community, it will enable provinces to control and manage their resources to help uplift themselves. It depends on the citizens, it is the people's agenda, not a political agenda or that of civic society it is for the people to push for it to become a reality.’  
<https://soundcloud.com/zimrights/views-on-devolution-from-a-bulawayo-resident>
- ‘We really don’t know when this law on devolution shall be implemented because the problem we face is that we have our own needs and we would be need to make our own decisions as residents of this province of Masvingo

rather than for the Minister who makes all decisions and he is from central government. We should not wait for a Minister who usually resides in Harare. That creates problems and we don't want our development issues to be decided by someone else.' <https://soundcloud.com/zimrights/a-man-from-masvingo-views-on-devolution>

- There was money which was disbursed under devolution, no-one seems to know how it was used. We must demand accountability and we must be part of the decision making process on how the money is going to be used. Other participants recommended that an independent audit must be commissioned into the use of the funds.
- While devolution is still be implemented, funds have been disbursed supposedly under devolution. There must be a mechanism to track how such fund were disbursed and how they were utilised.
- Devolution will make an impact in people's lives if critical offices like the office of the Registrar General are brought closer to the people. Parliament can also be decentralised into another province.
- While the principle of devolution is noble, most of the amendments proposed are designed to suit a political agenda.
- Devolution must include transformation of the institution of traditional leadership to avoid politicisation of the institution.
- The issue of competence should never be a criterion for implementing devolution. Devolution starts on the premise that people have the right to self determine. It is like starting a family. Competence to run should never be a criterion.
- There was no consensus whether Members of Parliament should be part of the Provincial Council or simply play an oversight role. Other participants felt Members of Parliament must leave local governance business to local authorities.

*Community Views on Devolution on Amendment Bill Number 2 of 2020*

- Amendments relating to devolution provisions are necessary whether it is done now or later.
- The Constitution is good as it is. What it only needs is implementation. There is no perfect constitution in the world but let's make amendments after we have implemented the law. We will then know where we need to perfect.  
<https://soundcloud.com/zimrights/views-on-devolution-from-a-bulawayo-resident>
- Devolution somehow raises the issue of inclusion. Imagine that persons with disabilities have continued to be relegated as far as having budgets that do not factor in disability-related issues. Looking at the fact that Provincial Councillors have their own composition which leads to such a structure, there is need for inclusion of persons with disabilities as a special group under proportional representation. Otherwise without doing so we will see the fruits of devolution benefitting only a few.
- The Constitution provides for a referendum only in circumstances in which the amendment is in Chapter 4, which is the Bill of Right. However, though Parliament can amend all other provisions without referendum they must have regard to the views of the public, since the constitution was a product of public consultations.

*Key Asks for ZimRights*

From the Community Dialogue, the following are ZimRights' key asks:

1. That there be a comprehensive devolution framework beyond current proposed amendments, that ensures that all laws and policies are in line with the principle of devolution as outlined in the Constitution.

2. Parliament be encouraged to come up with the Provincial Councils and Metropolitan Councils law
3. There is need for Parliament to invest more time in civic education and awareness raising regarding devolution to get as much input from the public.
4. In principle, ZimRights must urge the Parliament to reject Constitutional Amendment Bill No.2. A separate bill must be developed focusing on devolution.
5. Traditional leaders are an integral part of devolution. Their power must be organic, derived from the Constitution to avoid a situation where they believe that their power comes from politicians. They must become more aware of the law and how it will affect their operations to avoid conflict with other government institutions.

## Conclusion

ZimRights will take the devolution dialogues to other provinces. The views of the communities will be presented to Parliament to ensure that Parliament is informed of the concerns of the communities.

*Devolution Community Dialogues are aimed at mobilising grassroots communities to contribute positively to the conversation on devolution. Use information below to share any feedback with us. To register for the next Community Dialogue on Devolution in your area get in touch with us on Whats App Number +263 734 053 955*

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