

The NGO Research Culture in Zimbabwe: Its Anatomy, Architecture and Typology

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Abstract: *This Article gives a synoptic summary or helicopter view of a PhD research project undertaken in Zimbabwe, with technical support and guidance from Christ University (Bangalore, India), between October 2011 and October 2013. The Thesis research project titled “The NGO Research Culture: Its dimensions, significance, influence, effects and implications on social development management efficacy in Zimbabwe” fuses field-based research practice audit and appreciative inquiry approaches to explore the anatomy, architecture and typology of research across diverse NGO categories in the country. The exploratory study is located in the context of institutional development, organizational performance and environmental adaptation. The study investigated the research culture of Zimbabwean Non-Governmental Organizations (ZNGOs) after realizing that most social development sector actors in the country are generally under-performing, uncompetitive and non-strategic. Motivated by a desire to contribute to on-going policy and practice debates on how to improve and enhance NGO sector performance, intervention targeting, quality service delivery and strategic market positioning in contemporary Zimbabwe, the study focused on several themes around the research-performance nexus in social development management. The study configured, developed and suggested a research-centered NGO management model (code named MIPEM) that support micro (sector) and macro (national) level efforts aimed at transforming ZNGOs into more dynamic, robust, versatile, creative, innovative, adaptive, responsive and evidence-based social development players. MIPEM is acronym for Management Intelligence and Performance Enhancement Model and its anchoring pillars are integrating, embedding, mainstreaming and overarching research as a planning and management tool. To determine the NGO research culture, the study considered multi-dimensional aspects of NGO research culture including research values, beliefs, traditions, norms, ideals, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and practices. The focus and scope of the field empirical survey was ascertaining how research is organized, applied, utilized, assimilated, grounded and promoted in 150 NGOs sampled from an estimated 2 500 NGOs working in various social development areas in Zimbabwe including social service provision, human and community development, citizen empowerment, civic education, socio-economic justice, research and advocacy. An eclectic methodological design was adopted for an exhaustive inquiry where units of analysis were self-reporting questionnaire, interview and focus group discussion responses by NGO senior managers, field staff, service consumers (beneficiaries) and other stakeholders. Study primary informants were NGO senior managers with the rest of sample elements as secondary data sources validating their responses. Other data collection methods used to cross-check NGO management responses included field observations, desk studies, content analysis and expert opinions. The exploratory study notes numerous research benefits to organization development, observes that research has an upgrading and quality improvement effect on NGO management, argues that research outcomes include transforming the architecture of decision support systems and management information systems in NGOs into and concluded that Zimbabwean NGOs have a weak research culture. The research-performance nexus in the NGO sector was confirmed by empirical evidence and supported by corroborative evidence. The linkages between NGO research culture and effective social development management are highlighted. The study recommend that Zimbabwean NGOs mainstream, embed and overarch research as an integral corporate planning tool and it further suggests adoption of a research-centered management intelligence and performance enhancement model that it code-named MIPEM.*

Keywords: NGO research culture, research architecture, research-performance nexus and development management efficacy.

1. Introduction

A national situational survey undertake by Non-State Actors Forum (NSAF) in 2006 characterized Zimbabwean NGOs as underperforming, uncompetitive and non-strategic. The practice audit (Thesis research project) was prompted by the NSAF survey startling findings and their subsequent analysis-induced assertion. The study, a research practice audit and appreciative inquiry, is motivated by desire to see research overarching NGO sector performance. Seeking to explore, validate and authenticate the assertion with a view to either confirm or reject a hypothetical proposition that Zimbabwean NGOs do not have a strong research culture.

2. Contextual Background to the Study

On the back of Civil Society Movement becoming more visible and influential in local, national, regional and world social, cultural, economic and political development, the

status of the NGO sector has been elevated in the last three decades [1]. The subsequent phenomenal growth of NGOs as a sector hitherto stereotyped and labeled volunteer managed social enterprises, reactive not for profit agencies, philanthropic and non-professional management philosophy informed by heart (inspiration, intuitive feelings) not head (scientific, rational and proactive) considerations however, invited heightened performance expectations reminiscent with benchmarked competitive, efficiency and strategic standards levels found only in the private or Business sector.

Globally, NGOs are a key constituent of the Civil Society sector championing Human Rights, Social Justice, social cohesion (integration and inclusivity), participatory democracy, citizen empowerment as well as democratization of development processes. In the case of Zimbabwe, there is empirical evidence confirming that NGOs have emerged, evolved and transformed into key national development actors, complimenting Government in social service

provision, security, protection and justice; human and community development; policy research and advocacy; skills and technology transfers to grassroots levels [2].

Social development management critics in Zimbabwe, however, discount NGO sector effectiveness on the basis that most of the sector actors exude overt organizational performance challenges and management ineptitudes manifesting in various ways including: asymmetric (unbalanced) organizational development designs, poor intervention targeting, white elephant programming, limited innovative and creative operational solutions, adoption of obsolete and redundant programming strategies, stagnant and retarded organizational growth and weak continuous learning and quality improvement culture. Manifestations of NGO sector underperformance include: poor intervention targeting, white elephant (irrelevant) and unsustainable projects, tainted and retarded growth, limited innovation and creativity, problem solving deficiencies, weak continuous learning and quality improvement culture, adoption of obsolete strategies and redundant interventions (tired and recycled approaches). Analysis of these overt operational weaknesses suggests that perhaps research is a key missing ingredient to improving NGO performance.

Critical analysis of the above cited performance se overt operational weaknesses suggests that perhaps research is a key missing ingredient to improving NGO performance. The NGO performance challenges highlighted above give credence to assertions that research is the most significant enabling tool towards improving NGO management intelligence and enhancing social development intervention effectiveness, efficiency, relevance and sustainability

Diverse stakeholder demands for a paradigm shift in the manner management roles and functions are discharged in the NGO sector have since triggered intense practice debate on how NGO management could be aligned to resonate with an elevated sector status in local and global development. as well as attracted academic (research or scientific community) interest has also been attracted to explaining how globalization in academic (research or scientific community) interest support, energize, motivate and stimulate professionalization of the NGO management in Zimbabwe.

As the sector adjusts, aligns and upgrades itself to resonate with higher market expectations, NGO managers need to shrug off traditional sector identity labels that portray NGOs as reactive, mechanical, uncompetitive and non-strategic providers of not-for profit, philanthropy, charity, voluntary, relief, emergency and humanitarian support services to proactive, robust, dynamic, adaptive, innovative, responsive and informed organizations [3].

NGO senior managers, just like their counterparts in public and private sectors, plan, control, lead, design, motivate, enable, guide and evaluate as they preside over organizational culture, operational frameworks, activities and diverse resources-financial, human, material, relations and information [4]. The argument is that management engineering (operational designs) effectiveness largely depend on the quality of planning information that managers use in crafting corporate strategies, tactics, operations,

policy and program frames. Management performance, excellence, effectiveness and wisdom are therefore essentially linked to organizational research philosophy.

3. Overview Summary of the Study Design

3.1 Study Purpose, Objectives and Scope

The study Terms of References (TORs) are derived from the research purpose and objectives that in turn are linked to the research problem. The scope of the study is improving NGO sector performance and enhancing social development management practice while its design requires investigating, determining, establishing, ascertaining and assessing various NGO research culture dimensions including the following measurement variables:

- How research is appreciated, organized, applied, utilized, assimilated, promoted and capacitated
- Research values, beliefs, norms, ideals, traditions, customs, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, practices
- Research influence and value-adding attributes to NGO planning decisions/management performance
- Research influence on the overall performance of NGO senior managers
- Implications of NGO sector research orientation on social development management efficacy

3.2 Study Hypotheses and Propositions

Zimbabwean NGOs (ZNGOs) do not have a strong research culture; ZNGO senior managers are not committed to prioritizing research activities; ZNGOs are not benefiting from a robust research-performance nexus; ZNGOs do not have sustainable research capacities: Research in ZNGOs is not institutionalized: Key intervention planning decisions in ZNGOs are not influenced by local community research inputs; A strong NGO sector research orientation positively impacts on social development management efficacy

3.3 Study Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

The study is premised on the assumption that NGOs undertake research in response to pull and push factors. NGO research is motivated by perceived benefits (a pull factor) and stakeholder/partner expectations (push factor). The study theoretical stance is influenced by the following viewpoints: research has improvement and upgrading effects and NGO managers make rational and informed decisions. The following management concepts anchor the study: Total Quality Management (TQM), Decision Support Systems (DSS), Management Information Systems (MIS), Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), Results-Based Management (RBM), Evidence-Based Management (EBM), Integrated Organization Development (IOD), Balanced Management Performance Scorecard (BMPS) and Total, Mature and Learning Organizations (TMLOs). The following management tenets and theoretical models underpin the study: input-output, inside looking out, social learning, mature and total organizations, improvement and upgrading, balanced performance measurement scorecard and continuous learning and quality improvement.

3.4 Study Methodological Designs

The research practice audit study was undertaken between December 2011 to June 2013 when there was heightened political activities in Zimbabwe (Constitutional reform outreaches followed by and plebiscite harmonized national elections). NGO senior managers and programming field staff were study primary informants with diverse NGO partners and stakeholders as secondary study informants. The study adopted an eclectic research philosophy that allows fusion, blending, triangulation and integration of research approaches, informants, methods, techniques, instruments and tools.

Field research approach was adopted since primary data and empirical evidence was required for the survey. A battery of data collection methods including self-administered questionnaires, structured interviews, mixed focus group discussions, passive field observations, case studies and content analysis was used. A mixed methodological design was preferred for an exhaustive exploratory study in order to enhance balance, objectivity, validity and reliability. A total of 150 NGOs drawn from all sector cluster categories in Zimbabwe including National NGOs (NNGOs), International NGOs (INGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Private Foundations and Trusts (PFTs) were the research subjects. Though the 150 sampled NGOs are a representative sample of an estimated 2 500 NGOs operating in Zimbabwe (population universe), the units of analysis are responses by a sample frame of 540 elements targeted for the investigation. Composition of the study sample include representatives of NGO senior managers, field staff, target beneficiaries, Governors (Advisors) and a cross-section of key stakeholders and partners including Government Agencies, Funding partners, Development Scholars and Management experts was identified using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques such as stratified cluster quota, systematic, purposive, convenience.

A predetermined cluster ratio was used in identifying 150 NGOs across main social development thematic focus areas in Zimbabwe as study units of analysis. To accommodate fundamental NGO differences, inclusivity, balance and purposive sampling of different NGO profiles (size, origin, location, legal identity attributes) all NGO sector actors in the country were first classified under five distinct cluster categories namely: National NGOs (NNGOs), International NGOs (INGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and Private Foundations and Trust (PFTs) before they were assigned to 10 equal provincial quota samples using a hybrid of random, lottery, purposive, systematic and convenience sampling techniques. Quota sampling was guided by a predetermined cluster ratio formula (1:2:3:4:5) to ensure that the constitution of each provincial (defined administrative area) quota sample comprised of the following cluster representative elements: 1PFT, 2 FBOs, 3INGOs, 4CBOs and 5NNGOS. With 10 administrative provinces in Zimbabwe, a cumulative sample frame of NGOs as primary study informants comprising of 10 PFTs, 20 FBOs, 30 INGOs, 40 CBOs and 50 NNGOs (sum total of 150 units of analysis) was drawn. Diagram 1 below shows the study NGO sample composition.

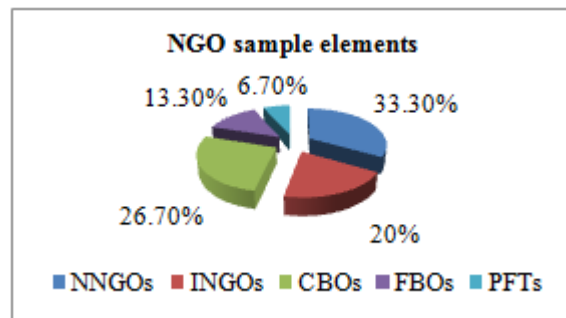


Figure 1: Composition of the NGO sample by category

4. Review of Related Literature

4.1 Conceptual Constructs of the Study

Culture is broadly defined as a unique way of life, depicting how things are done and represents values collectively shared by a particular community (NGOs). Culture epitomizes and shapes organization character, identity, ideology, perceptual, knowledge, attitudinal, behavioral and practice attributes. Cultural symbol are many and contextual but essentially include language (terminology), behaviors (actions, intentions, opinions, ideals and perceptions).

Elements of NGO research culture are quite diverse and contextual since culture is dynamic, situation-specific and always evolving. Research culture is a multi-dimensional phenomenon characterizing the sum total of NGO research values, beliefs, norms, ideals, aspirations, customs, traditions, knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and practices [1]. Some commonly used NGO planning information sources include: stakeholder planning indabas, community meetings, walk in requests, formal research, referrals (secondary data), dialogue and consultative platforms for partner inputs. NGO research represents formal and informal processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting useful data (systematic and purposeful soliciting of information that enables planning, measurement, monitoring, evaluation, forecasting (prediction), comparison and validation [2].

Research is a multi-dimensional phenomena manifesting in diverse forms including: studies, audits, surveys, inventories, inquiries, investigations, appraisals, discoveries, explorations, assessments, evaluations and measurements. Some of the common forms of applied research supporting NGO planning and management (social development interventions) include: baseline surveys, community inventories, population studies, capacity assessments, program evaluations, project impact measurements, variance analysis, organizational audits, stakeholder mapping, policy analysis, appreciative inquiries, census enumerations, phenomena investigations, performance appraisals, explorations and discoveries. In the context of NGO planning and management, research takes various forms including: surveys, studies, inventories, audits, inquiries, explorations, discoveries, investigations, assessments, analysis, scanning, evaluations, comparisons, appraisals, measurements, mapping, predictions and forecasting. There are different types of developmental research that NGOs may undertake and these include: action research (programming), appreciative research (market surveys), operational research (decision-supporting), diagnostic

research (needs identification), quality assurance research (project monitoring and evaluation). Other common types of research in social development management include: programming research, operational research, policy research, market research, predictive research, diagnostic research, prognostic research, developmental research, analytical research, situational research, measurement research, planning research and transformational research. The various types of action research in social development management include: gap analysis, needs identification, project monitoring and evaluation, environmental scanning, market research, operational research, variance analysis, performance measurement, organizational audits, capacity assessment, population census community inventories.

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4.2 Theoretical Frameworks of the Study

An extensive literature review is done to situate the study in the context of existing knowledge, on-going debates and current discourse on improving NGO sector performance and social development management effectiveness in Zimbabwe. The review locates the study in global, regional, national and sector perspectives. The following issues are noted, discussed and interrogated: the historical evolution of applied research, role and state of research in Zimbabwe, research-performance nexus in social development management, anatomy, architecture and typology of research in ZNGOs and NGO research implications for social development management effectiveness.

4.3 NGO Research Motivation (Pull-Push Factors)

ZNGOs undertake research for various reasons including: perceived benefits, stakeholder expectations, donor prescriptions (funding conditions), peer pressure (everyone is doing so), organizational customs and traditions, demand-driven (research done to understand a particular issue or to realize specific task objectives)

4.4 Research Effects on NGO Management Efficacy

- Operational effectiveness and efficiency-attaining the right purpose by doing right things in the right way at the right time with the right tools for the right people at the right cost
- Quality improvement-upgrading, effecting and sustaining highest possible standards
- Game changer-trigger and stimulate necessary positive changes (cause transformation)
- Relevance-appropriate, necessary, essential, acceptable and useful to expectations
- Accurate targeting-determining the what, why, where, when, who, how and with what
- Stakeholder confidence-winning the heart, satisfaction, recognition and approval of all
- Operational integrity-design operational systems and adopt practices inspiring confidence

- Informed practice-information, knowledge and wisdom (information banks for Decision support systems, enriched analysis, evaluation, comparison, measurement, control, sound judgment)
- Management intelligence-environmental awareness, enlightened decisions, planning insights and foresight, proactively getting the right and useful information before actions
- Balanced organizational development-right mix of 7 S critical elements for institutional strengthening namely organizational structure, strategy, style, systems, skills, shared values and subordinate goals
- Promotes adaptive, responsive, innovative, creative, strategic, rational and informed decisions
- Upgrading effect-total, mature, magnanimous, versatile, robust and dynamic organization

4.5 The Strategic Value of Research to NGOs

- Research improves intervention design, implementation and performance measurement
- Research strengthens management insight, foresight, enlightenment and intelligence
- Research facilitates environmental awareness, adaptation and responsiveness
- Research enhances organizational creativity, innovation, prudence and shrewdness
- Research fosters culture of cause-effect analysis, rational decisions and proactive actions
- Research supports strategic planning, market positioning and resource mobilization efforts
- Research engender stakeholder participation, confidence, buy-in and attractiveness
- Research cultivates virtues of transparency, accountability and risk management
- Research embraces efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and integration
- Research grounds information-driven, needs-responsiveness and knowledge-based practices
- Research improves management, analytical, evaluative and predictive skills
- Research inspires confidence and enhances planning, problem solving, performance measurement and , priority setting competencies
- Research has bearing on the governance aspects of social development- participation, transparency, accountability
- Research positively impacts on social development management efficacy (improves planning quality, rationality of decisions and operational prudence)
- Research shapes market quality perceptions as well as encourage active stakeholder participation, involvement and buy-in
- Research strengthens risk control and management
- Research inspires management and stakeholder confidence (dispels impression of trial and error)
- Research enlightens decision-making and informs actions (evidence-based and information-driven)
- Research gives planning insights and foresight
- Research increases environmental awareness, literacy, intelligence, adaptation and alignment
- Research assures rationality, objectivity, creativity, predictability, measurement and analysis

- Research enhances organizational alertness, robustness, versatility, tenacity and competitiveness
- Research improves service quality, adaptability, innovative, creativity and responsiveness
- Research enhances strategy formulation, tactical shrewdness and operational efficiency

4.6 NGO Expected Research Outcomes

Some of ZNGO expected research outcomes include;

- Management awareness, enlightenment, intelligence, insight, foresight, versatility, robustness and prudence
- Informed, responsive, adaptive, analytical, evaluative, creative, innovative, predictive
- Effective planning, problem solving, performance measurement, priority setting and rational decisions
- Opportunities for NGOs to assert sovereign (independent/ autonomous) development decisions

4.7 Common Uses of NGO Research

Zimbabwean NGOs mostly use research as a tool for:

- Activity targeting and planning
- Needs identification
- Interventions design
- Support evidence-based advocacy
- Resource mobilization enrichment
- Performance measurement
- Variance and trend analysis
- Making rational decisions
- Justifying management decisions and actions
- Continuous learning and quality improvement
- Preparing presentation technical papers
- Environmental scanning

4.8 Requirements for grounding research in NGOs

Key NGO research grounding requirements include;

- Senior management commitment and support
- Supportive institutions and infrastructure
- Appropriate skills, technology and capacities
- Collaborative partnerships/leveraging synergy
- Integrated in organization culture and actions

5. Synopsis of Key Study Findings

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study response rates:

Table 1: Response rate per informant category

Informant category	Response rate	
	Number	Percentage
NGO Senior Managers	147 out of 150	98%
NGO Field staff	143 out of 150	95.33%
NGO Governors	28 out of 30	93.33%
NGO target beneficiaries	53 out of 60	88.33%
NGO funding partners	28 out of 30	93.33%
Government Officials	14 out of 15	93.33%
Local Authority Officials	14 out of 15	93.33%

Academia (Researchers)	30 out of 30	100%
Social development experts	29 out of 30	96.67%
Management experts	28 out of 30	93.33%
Total study informants	514 out of 540	95.19%

An aggregated response rate of 95.19% was accepted as statistically significant to generalize the study findings.

5.2 Study Sample Opinion on NGO Research Culture

Table 2: Responses to the question Do Zimbabwean NGOs have a strong research culture?

Informant category	Affirmative (Yes) responses	
	Number	Percentage
NGO senior managers	102 out of 147	69.39%
NGO field staff	76 out of 147	51.7%
NGO service benefactors	31 out of 53	58.49%
NGO funding partners	15 out of 28	53.57%
Government officials	5 out of 29	17.24%
Academia (Researchers)	11 out of 30	36.67%
Social development experts	12 out of 29	41.38%
Management experts	7 out of 28	25%
Total study informants	259 out of 485	53.40%

5.3 The State of Research in Zimbabwean NGOs

5.3.1 NGO Research Practice Inventory Results

- 87.76.% of NGOs in the sample did not have stand-alone research structures and supporting budgets
- 57.82% of respondents were of the opinion that research has low priority in the allocation of NGO resources
- 83.67% of NGO sample elements did not recruit staff on the basis of perceived research aptitude or competencies
- 96.67% of the academia felt that NGOs did not value strategic leveraging (collaborative research)
- 73.47% of NGOs in the sample did not have substantial and regular investments in research supporting infrastructure and technology
- 51.70% of NGO informants rated themselves as having a weak research culture (orientation or inclination)
- 91.16% of NGOs did not have research as a regular agenda item at senior management meetings
- 69.39% of NGOs did not have post-research (follow through) support activity plans and budgets
- 78.23% of NGOs did not have mechanisms to share, disseminate, promote and market their research
- 80.95% of NGOs did not incorporate research in their strategic plans, mission and vision statements
- 61.90% of NGOs did not apply diverse research types (have biased preference for programming research)
- 95.24% of NGOs did not undertake research on regular frequency basis (research is not a regular activity)
- 73.47% of NGOs contracted out their research assignments to external consultants (not done by own staff)
- 58.50% of NGOs did not act on research outcomes (recommendations) with most reports often just left to gather dust in management desk drawers
- 75.51 % of local NGOs do not have post-research plans and supporting budgets

- Most NGO beneficiaries are of the opinion that research is a catalyst for their active participation in development planning
- 80% of stakeholders believe that research did not influence main NGO interventions decisions
- 84 % of activity funding partners believe NGOs with a strong research culture had better chances of securing long-term funding
- 64 % of government officials feel Zimbabwean NGOs are pushing a regime change rather than social development agenda
- 72.41 % of the Academia believe NGOs could benefit from forging collaborative research partnerships with Universities
- 93.33 % of social development experts are of the opinion that a strong NGO sector research culture improve development management effectiveness
- 84 % of business management (private sector) experts express an opinion affirming that NGO sector managers are not committed to research influence, strengthening and diversification
- 79.31% of development scholars (academia and students) regard Zimbabwean NGOs as incapacitated for sustainable research-(sector has limited research skills and supporting infrastructure)
- 67.35 % of senior NGO managers believe that the state of research in the sector is a true reflection of the generally low priority given to research in the country
- 87.76 % of NGO operational staff feel that their Head-Offices (senior managers and policy planners) do not act on recommendations from field activity and research reports
- 64.29 % of NGO Governors or Policy Advisors acknowledge that research is not quite visible in strategic directional instruments
- The NGO sector in Zimbabwe does not have strong research institutions and supporting infrastructure
- The NGO sector does not have clearly defined research standards, protocols and policy frames
- The NGO sector in Zimbabwe does not have robust research networks and strategic partnerships
- Primary consumers of NGO research are their foreign donors or funding partners
- NGO research agenda is not native since it is mainly donor prescribed or externally determined
- Major consumers of NGO research reports are their senior managers and funding partners (sponsors)
- NGOs sponsored by donors emphasizing operational intelligence are pro-research
- NGOs sharing same funding partner and country of origin have similar research values
- NGO research capacity deficiencies evidenced by lack of ideological orientation, skill, resources, management commitment, supporting institutions, infrastructure and linkages
- NGO weak research culture manifest in several ways including poor intervention targeting, limited creativity/innovation, retarded growth, quality challenges and underfunding
- NNGOs undertake both quantitative and qualitative research types though this is done at small scale
- INGOs and PFTs have formal research agendas, structures, activities, budgets and training programs
- INGOs have research capacity but tend to use one size fits all programming interventions
- INGOs tend to use research more as a Public Relations tool that hardly influence NGO practice
- FBOs give research low priority in the deployment allocation of organizational resources
- CBOs have the least research orientation, propensity, appetite, aptitude and disposition

5.3.2 Appreciative Inquiry Summary Results

- NGO sector research is not regular, mainstreamed, integrated, effectively organized and coordinated
- Research does not significantly influence key NGO policy and programming interventions
- Research is a marginalized, periphery, occasional and residual management planning tool
- NGO managers do not prioritize research in the deployment of organizational resources
- NGOs do not have sustainable internal and sector-wide research capacities
- NGO sector research institutions are not strong
- NGOs do not invest in research supporting skills, technology and infrastructure
- Research in Zimbabwean NGOs is a periphery management issue (not an active agenda item)
- Research in Zimbabwean NGOs is predominantly foreign funded and determined (demand driven)
- NGO senior managers are not committed to investing in capacitating research activities
- On face value, NGOs have the requisite research terminology but this cultural aspect is not skin deep
- Zimbabwean NGOs do not give research priority in the allocation of resources
- Zimbabwean NGOs do not have sustainable research capacities (diverse skills and technology)

5.3.3 Stakeholder Views/Perceptions on NGO Research

- 70 % of social development experts consider ZNGOs as having a weak research culture
- 75% of NGO Advisors/Governors/Trustees believe research has improvement-upgrading effects
- 87.76 % of NGO field staff believe that their head-offices do not act on their activity reports
- 91.3% of Government officials feel ZNGOs use research to push a regime-change agenda
- 82,76% of social development scholars are of the opinion that a strong NGO research culture positively impact on social development management efficacy
- 30% of Local Authorities rated Zimbabwean NGOs as having a strong participatory culture
- 90% of government officials feel that most ZNGOs have a regime change rather than developmental agenda
- Over 70 % of NGO sector key stakeholders rate ZNGOs as having a weak research culture
- 86.67% of development management experts view research as the panacea for underperforming NGOs
- Most NGO funding partners believe that NGOs with a strong research culture have better chances of securing long-term project funding support
- Most NGO beneficiaries believe that research allowed their involvement/participation in decision making

- Research provides NGOs with opportunities to assert their sovereign (independent and autonomous) development decisions
- Research offers mechanisms for NGOs to influence national and sector development (evidence-based)
- Research offers numerous opportunities for NGO managers to become professional and objective
- Research bolsters NGO performance and competitive opportunities
- All social development management experts held a view that a strong NGO research culture positively impacts social development management efficacy
- Most NGO funding partners believe NGOs with a strong research culture had better chances of securing long-term project funding support
- Most NGO beneficiaries feel that research has opportunities to influence NGO planning decisions
- Local Authorities feel that research provides NGOs with opportunities to assert sovereign (independent and autonomous) development decisions
- Research has excellent platforms for NGOs to influence national and sector development
- Research offers numerous opportunities for NGO managers to become professional and objective
- Research enhances NGO performance and competitiveness

5.3.4 Interpretive Accounts of Emerging Data Trends

- NGOs do not have a strategic, robust, native, holistic, integrated and cohesive research agenda is prescribed by their external sponsors (donors)
- Major and strategic NGO research assignments are undertaken by hired external Consultants
- Most NGO research assignments are undertaken under specified funding conditions
- NGOs sponsored by one external source emphasizing intelligence are pro-research
- NGO research capacity deficiencies evidenced by lack of philosophical orientation, skill, resources, management commitment, supporting institutions/ infrastructure and linkages
- INGOs have research capacity but tend to use one size fits all programming interventions
- CBOs give research low priority in the deployment allocation of organizational resources
- Most government agencies feel that Zimbabwean NGOs are pushing the regime change agenda
- Most social development management experts are of the opinion that a strong NGO research culture improved social development management efficacy
- Most NGO funding partners believe NGOs with a strong research culture have better opportunities to secure long-term project funding
- Most NGO beneficiaries believe that research is a catalyst for their participation in NGO planning
- Most NGOs do not recruit staff on the basis of research competencies, proficiencies and aptitudes
- Most NGOs do not have a robust and integrated research agenda comprising various forms or types

5.3.5 Emerging Patterns Empirically Supported

- Research applications, utilization and assimilation are limited both in scope and practice
- Research does not significantly influence key NGO policy and programming interventions
- Research is a marginalized, periphery, occasional and residual management planning tool
- NGO managers do not prioritize research in the deployment of organizational resources
- NGOs do not have sustainable internal and sector-wide research capacities
- NGOs are not benefiting from a strong research-performance nexus
- NGO sector research institutions are not strong, robust and dynamic
- NGOs do not invest in research supporting skills, technology and infrastructure
- Research is not regular, mainstreamed, integrated, effectively organized and coordinated
- Both quantitative and qualitative research types are undertaken though at a small scale
- Research does not significantly influence NGO policy and programming interventions
- Research is a marginalized, periphery, occasional and residual management planning tool
- NGO managers do not prioritize research in the deployment of organizational resources
- NGOs do not have sustainable internal and sector-wide research capacities
- NGO sector research institutions are not strong, robust and dynamic
- NGOs do not invest in research supporting skills, technology and infrastructure
- Research in Zimbabwean NGOs is a periphery management issue (not an active agenda item)
- Research in Zimbabwean NGOs is essentially foreign funded
- NGO senior managers are not committed to research influence
- On face value, NGOs have the requisite action research terminology
- Zimbabwean NGOs do not give research priority in the allocation of resources
- Zimbabwean NGOs do not have sustainable research capacities
- The NGO sector in Zimbabwe does not have strong research institutions
- The NGO sector does not have clear research protocols, policies and guidelines
- The NGO sector in Zimbabwe does not have vibrant research alliances and networks
- Primary consumers of NGO research are foreign donors or funding partners

5.3.6 NGO research knowledge, values and beliefs

1. Research is an important management and planning tool
2. Research informs policy and programming decisions
3. Research improves intervention targeting, facilitates comparisons and enhances performance measurement
4. Research stimulates creative and innovative solutions as well as enhance environmental awareness and adaptability

5. Research enables/facilitates continuous learning, quality improvement, market positioning and customer satisfaction

5.3.7 NGO Research Behaviors and Practices

1. Research is not a regular and active agenda item at senior management planning and review meetings
2. Research is not given priority in the deployment of competing organizational and operational resources
3. Research budgets often have a low uptake and are quite easily transferred for unplanned uses (abused and misused)
4. Research outputs, outcomes and reports are left to gather dust in management offices (not acted upon-widely shared)
5. Research roles, applications, capacities and institutions are not adequately promoted and supported by managers
6. Research practice has no clearly defined performance indicators, standards, benchmarks and protocols

5.3.8 NGO Research Norms, Customs and Traditions

1. Baseline surveys done to identify needs that influence inception intervention designs
2. Mid-term project evaluation is done to steer interventions towards milestone achievements and improve effectiveness
3. Project end evaluations done to assess overall project impacts and draw future implementation lessons
4. External Consultants are hired to undertake strategically important and high-impact research assignments
5. Appreciative inquiries done to get stakeholder inputs on what is, could be and will be important now and in future

5.3.9 NGO Research Norms

1. Blending quantitative and qualitative research philosophies on a consumer demand-basis
2. Strong bias for programming (action) oriented research without regard for other research types
3. Research content and design decisions are delegated to lower level organizational structures
4. Research reports, especially negative project evaluations, are not widely shared or disseminated
5. Staff recruitment policy and selection criteria neither emphasize research aptitude nor skills

5.3.10 NGO Research Preferences and Priorities

Needs identification (diagnostic and prognostic research)

1. Project planning, development, monitoring and evaluation
2. Stakeholder mapping and public opinion surveys (exploratory and descriptive studies)
3. Situational assessments and cause-effect analysis (descriptive studies)
4. Policy assessments, appraisals and evaluations for advocacy targeting and campaign designs
5. Trend and scenario analysis, prediction and projections environmental scanning to support strategic planning

5.3.11 NGO Research Agenda and Utility Value

1. Community inventories and population studies
2. Needs identification, gap-variance analysis and project design or development (diagnostic research applications)

3. Situation/status assessment, stakeholder mapping studies, opinion surveys and intervention monitoring and evaluation
4. Organizational and management performance audits
5. Baseline survey, feasibility study and impact assessment
6. Policy and market research and environmental scanning

5.3.12 NGO Research Motivation (pull-push factors)

ZNGOs undertake research for several reasons including perceived benefits, stakeholder expectations, donor prescriptions (funding conditions), peer pressure (everyone is doing so), organizational customs and traditions, demand-driven (need to understand a defined issue or realize specific task objectives)

5.3.13 Research and NGO Management Efficacy

- Operational effectiveness and efficiency-attaining the right purpose by doing right things in the right way at the right time with the right tools for the right people at the right cost
- Quality improvement-upgrading, effecting and sustaining highest possible standards
- Game changer-trigger and stimulate necessary positive changes (cause transformation)
- Relevance-appropriate, necessary, essential, acceptable and useful to expectations
- Accurate targeting-determining the what, why, where, when, who, how and with what
- Stakeholder confidence-winning the heart, satisfaction, recognition and approval of all
- Operational integrity-design operational systems and adopt practices inspiring confidence
- Informed practice-information, knowledge, wisdom (DSS elements), enriched analysis, evaluation, comparison, measurement, control, sound judgment
- Management intelligence-environmental awareness, enlightened decisions, planning insights and foresight, proactively getting the right and useful information before actions
- Balanced organizational development-right mix of 7 S critical institutional strengthening elements (structure, strategy, style, systems, skills, shared values and subordinate goals)
- Adaptive, responsive, innovative, creative, strategic, rational and informed decisions
- Upgrading effect-total, mature, magnanimous, versatile, robust and dynamic organization

5.3.14 The anatomy of research in ZNGOs

Research is a broad-based phenomenon symbolic of:

- Formal and informal means of acquiring useful planning and management information
- Purposive engagements with stakeholders in order to get their views, opinions and inputs
- Systematic processes of eliciting inputs through dialogue and consultative engagements
- Mechanisms to rope in broad-based stakeholder participation/involvement in decisions and actions

5.3.15 The architecture of research in ZNGOs

ZNGOs undertake many research types including:

- Programming research-needs identification, project monitoring and evaluation
- Operational research-community inventories, population studies, organizational audits,
- Diagnostic research-cause-effect analysis, performance measurement,
- Policy research-situational studies, gap analysis, content and sensitivity assessments
- Market research-opinion surveys, environmental scanning, stakeholder mapping,
- Developmental research-widening knowledge frontiers, exploring new possibilities, feasibility studies, business process re-engineering,

5.3.16 The typology of research in ZNGOs

The NGO research landscape in Zimbabwe is:

- Limited collaboration with mainstream research institutions like Universities (this is national cult)
- Limited capacities for sustainable research due to traditional NGO management philosophy, non-strategic utilization of research, stereotyped stakeholder perceptions and externally induced research agenda
- Limited commitment to research influence-outputs not acted upon, used as façade or PR gesture, low investment in research, difficult Government-NGO relations, funding challenges
- Limited coverage-narrow range of research applications, other intervention determinants
- Limited cohesion-research not an embedded , integrated and mainstreamed activity

5.4 NGO Research-Performance Linkages

It is apparent from research findings and field observations that there is strong correlation between NGO research orientation and performance. Both inductive and deductive inferences made in the study indicate strong associational relationships (linkages) between the following variables:

- NGO strong research culture and ability to attract long-term funding support
- NGO strong research inclination and accurate intervention targeting
- NGO strong research orientation and sustainability of programming impacts
- NGO strong research philosophy and stakeholder collaboration and buy-in
- NGO strong research bias and beneficiary involvement or engagement
- NGO strong research commitment and innovative and creative operational solutions
- NGO strong research passions and balanced organizational development
- NGO strong research culture and use of balanced performance measurement tools
- NGO strong research culture and organization flexibility, responsiveness and adaption
- NGO strong research culture and participatory, bottom-up and inclusive planning models
- NGO internal research sharing mechanisms and post-research follow up support plan

- NGO internal research sharing and staff development commitment
- NGO internal research sharing and positive rating by broad-based stakeholders
- NGO internal research sharing platforms and customer satisfaction investment
- NGO internal research sharing and health management-staff relations There is a positive correlation between a strong research culture and competitive performance
- NGOs with a strong research culture are relatively competitive, strategic, attractive and sustainable
- There is an inverse relationship between NGO research orientation and market positioning or influence

6. Study Main Conclusions

6.1.1 Zimbabwean NGOs do not have a strong research culture despite having a right terminological orientation

6.1.2 Zimbabwean NGOs do not have sustainable internal capacities for effective research

6.1.3 Zimbabwean NGO senior managers are not committed to investing in research influence

6.1.4 Zimbabwean NGOs do not prioritize research in the deployment of organizational resources

6.1.5 Zimbabwean NGOs do not integrate, mainstream, embed, overarch and leverage action research

6.1.6 Zimbabwean NGOs undertake/utilize research more as a façade cosmetic than a management tool

6.1.7 Zimbabwean NGOs have weak research-supporting policy frames and institutional arrangements

6.1.8 Zimbabwean NGOs are more loyal/sensitive to donors than communities they work with

6.1.9 Zimbabwean NGOs do not cultivate and foster requisite conditions for a strong research culture

6.1.10 Quality of NGO planning and management wisdom depends on quality of planning information used

6.1.11 Research application, utilization and assimilation is limited in scope and practice

6.1.12 NGO research inclination (orientation) has a direct bearing on social development management efficacy.

6.1.13 Research provides important platforms for in-built mechanisms to promote good corporate governance and risk management by preventing common management pitfalls of excessive office misuses and unitary power abuses as managers are expected to be guided by expressed popular views and open up to public scrutiny.

6.1.14 Research therefore supports NGO management transparency and accountability (stakeholders can audit, verify and validate management actions against research inputs)

6.1.15 NGO research culture impacts positively on social development management efficacy. NGO research facilitates prudent decision making, buy-in and accountability

7. Discussion of Study Key Findings**7.1 Determinants of NGO Research Culture in Zimbabwe****7.1.1 Endogenous Factors or Considerations Include**

Organizational profile parameters (attributes) such as corporate ideology, history, size, customs, traditions, culture, activities, funding sources and peer pressure (association

effect) shape and influence NGO research orientation, abilities, capabilities and capacities

Management philosophy, values, ethos, mind-set, assumptions, attitudes and priorities ultimately influence NGO operational frameworks and organizational culture. Organizational strategic direction, aspirations, goals, objectives and intentions, planning protocols, models, processes and management decision-making structures. Capacities (resource base, skills mix, technology, infrastructure, synergy and leveraging points). Supportive internal environment made up of policies, protocols, systems, structures, strategies, skills, shared values, subordinate goals, skills base technological capabilities, diversified resources and management political will (commitment) are key institutional components that determine the scope, breaths and depth of research activities in NGOs

7.2 Exogenous Factors or Considerations Include

Environmental characteristics inevitably expose an NGO to the contagion effects (common sector practices, benchmark standards, operational guidelines subject NGOs to systemic influence and pressure as contextual and relational realities have compelling power (if all other sector players do research this will pressurize an NGO to act likewise). Macro level operational environment attributes (political climate, economic performance, funding conditions, regulatory frameworks, market demands or stakeholder expectations, globalization opportunities and threats) inevitably expose an NGO to the contagion effect of systemic (sector-wide), peer influence, contextual realities and relational matrix power (if all other peers/players do research this will pressurize an NGO to also act likewise)

Stakeholder expectations, market demands and donor prescriptions have immense influence on NGO research outlook and inclination. NGO research is demand-driven in that it responds to information needs of diverse stakeholders including funding partners, government and intended beneficiaries (all consumers of NGO research determine the form, content and frequency of research is determined by the information needs of consumers of NGO research) since effective research responds to diverse user needs

7.3 Cause-Effect Analysis (attribution)

Zimbabwean NGOs do not have a strong research culture and this may be attributed to the following observations:

- NGO managers do not prioritize research in the deployment of organizational resources
- NGO senior managers are not committed to research planning influence
- NGOs do not invest in sustainable research capacities and supporting institutions
- NGOs do not have supporting research promoting infrastructure and grounding technology
- NGOs do not view research as a regular, integrated, mainstreamed and embedded activity
- NGOs mainly use research for public relations purposes (meant to create impressions)
- NGOs do not have strong research philosophies, protocols, policies, practices and standards

- NGOs do not have effectively organized, promoted, shared and documented research actions
- NGOs do not leverage research short-comings by synergistic collaborative partnerships
- NGOs do not value strategic research alliances, networks and partnerships
- NGOs do not have research performance and documentation tracking systems

7.4 Constraints to Strengthening NGO Research Culture

- Donor fatigue currently existing in the country shrinking research and other budgets
- Fluctuating/vacillating (shifting/changing) redefined national development aid priorities
- Research crowded out by hardware programming interventions (public performance)
- Resource constraints in an environment of many humanitarian/emergency relief needs
- Difficult/disabling legislative & regulatory environment- POSA, AIPPA, NGO Bill effects
- Donor dependency and prescriptive tendencies
- Frost Government-NGO relations
- Inadequate internal capacities and commitment to research influence
- Poor sector-wide research institutional arrangements
- Failure to strategically invest in supporting infrastructure-skills, technology, partnerships
- Holding on to traditional and obsolete management approaches and cultural philosophies
- Sector failure to evolve, transform, embrace and professionalize management practices
- Token and stage-managed research (research done as a public relations activity)
- Absence of platforms for research sharing, dissemination, promotion and marketing
- Limited scope (breaths and depth) of research application-narrow range of research types

7.5 Strategies to Strengthen Research in the NGO Sector

- There is need for diverse research applications in order to unlock NGO management performance
- Mainstream, integrate and embed research as an overarching management function
- Invest in strengthening research institutions, partnerships, alliances and collaboration
- Build and retain NGO internal and sector-wide research capacities (skills, infrastructure)
- Institute research ambassadors, establish research promotion platforms and research clubs
- Strategic research partnerships, alliances and networks
- Investing in research capacities and institutions
- Leveraging research weaknesses through synergies and partnerships
- Catching and coaching young researcher (connecting by interns, school research clubs)
- Scaling up integrated and embedded research-pursue a robust & dynamic research agenda

7.6 Measures/Mechanisms to Strengthen NGO Research

- Diverse research applications in order to unlock NGO management value and ground performance
- Mainstream, integrate and embed research as an overarching management function (new approach)
- Invest in strengthening research institutions, partnerships, alliances and collaboration (synergy)
- Build and retain NGO internal and sector-wide research capacities (leveraging skills/infrastructure)
- Institute research ambassadors and establish research promotion platforms promoter at all levels
- Re-define, re-engineer and re-configure the role and place of research in NGO management
- Take on a business-like approach to NGO management (scientific, measurement, strategic)

7.7 Opportunities to Broaden/Deepen NGO Research

- Supportive policy frames and infrastructure
- Heightened national research prioritization
- Growing national, regional and global awareness (towards evidence-based interventions)
- Availability of alternative research funding sources-consultancy, cost-sharing, joint research assignments, participatory research-subsidies, internship and research fellows

8. Study Summary Conclusions

- Research in ZNGOs is not effectively organized (no sufficient supporting structures)
- There is limited research applications in ZNGOs (programming focus not other types)
- ZNGOs do not have sustainable capacities for research (no skills, technology, institutions)
- ZNGOs have weak research institutions (no networks, sharing platforms and policy frames)
- NGO senior managers are not committed to research influence (low priority and less involved)
- ZNGOs appreciate research benefits but have limited applications, utilization and assimilation
- ZNGO research is not adequately promoted (not shared, disseminated and show-cased)
- Zimbabwean NGOs have no research practice code of conduct (good practice, protocols and standards)
- Zimbabwean NGO have no strong research culture (orientation, philosophy and practice)
- Zimbabwean NGO managers have no commitment to research influence (budgets, priority and time)
- Zimbabwean NGOs have no sustainable research capacity, skills, technology and institutions
- Zimbabwean NGOs have no holistic, inclusive and integrated research agenda (do all research types)
- Zimbabwean NGOs have no strong research institutions (supporting networks and policies)
- Zimbabwean NGOs have no research practice code (protocols and standards) guiding research conduct
- Zimbabwean NGOs are not benefiting from a research-performance nexus and research synergies

NGO performance deficiencies in Zimbabwe are attributed to and undermined by: low priority given to research, under-developed research culture, down-graded research influence, relegating research as a periphery activity, limited research investments, low management commitment to research, disjuncture between researchers and policy planners. NGO research culture cannot be strengthened without: senior management commitment, sustainable internal capacities, requisite supporting infrastructure, research prioritization in resource deployment, embedding or integrating research in all management functions and activities, developing strategic collaborative research partnerships with diverse stakeholders, paradigm shift towards continuous learning and quality improvement, strategic partnerships, alliances, networks and institutions (synergies), upgrading mind-set and discovery philosophy.

The study affirms strong linkages between research and performance in the context of NGO management as evidenced by positive correlation between NGO strong research orientation and stakeholder attractiveness, resource mobilization ability, strategic market positioning, tactical shrewdness, operational prudence, balanced organization development, widening service provision range, customer satisfaction focus and quality service delivery.

Study findings confirm that research: enables Total Quality Management and Business Process Re-engineering, improves decision support and management information systems, enhances knowledge management and balanced organizational development, engenders results-based management, promote needs-responsive (evidence-based, information-driven) approaches, facilitate environmental adaptation, planning intelligence and tactical shrewdness, strategic market positioning and customer satisfaction

9. Study Summary Recommendations

- Zimbabwean NGOs need to strengthen research capacities, institutions, networks and alliances
- Zimbabwean NGOs need to develop strategic and collaborative research partnerships with diverse mainstream research institutions like Universities
- Zimbabwean NGOs need to establish stand alone research structures and increase research budgets
- Zimbabwean NGO sector need to embrace, embed and integrate research supporting technology
- Government of Zimbabwe need to create an enabling environment to promote NGO research
- There is need for NGOs to allocate more resources for research (UN conventions threshold is 12%)
- There is need for NGOs to diversify research by applying different types of action research
- There is need for NGOs to undertake research on a regular basis (make research an integral activity)
- There is need for NGOs to prioritize research in the allocation of organizational resources
- There is need for NGOs to invest in developing research skills for both management and staff
- There is need for NGOs to develop research impact monitoring systems and performance indicators
- There is need for NGOs to establish, foster, nurture and invest in collaborative research partnerships

- There is need for NGOs to make research an active agenda item at management planning meetings
- ZNGOs need to become more evidence-based and make scientific decisions
- There is need for NGOs to commit themselves to act on research outputs (have post-research plans)
- There is need for NGOs to develop broad-based institutional capacities for sustainable research
- There is need for NGOs to promote research alliances and multi-disciplinary research teams
- There is need for NGOs to incorporate research in their mission statements and strategic plans
- There is need for platforms supporting regular interactions between researchers and policy makers
- There is need for NGO collaborative research with mainstream research institutions as Universities
- There is need for innovative ways to strengthen research leveraging synergy, sharing, dissemination
- There is need for NGO stand-alone research structures/budgets to avoid crowding-out effect
- There is need for NGOs to invest in research supporting infrastructure, technology and training
- There is need for NGOs to have post-research supporting mechanisms, plans and budgets
- There is need for NGOs to apply diverse but complimentary research types and forms
- There is need for NGOs to develop research performance measurement indicators
- There is need for diverse incentives to encourage, promote and scale up NGO research
- ZNGOs need both short and long term policy and programming plans that transform and strengthen research

10. Suggested NGO Management Improvement Model

ZNGOs need a paradigm shift in the manner research is perceived, organized, structured, applied, utilized, assimilated, capacitated and promoted. The study suggests that ZNGOs adopt and adapt a configured Management Intelligence and Performance Enhancement Model (MIPEM) emphasizing the following:

1. NGOs cultivate, foster and promote a research-centered management philosophy premised on evidence-based, information-driven and needs-responsive operational practices where all management and planning roles, functions, responsibilities and decisions are research informed, anchored, imbedded and overarched
2. NGOs integrate, mainstream, leverage and embed research as an overarching planning tool characterized by demonstrable practical commitment to disciplined application of all project management cycles (PMC) iterative research processes (plan, execute, monitor, evaluate, learn lessons, align, re-plan) overarch management decisions and planning actions

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