

## EMERGING SUSTAINABILITY AND CO-CREATION PERSPECTIVES IN PUBLIC SECTOR GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE

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### ABSTRACT

*Globally, sustainability and co-creation perspectives are emerging as success factors for effective public sector service delivery. Sustainability exhorts public institutions to embrace governance practices that are fair to both present and future generations, while co-creation perspectives reinforce sustainability by calling for government collaboration with citizens to enable joint design and production of goods and services. Utilising New Public Governance and Public Value theoretical frameworks, this study undertook systematic reviews of relevant experiences in selected countries in a bid to create a basis for interpreting the dynamics affecting the uptake of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in the public sectors in Zimbabwe, using the mining and energy sectors as principal case studies. Study findings indicate that although sustainability and co-creation practices are taking root across public sectors in Zimbabwe, more needs to be done to fast-track the sustainability and co-creation transformation while ensuring policy prioritisation is aligned with addressing citizen service gaps. Environmental protection and citizen welfare were found to be critical in guaranteeing the success of sustainability and co-creation in the mining and energy sectors. In both the mining and energy sectors, the Japanese culture-informed Sanpo-Yoshi principle emerged as one of the strategies that can smoothen the development of participant governance. Particularly critical is the need for a coherent policy framework that sets the right tone for the uptake of sustainability and co-creation. Open, collaborative, decentralised, and generative governance need to be cascaded to key sectors of the economy to allow the establishment of a robust framework for co-creation and sustainability.*

**Keywords:** public sector governance; sustainability; co-creation, collaborative governance; public value

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability and co-creation perspectives animate frontier 21<sup>st</sup> century discourses aimed at promoting

intergenerational, networked and inclusive service provisioning in public sectors. The case for mainstreaming sustainability and co-creation perspectives across sectors of the economy is even more pressing, given the wicked global issues arising from climate change, health pandemics, wars, regionalism, coups, contested elections, energy crises, absence of the public voice in policy processes, and declining faith and trust in governments. The interconnectedness of these contemporary dynamics demands networked and participatory governmental bureaucracies. According to Ansell & Torfing (2021), by calling for active engagements between government, citizens and stakeholders, the co-creation movement set in motion a feasible model of governance that stretches beyond the domains of the public and private sectors, and self-organised communities.

To understand the central terms guiding this paper, it is ideal to define sustainability and co-creation perspectives. Firstly, the sustainability concept is a popular, broad, multidisciplinary and complex term that can be explained by looking at various interconnected aspects. Etymologically, sustainability assumed visibility since the publication of 'Our Common Future' report in 1987 by the Norwegian Social Democratic Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. This report, which came to be known as the Brundtland Commission Report, calls for development that can meet the requirements of the present-day while safeguarding the needs of future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). Edwards (2005) adds that the Brundtland Commission of 1987 developed a model of sustainability that is referred to as the 'Three Es', that is, the interaction of environment (ecology), economy (employment), and equality (equity). The definition of sustainability in the public sector is focused on finding long-lasting solutions to the multifaceted contemporary challenges affecting people across nations. Sustainability is all about the means to address the socio-economic and environmental conundrums facing the people and the planet for a sustainable future. Mollenkamp (2022) sums it up by defining sustainability in policy and business contexts by noting that the central role of sustainability is to guard against physical and natural resource depletion while also ensuring they remain available for a long time to the next generations. In the prism of sustainability, therefore, a different type of economy which is natural, socio-ethical and lower-resource is found, something the United Nations is referring to as the "green economy" (Gabler, 2015, p. 14).

Secondly, the concept of co-creation is also central in this study. According to Torfing et al. (2016 cited in Aastvedt & Higdem, 2022), co-creation is a form of co-production that is rooted in the participation of various private and public actors in service production. One of the most renowned definitions of co-creation from a public sector perspective is by Torfing et al. (2019, p. 803), who define the concept as:

...a process through which two or more public and private actors attempt to solve a shared problem, challenge, or task through a constructive exchange of different kinds of knowledge, resources, competencies, and ideas that enhance the production of public value in terms of visions, plans, policies, strategies, regulatory frameworks, or services, either through a continuous improvement of outputs or outcomes or through innovative step-changes that transform the understanding of the problem or task at hand and lead to new ways of solving it.

In this definition, politicians, public and private managers, frontline staff, civil society organisations, private corporations and so on, join forces in what Arnstein (1969) referred to as the "ladder of participation" in bringing innovative ideas under different forms of informed dialogue thereby creating a self-government of the people. The significance of co-creation is that local communities are empowered, broad-based participation and societal resources mobilisation and public innovations enhanced while ownership for the solutions to all the pressing conundrums facing communities are also enhanced (Ansell & Torfing, 2021). The significance of the people in public sector governance is a dominant factor in the co-creation perspective, something that necessitated Baptista et al. (2020) to conclude that co-creation with the generality of the people is purely based on the adoption of service

management strategies. In co-creation, outsiders serve as co-initiators, co-designers, co-implementers, co-evaluators and co-innovators. Co-creation may take the form of crowdfunding where outsiders are invited to contribute ideas to a perceived community, industrial or national problem. It may also take the form of and coalitions in which government networks or partners with outsiders. Co-creation perspectives are thus about breaking the silo or ‘government-can-do-it alone’ mentality.

Viewed thus, co-creation perspectives point to protracted global efforts directed towards opening opportunities for civil society and citizens to collaborate with the governments to co-produce most of the public services. Such citizen-empowering partnerships can be evidenced by the various modes of engaged governance that include e-governance, Public Service Guarantee Acts, Citizens’ Charters and the right to information, among others. Basu (2021) argues that the signing of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 by the United Nations (UN) point to growing global consensus to forge new ways of looking at the state and the citizens.

As governments are obligated to improve the public delivery systems, innovative ways of making complex public institutions responsive to the needs of the citizens are becoming critical. The need to adopt sustainability and co-creation strategies is not optional in view of the increasing pressure on governments to achieve the global SDGs, the shifting geopolitical landscapes that are marked by, for example, ‘hybrid multilateralism’ (non-state actors and sub-national actors in global affairs), increased populism and an increased focus on national security (Gottenhuber & Mulholland, 2020). Accordingly, SDG 12 obliges sustainable consumption and production at the levels of communities, industries and governments (Ma et al., 2019; Ygi & Kokubu 2020; Goyal et al., 2022). Thus, to navigate these and other uncertain terrains, foresight capacity should remain a sought-after skill in policy, business and social interactions (Wibeck et al., 2022).

These emerging sustainability and co-creation perspectives are evident in the phrase ‘governance without government’ (Peters & Pierre, 1998) that places emphasis on ‘markets’ and a de-emphasis on the state as the sole player in the provisioning of goods and services. The intellectual basis of these perspectives can be gleaned from the New Public Service (NPS) and Discourse Theory which call for governance frameworks that build democratic citizens, community and civil society, and organisational humanism (Robert & Denhardt, 2003). Within these frameworks, civil servants play a central role in controlling and steering society by helping them meet their shared interests. Citizens should not be viewed as mere consumers of public policies but as creators of these policies.

The Zimbabwean public sector has been mired by weakening public service provisioning for decades. This chapter, therefore, unpacks sustainability and co-creation perspectives in public sector governance by assessing the setbacks in their implementation, the progress made so far, and the opportunities sustainability and co-creation perspectives create in the management of public sectors. The substantive concerns of the paper are animated by the following questions: What are sustainability and co-creation perspectives? What sustainability and co-creation initiatives have been adopted in the mining and energy sectors in response to these sustainability and co-creation perspectives? What structural and situational factors are compromising the uptake of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in public institutions? Drawing from global best practices, what conditions should be created to inculcate and nurture sustainability and co-creation thinking and practices in public institutions?

## **2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

### 2.1.1 The New Public Governance

Sustainability and co-creation perspectives are theoretically rooted in the New Public Governance (NPG) theory whose clarion call is participatory democracy. Osborne et al. (2016, p. 30) argue that the NPG is premised on service processes and outcomes through partnerships and networks, where the “third sector and social enterprises can play an important role and citizens are active co-producers of public services”. The NPG theory is thus very relevant in this paper because it is built on partnerships between the citizens and the bureaucracy as the citizens take part in the development processes as co-producers of public services. Under this theory, citizens are given relative influence than has been guaranteed by the Traditional Public Administration or New Public Management. Vidal (2013) sums it up by noting that NPG plays a significant role in the sustainable development discourse as it promotes mutual exchange between service users and professional service providers. Thus, the citizen-centric approach guarantees the participation of all stakeholders in the democratic decision-making processes. In this way, the NPG theory throws powerful insights into the dynamics of sustainability and co-creation in the case study areas of mining and energy in Zimbabwe.

### 2.1.2 Public Value Theory

Sustainability and co-creation perspectives also share theoretical links with the theory of Public Value. The early typology of public value was provided by Jorgensen & Bozeman (2007), who argued that public value contributes to societal development by emphasizing sustainability, human dignity, human rights protection, guaranteeing the rule of law, enhancing citizen participation, and accountability and trust in policy choices. Bozeman (2007 cited in Wellstead et al. (2022, p. 367) posits that ‘public value’ refers to what is consumed collectively by the citizens and “represents a normative consensus of prerogatives, principles, benefits and rights that can be attributed to both governments and citizens”. Basu (2019) reinforces this argument by noting that the role governments play is to broker interests among the citizenry and other stakeholders to create shared values. It is the contention of this paper that the more public governance is imbued with public value, the more sustainable and co-creative it becomes.

## 2.2 Review of country experiences

In this sub-section, sustainability and co-creation perspectives are unpacked through brief reviews of experiences in Japan, South Africa, Uganda and the United Kingdom.

### 2.2.1 Japan

Public sector governance experiences in Japan, an island country in East Asia, have relevant lessons for studies on sustainability and co-creation. According to the Voluntary National Review (2021), the Japanese government recognises co-creation as a reputable force in the realisation of sustainable development. The Voluntary National Review (2021, p. 11) notes that:

In the context of SDGs, the goals can be achieved efficiently and effectively by leveraging new innovations and mobilising policies, including regulatory reforms. In order to realise a flexible and resilient socio-economic structure in the Post COVID-19 Era, with a virtuous cycle between the economy and the environment, it is necessary to promote changes in the behaviour of society as a whole, involving all stakeholders, while holding up the SDGs as a compass to promote initiatives that incorporate all perspectives of the economy, society and the environment.

Japan considers the inclusion of all stakeholders in the policy-making process central to ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector. To address unsustainable business practices such as plastic waste, food loss, and pollution, among others, Japan implemented the ‘sanpo-yoshi’ principle to create shared value between the business, their customers, and society (Nemani, 2022, p. 15). ‘Sanpo-yoshi’ denotes something that is good and respectful to the ‘three parties’, a reference to the seller, buyer and society. This principle obliges citizens to depart from being passive by expecting the

businesses and the government to solve all big and wicked challenges without their input (Nemani, 2022). In this way, the Japanese government created a path toward building a broad-based, whole-of-society approach to the implementation of SDGs (OECD, 2020). The Japanese Shintoism-rooted ‘sanpo-yoshi’ and ‘matsuri’ cultures exhort public values of thinking of others, doing one’s best, not giving up, respecting elders, knowing one’s role, working in a group, and respect for nature-animate the core concerns of sustainability and co-creation.

### 2.2.2 South Africa

Valuable sustainability and co-creation lessons can also be gleaned from the interactive governance experiences in South Africa (SA) in which the value of citizens in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is placed at the forefront. According to Pillay (2019, p. 88), the move towards co-creation, if wholly embraced, has the potential to surpass the traditional bottom-up governance approach. Pillay (2019) further notes that SA encompassed co-creation as a mechanism to enhance active citizenship and reinvigoration of the traditional systems approach. This approach has seen the government of SA, as argued by the South African Co-Creation Brief (2022), implementing the Fifth Action Plan to provide a platform for both the government and the civil society to “coalesce around and act on shared priorities such as implementing recommendations from the Africa Peer Review Mechanism and Zondo Commission reports”. The notion of ‘coalescing around shared priorities’ sits well with co-creation perspectives. Notable sustainability and co-creation initiatives include a review of national policies and programmes to establish their alignment with SDGs; adoption of a National Development Plan that prioritises the elimination of poverty and inequalities; and promotion of multi-stakeholder engagements and inclusive economic growth by 2030. Other initiatives included prioritisation of the provision of clean water, electricity, sanitation, education and health; prioritisation of just climate change mitigation; adoption of one of the most robust anti-retroviral programmes in the world; and the adoption of a comprehensive framework for just and sustainable energy transitions.

Notwithstanding these initiatives, discriminations, gender-based violence, inequalities, lack of access to basics, and ensuring a just energy transition remain major challenges as SA remains highly dependent on fossil fuels. The envisaged mutual partnership between the citizenry and the public-sector in-service provision risks being a utopia as pre-independence levels of inequality remain visible, and citizenry is largely dependent on state support. The major challenge towards the implementation of sustainability and co-creation perspectives is that the bottom-up and the collaborative opportunities for citizens to take part in the policy-making processes remain in the embryonic stage. According to Dugstad et al. (2019, p. 10), co-creation strategies in SA predominantly fail to take a radical approach to social change because of many factors such as “information technology infrastructure and mobile network instability” which act as some of the major technological barriers. This, according to Pillay (2019), shows that in practice the partnership between citizens and the government is limited and heavily strained in effect. The practicability aspect of co-creation in the SA context, therefore, demands high-level collaboration between the private and public sectors, and the citizens. To this end, robust governance mechanisms need to be implemented to address contemporary challenges relating to poverty, diseases, inequality, unemployment, violence, and energy crisis, among others.

### 2.2.3 Uganda

Valuable lessons can also be drawn from experiences in Uganda. The Government of Uganda is working in partnership with the United Nations (UN) to promote sustainability and co-creation through the implementation of SDGs. The UN and other stakeholders offer options to reframe practices and policies around sustainability for diversified, inclusive and job-intensive intensive economic development; to enhance information access; utilisation of social protection services that upscale gender equality, human rights and the wellbeing of the Ugandan people and also to protect the planet (UN, 2021). Wepukhulu (2022) also notes that sustainability co-creation issues are significant

in contemporary Uganda because they provide culturally and contextually appropriate, easy to adapt, innovative and sustainable energy solutions. A technologically healthy public sector has the capability to build trust among the stakeholders. Uganda's public sector, especially on environmental matters, as argued by Cirella et al. (2018), faces the challenge of high rates of poverty and illiteracy, especially in remote areas.

#### 2.2.4 The United Kingdom

The need to promote the uptake of sustainability and co-creation practices in public institutions is also a key priority in the United Kingdom (UK), especially in the wake of deep-seated challenges arising from climate change, health pandemics, the need for just and sustainable energy transitions, among others. The Institute of Government and Public Policy (IGPP) (2022) argues that the National Health Service (NHS) and the local governments are on the right path towards meeting climate targets such as net-zero carbon emissions by 2045 while 230 Councils throughout the UK declared a climate emergency. Innovative solutions are needed to ensure the protection of the 3Ps, smart modes of public transportation, and disease prevention, among others. Adams et al. (2016) posit that the Environment Agency, the London Borough of Yorkshire Ambulance Services and the Gateshead Council adopted bold measures to replace their fleets with electric vehicles by the year 2028. van Hille et al. (2020, p. 2) succinctly captures the case for sustainability and co-creation thus:

collaboration across all sectors is a way to operationalise the universal nature of the global sustainability agenda. Co-creating innovation that focuses on sustainability aims to address sustainability issues, bringing different stakeholders together has reached almost a paradigmatic status in the public and private sector.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

To fully understand the emerging sustainability and co-creation perspectives in public governance in Zimbabwe, a systematic review was utilised. According to Chalmers et al. (2002), systematic reviews are widely used to apprise public policy makers, the civil society and practitioners; and hence, they are a significant tool to critically explore various interventions. In this paper, systematic review involved formulation of guiding questions, identification of relevant literature for review, synthesis, interpretation and drawing lessons for sustainability and co-creation.

### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Frameworks of sustainability and co-creation

The Government of Zimbabwe recognises the role sustainable development can play if it is embedded in inclusivity. Sustainability and co-creation reforms are undertaken under policy framework of the principle of 'leaving no one behind', the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Section 73 subsection 1 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, which states that "every person has the right to (a) an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being, and (b) to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations through reasonable legislative and other measures that prevent pollution and ecological degradation; promote conservation; and secure ecologically sustainable use of natural resources while promoting economic and social development. This constitutional provision points to efforts directed towards the realisation of sustainability and inclusivity in the public policy-making process. This is the first step towards the fulfillment of public sector sustainability in Zimbabwe. A clean environment that guarantees a future free from pollution and degradation is significant to ensure socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

Sustainability and co-creation perspectives are also enforced through national development programmes such as Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) and Devolution. Vision 2030 views stakeholder collaboration between the state and other non-state actors, including the citizens, as critical in addressing development challenges relating to unsustainable waste management, unsustainable agricultural practices, unsustainable wetland management and, among

others, the challenges that are a result of disease and climate change. Underpinning the two programmes was the need to achieve a broad-based sustainable social and economic transformation based on good governance, environmental protection, climate resilience, environmental protection, social protection and, among others, digitalisation of the economy. Thus, cumulatively, these and other policy frameworks advance the sustainable protection of the economy, environment and society.

To achieve an upper middle-class economy by 2030, devolution plays a key role. The parameters for devolution are set out in Section 264 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013, which stipulates that power and responsibilities should be devolved to the people to ensure economic and political empowerment of communities by transferring power to lower tiers of government. The inclusion of local communities in the political and economic spheres is in line with sustainability and co-creation-based governance. However, as argued by a local Think Tank, the Zimbabwe Economic Policy Analysis and Research Unit (ZIPARU) (2020, p. 1), the major drawback pertains to delays in amending and aligning the Rural Councils Act [Chapter 29:13], the Regional and Town and Country Planning Act [Chapter 29: 12] and the Urban Council Act [Chapter 29:15] to the Constitution. Notwithstanding this, efforts are directed towards amending some subsidiary legislations such as the Public Finance Management Amendment Bill and the Provincial Councils and Administration Bill to align them with the Constitution. Arguably, a well-implemented devolution programme enhances sustainability and co-creation practices. Citizen participation, effective and efficient public sector institutions, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and adequacy of human capital all point towards the right path to sustainability and co-creation. Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022, p. 2) sum this by noting that devolution is vital because it enhances democracy by ceding power to local authorities as they are closer to communities than they are to the national government. Thus, stakeholder participation, including citizens, increases collaboration and socio-economic cohesion hence moving towards sustainability and co-creation.

To further test the capability of regulatory frameworks in setting a positive tone for sustainability and co-creation perspectives in Zimbabwe, the SA case experience is key. Zimbabwe needs to adopt a radical approach to equip communities with appropriate information technologies so that they are able to take part in socio-economic development through collaborative governance. To do this, Zimbabwe may, like SA, establish its own version of the Co-Creation Brief to act as a platform to encourage the public sector to reform the public sector towards sustainability and co-creation.

## **4.2 Sector-specific sustainability and co-creation experiences**

### **4.2.1 The mining sector**

Mining is one of Zimbabwe's high revenue-generating sectors due to its diversification with around sixty-five different types of minerals. According to the *Miningmx* of 10 November (2022), Zimbabwe is endowed with huge deposits of platinum group of metals which include but are not limited to lithium, gold, coal and chrome, a mining sector that adds at least eleven percent of the nation's GDP. In addition, the ongoing oil and gas exploration in Muzarabani area of Mashonaland Central Province has the possibility of transforming the Zimbabwean economy.

Notwithstanding the potential of wealth creation in mining, considerable social and environmental disruptions are always prevalent. Mlambo (2017, p. 11) adds that some of the sustainable pillars that have been transgressed in the mining industry are that,

“...no intragenerational equity as poverty among the general population is worsening; extractivism has ignored the fact that future generations have an equal right to natural resources (no reinvestment of proceeds); unmitigated negative environmental effects are common; and negative social impacts not uncommon- (displacement of communities without adequate compensation, human rights violations and bad labour practices)”.

In addition, human and wildlife displacements, social tensions, degradation and inadequate compensation are also emerging as challenges that emanate from a lack of sustainable and co-creation practices within the mining industry in Zimbabwe. For instance, the human displacements that happened at the Marange Diamond Fields in 2009 are a case in point where mining can disrupt human settlements.

The absence of an updated national minerals policy in Zimbabwe also derails the success of sustainability and co-creation. The Mines and Minerals Act [Chapter 21:05] of 1961 still serves as the principal law that regulates mining activities. Other Acts used to supplement the Mines and Minerals Act include the Precious Stones Act [Chapter 21:06]; the Gold Trade Act [Chapter 21:03]; the Base Minerals Export Control Act [Chapter 21:01] and the Minerals Corporation of Zimbabwe Act [Chapter 21:06].

In response to the aforementioned shortfalls and other unsustainable mining practices, the Government of Zimbabwe introduced some mining governance reforms that include the scrapping of the 51 percent share ownership requirement in 2019, the extension of the ‘use it or lose it’ scheme to all mines in the country, the Mines and Minerals Bill and the Lithium export ban in 2023. It is significant to note that these and other measures have created an enabling environment to increase and enhance foreign direct investment while maintaining indigenous proprietorship. Despite these reforms in the mining sector, sustainability and co-creation issues remain weak as the country remains with no robust legal/policy framework to address the exploration and production, marketing, beneficiation and stakeholder participation and transparency and accountability in the industry.

The net impression is that the implementation of sustainability and co-creation reforms in the mining sector remains a challenge for the government and other stakeholders in Zimbabwe. In particular, the application of the ‘whole of society and government approach’ risks remaining on paper in view of ‘resource curse’ experiences such as the one that occurred following the discovery of diamonds in the Chiadzwa area of Marange in Manicaland in 2006. The term ‘resource curse’ is used to refer to experiences in which countries that are rich in mineral endowments ironically have less economic growth and development than countries with fewer natural resources. In the case of Chiadzwa, the ‘resource curse’ syndrome took the form of opaque governance of the diamonds, illegal mining, illicit trade and underpricing of diamonds (Zhou, 2012). The release of the four-stage Gold Mafia documentary in 2023 by Al Jazeera in which several high-ranking Zimbabwean government officials were allegedly involved in money laundering does not augur well for intergenerational, sustainable development. These challenges depict a scenario where concerns raise about transparency and accountability, and whether there is equitable distribution of wealth. Meaningful citizen participation is desirable in the decision-making processes in the mining sector to ensure sustainable mining practices.

Zimbabwe, therefore, can learn from the Japanese culture-informed public values where knowledge sharing between the government and other stakeholders, including the communities is viewed as vital to socio-economic development. As noted earlier, the Japanese ‘sanpo-yoshi’ principle based on ‘good for three parties’ (the seller, buyer, society) sits very well with the 3Ps notions of sustainability in which humanity is obliged to indulge in behaviours that protect the planet (environment), people (society) and prosperity (economy). The ‘sanpo-yoshi’ principle also reinforces co-creation thinking by emphasizing the engagement of local communities in national policy processes. Thus, adopting this principle in Zimbabwe’s mining, energy, agriculture, manufacturing and other economic pillars will ensure the realisation of Vision 2030 and the achievement of development that is anchored on sustainability and co-creation pillars.

#### 4.2.2 The energy sector

Energy is a vital resource that determines the socio-economic development in every country. Zimbabwe is laden with various sources of energy options that include thermal power, hydropower, petroleum fuels, solar energy and wood fuels. Thus, mining, agriculture, education, health and construction sectors rely heavily on energy supply. However, Zimbabwe is faced with two challenges, that is, energy crisis and global climate change. As a result, Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Energy Protocol which was signed in 1996, and became operational in 1997; and to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and others such as the Paris Agreement (2015) which aim to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, to promote international and regional cooperation and to build resilience to the effects of climate change. It is important to note that SDG7 calls for modern energy for all that is reliable, affordable and sustainable for everyone by the year 2030. This resembles the international commitment toward the realisation of energy sustainability. To signify Zimbabwe's commitment to the global sustainability cause in energy provision, the country is also an active participant in the Conference of the Parties (COP).

The government, through the Ministry of Energy and Power Development (MoEPD), formulated the National Energy Policy (NEP) in 2012 to serve as the guiding policy document for enhancing sustainability. Key stakeholders such as the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA); Ministries and State. During the formulation of the NEP (NEP, 2012), relevant agencies were consulted including enterprises; financial institutions; Rural Electrification Fund (REF); some non-governmental organisations (NGOs), traditional leadership and local community members. Stakeholder consultation is a key element of co-creation perspectives. The Japanese 'sanpo-yoshi' principle also emerges as a critical element Zimbabwe could adopt to inculcate the values of stakeholder participation in community affairs as well as sustainability in the use of resources. The whole idea of participatory governance, thus, is to ensure citizens have a voice in decision making, policy formulation and implementation. Public consultations, participatory budgeting processes and the establishment of platforms for dialogue between the government line ministries, civil society and communities will go a long way in ensuring the success of co-creation and sustainable development. Prioritising local communities in, for instance, Hwange, is key in ensuring they are part of the solution to the pollution that comes with thermal power generation.

In addition, the MoEPD is driving an agenda for Zimbabwe to adopt renewable energy technologies (RETs) through public-private partnerships (PPPs) and community awareness strategies. The demand to adopt Low Carbon Energy (LCE) and/or renewable energy sources (RES) such as solar, hydro, wind, geothermal and biogas energy emerged as the world is moving towards green economy and sustainability (National Renewable Energy Policy (NREP), 2019). Thus, to ensure environmental sustainability, the country pledged to reduce its Green House Gas emissions from 60.5% to 33% by 2030 (Webmaster, 2020). This was buttressed by the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and the Zimbabwe National Climate Change Response Strategy, both of 2014, which advance climate change adaptation strategies, community and corporate resilience building, technological advances and green financing. The government's efforts to drive the sustainability perspectives are, therefore, visible although efforts to drive co-creation at the policy level lag as the involvement of citizens in energy sustainability discourses is low note.

#### **4.3 Factors undermining the uptake of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in Zimbabwe's public institutions**

Drawing from experiences in Zimbabwe's case studies of the mining and energy sectors, the uptake of sustainability and co-creation practices is undermined by a number of factors. One of the undermining factors is the knowledge gap between the private and public sectors and sections of society in both urban and rural setups. The lack of expertise in digital competencies and knowledge about co-creation in the public sector makes it difficult to initiate sustainability co-creation strategies by the public

sectors. Edelman et al., (2022, p. 115) posit that “the main barriers to achieving sustainability in the public sector and public outcomes are the lack of (digital) competencies and knowledge about co-creation”. A lack of capacity to effectively implement sustainability and a co-creation approach in the public sector derails government’s commitment towards the realisation of participatory governance. The shortage of skilled personnel, limited institutional capacity and inadequate resources makes it difficult for government and other stakeholders to achieve the desired sustainability and co-creation outcomes. To develop a clearly defined co-creation model, the expertise should be nurtured in bureaucrats to be able to follow the co-creation stages that are centred around citizen needs identification, prioritisation, specific focus, re-creation, test prototype and citizens’ feedback.

Weak and/or lack of a clear policy on sustainability and co-creation is also a major obstacle to the public sector reform and governance discourse. According to Moons et al. (2021, p. 20), “the format of co-creation is seen as an important aspect as this determines the process to be followed and how participants and opinions are to be integrated”. The goals and expected outcomes of co-creation will be measured when there is a clear policy orientation in that regard. In addition, Pillay (2019) argues that the weak policy framework in South Africa, for example, is detrimental because the implementation of public policies shows the significance of stakeholder collaboration even as they all have competing and diverse needs. Sustainability and co-creation policies, however, will mitigate against situational and structural factors that compromise the uptake of the co-creation and sustainability practices. With a lack of clear policy framework for co-creation, it remains difficult for Zimbabwe and the rest of the developing world to determine ways to prioritise citizen engagement and involvement in decision making processes.

The promotion of public sector sustainability and co-creation is further undermined by a lack of socio-economic and political will. This is supported by Ansell et al. (2022, p. 38), who argue that “co-creation may run into problems caused by the lack of political support, weak reflexive leadership, poor institutional design, shortage of funding, and unforeseen events such as natural disasters, wars, economic crisis, and political conflicts that prevent collaboration”. When there is no political will, it is challenging to encourage the communities to join forces with the public sector in changing the consumption norms towards green services and products; and to promote the public sector to utilise value for money and activate a sustainable budget. The net impression is that the utilization of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in Zimbabwe remains a challenge as the public sector institutions are not ready to embrace the demands that come with co-creation. In particular, bureaucratic red and partisan politics remain visible obstacles to co-creation.

#### **4.4 Conditions necessary for the uptake of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in Zimbabwe**

Drawing from the sampled country experiences and the Zimbabwe case studies, this section unpacks the conditions that should be created to inculcate and nurture sustainability and co-creation practices in public institutions.

##### **4.4.1 Decentralisation**

Decentralisation is one of the major reform movements the world witnessed in the past decades. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2021, p. 3) conceives that, “engaging in a decentralisation process affects all spheres of society, from the nature and the quality of governance to national wealth and economic growth and, more broadly, to citizen well-being”. This demonstrates the role decentralisation can play in promoting sustainability and co-creation practices. Given the complexities in the adoption or uptake of co-creation in the Zimbabwean public sector, there is a need for the government to emphasise the decentralisation of political, fiscal, administrative roles and also to facilitate collaboration between the government and the citizenry (Pillay, 2019).

In addition, devolution has proven to be a panacea to the over-centralisation of governmental powers and authority. Devolved local governments are known to be capable of promoting problem-solving grassroots institutions because of their administrative, political and fiscal devolutionary dimensions. Devolution has become the preferred criterion within Zimbabwe because citizens witness their affairs run with minimal central government interference (Masunungure & Ndoma, 2013). Nyikadzino & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022) add that local democracy is strengthened by devolution as citizens and other stakeholders in civil society collaborate for a common cause. Therefore, with a strong devolution drive in the mining and energy sectors, sustainability and co-creation will be realised as the citizens, the private and non-profit sectors will be involved in the policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, something envisioned by the Japanese 'Sanpo Yoshi'. Arguably, for instance, as lithium mineral has become one of the key raw materials involved in the manufacturing of batteries, stakeholder collaboration is needed to realise the benefits the mineral can bring to local communities and the nation at large.

#### 4.4.2 Collaborative governance

Collaborative or network governance is a panacea to the promotion of sustainability and co-creation in the public sector. According to Yigzaw (2021), collaborative governance is a type of governance where the public and private sectors, international public organisations and civil society work together in building trust in government to address socio-economic challenges. Collaborative governance ensures economic development and prosperity through the creation of institutional transformation (Yigzaw, 2021). This means that as the world transforms towards a green economy, concerted stakeholder effort is needed to foster sustainability and co-creation practices. Hartley et al. (2013 cited in Torfing et al., 2019) argue that co-creation drives collaborative interaction between the public and private sectors toward the adoption of innovative solutions to public sector challenges. Finding a way for stakeholders to work together even with different interests, roles and perspectives is the best way to transform the public sector into new designs with the capacity to address contemporary challenges (Ansell et al., 2022). The Zimbabwean public sector, therefore, requires collaborative governance streams to allow the economic pillars to thrive. It takes a piece of willing government machinery to advance collaborative governance as a smooth way towards the realization of sustainability and co-creation not only in the mining and energy sectors, but in other sectors such as tourism, agriculture, education and industry.

#### 4.4.3 Generative governance

The concept of generative governance is vital to the uptake of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in the public sector reform and governance discourse. According to Ansell & Torfing (2021a), generative governance involves the creation of platforms that foster co-creation processes within the private and public sectors. The key components of generative governance include the tools, interactions, processes and institutions that pave the way to the practice of sustainability and co-creation (Torfing, 2021a). For the development of effective and efficient public sectors, the multi-stakeholder forums need to be governed by regulatory processes, institutional frameworks and financial and non-financial capabilities to encourage every stakeholder to collaborate for a common goal. Ansell & Torfing (2021b) add that generative governance aims at addressing wicked problems by creating platforms that enable co-creation by drawing public and private actors, including the citizenry, together in an innovative and creative problem-solving state. With generative governance, sustainable funding systems and structures will be created to set the right tone for public sector sustainability and co-creation discourses by way of fostering quick transactions towards public sector green development agendas. The delays by the public sector to adopt generative governance are a result of a lack of collaborative governance where stakeholders in the public, private and business sectors, and the citizens join forces to address socio-economic challenges.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The world requires an urgent and radical transformation from unsustainable socio-economic practices in the public sector. Sustainability and co-creation perspectives provide the unlocking key towards public sector reforms and governance for the future in Zimbabwe. To drive the development trajectories towards the realisation of Sustainable Development Goals and Vision 2030 in Zimbabwe, policies and regulatory frameworks should emphasise co-creation as a panacea to the realisation of sustainable development that poses no threats to the 3Ps, that is, planet (environment), people (society) and prosperity (economy). The barriers to sustainability and co-creation practices should also be addressed by emphasizing decentralisation and devolution, collaborative governance and generative governance.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that bureaucratic, top-down governance of public sector institutions is outdated and a potent threat to sustainability and co-creation-based development. As the world is mired by wicked challenges, a more sustainable and co-creation agenda ensues to galvanize a mixture of ideologies, ethics, innovations, politics and policies toward universal sustainable development. For Zimbabwe, the universal adoption of sustainability and co-creation agendas in public sector institutions requires enhanced public budgets to facilitate intensive innovation through bottom-up approaches. Such budgets should be directed towards equipping and educating the public on how important it is when they collaborate to co-produce goods and services in mining, finance, manufacturing, agriculture, public transport and other socio-economic sectors.

To ensure the success of sustainability and co-creation perspectives in the developing world, governments should establish the necessary infrastructure platforms that will pave the way for the stakeholders to find and discuss solutions to known and unknown conundrums. Creating such platforms will ensure a suitable environment where the citizens are able to initiate services without having to depend on governments. Moving from a delivery (representative) to a co-creation (participatory) form of government is what the world needs to achieve SDGs and country-specific goals.

Therefore, both the mining and energy sectors are recommended to embrace collaborative and generative governance practices where their decision-making powers emanate not only from the mining and energy companies but from the local communities, the business and the NGOs. This will signify the existence and implementation of sustainability and co-creation as ways to enhance public sector governance. The 3Ps can only be safeguarded when every stakeholder is involved in public sector policy processes. Instances of river pollution and displacement of communities to pave way for projects will be avoided when the bureaucracy manages to build strong institutions anchored on sustainability and co-creation precepts.

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