Municipal International Cooperations (MICs) in Zimbabwe’s local authorities: An exploratory study of the Harare Metropolitan City

Sharon, R.T. Chilunjika (a) Alouis Chilunjika (b) Dominique E. Uwizeyimana (c)

(a) Ph.D Candidate, School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
(b) PDRF, School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
(c) Professor and Director, School of Public Management, Governance and Public Policy, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 20 June 2023
Received in rev. form 22 July 2023
Accepted 24 July 2023

Keywords:
Municipal International Cooperations,
City twinning, Local authorities,
Harare Metropolitan City, Exploratory Study.

JEL Classification:
H7, H77, O3, Q38.

ABSTRACT

The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 of 2013 recognises local authorities as key actors in local and national development, thus capacitating them to engage in international and regional relations so as to assist in matters of municipality management and service delivery. In this vein, such relations should promote growth through investments, innovation and information exchanges among others. The study examines the utility of MICs in promoting sound management and the enhancement of service delivery at the Harare Metropolitan City. The study used a qualitative research design where participants were purposively selected to provide data. Data was gathered using interviews and the extensive review of written documents. Data was analysed using thematic and content analysis techniques. The study established that MICs are a reliable tool to promote sustainable development in areas of human capacity development, information technology, and knowledge sharing among others. Additionally, MICs also promote effective and efficient service provision in Harare Metropolitan City. The study recommends the restructuring and fortification of the MICs’ legal and financial frameworks as well as the provision of central government support so that Harare Metropolitan City can autonomously venture into partnerships and be productive without any central government interference.

© 2023 by the authors. Licensee Bussecon International, Istanbul, Turkey. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY) (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Introduction

The primary focus of this paper is to examine Municipal International Cooperations (MICs) in a developing context and their implications on municipality operations thereof. MIC is a field of study that focuses on international relations spearheaded by municipalities or local authorities and can also be referred to as city twinning, town couples or sister cities and is part of the ongoing globalization movement (Charumbira, 2015, p.20). These relationships are viewed as agents of progress as they facilitate city internationalization, job creation, and educational advancement as well as address concerns of poor service delivery, racism and social inclusion (Johnson and Wilson, 2006, p.71). Additionally, they enable municipalities to work together on defining the problems and devising appropriate solutions on the basis of shared experiences and technical exchanges. The underlying idea is that these cooperations can result in creative and effective solutions for local government challenges (Zhou and Chilunjika, 2013, p.237).

The emergence of international relations between municipalities can be traced to Europe in the beginning of the 20th century. Originally, these relationships were an initiative of the working class lobbying for socio-economic improvements and partly as a utopian vision for those who strived for a united Europe after World War 2 (Furmakiewic, 2020, p.145). However, over the years there has been a gradual shift on the European scene from partnerships of reconciliation and integration to partnerships of a more economic character fostering entrepreneurship and trade (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011, p.231). The most obvious change in scope and goals of these relationships has been the emergence of North-South relationships. These relationships comprise of local...
authorities in the Industrialized North (Europe) and those from Third World countries in the global south (Africa). Initially, these partnerships were predominantly established as aid delivery mechanisms, but now they increasingly function to facilitate the exchange of good municipal management practices between cities (Chilunjika and Chilunjika, 2021, p.3).

Although a number of international scholars including Paquin and LaChapelle (2005), Chaloux and Paquin (2013) and Laguerre (2019) have written on MICs, a limited number however provided a deep understanding of these relationships at the level of local government sphere in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA), let alone Zimbabwe. As a developing country Zimbabwe is countennanced with a multitude of political, economic, social and technological challenges which have been crippling the operations of its local authorities for over two decades now (Dube, 2019, p.8). According to Chilunjika, Mutema and Dube (2020, p.xx) the main challenge facing municipalities in Zimbabwe is the ever widening gap between the expenditure needs and the availability of finances. Accordingly, Dube’s (2019, p.6) study reveals that between 1990-2019 resources for financing local government operations through the national budget have rarely exceeded 1% of its total. As a result of this, municipalities have to come up with innovative ways to self-finance their operations, and engaging in MICs is increasingly being recognised a sustainable means to achieve this (Chilunjika and Chilunjika, 2021, p.8).

This paper therefore seeks to assess whether these collaborations are beneficial for municipalities in Zimbabwe or not. The first part of the paper deals with the conceptual framework where it discusses terms such as MICs, city twinning, and decentralized cooperation and paradiplomacy. It goes on to discuss activities conducted under MICs and ends by discussing some of Harare’s regional and international relations as well as proffering some recommendations that can led to strong MICs partnerships in developing contexts. The key question that this paper asks is: What is the nature and scope of MICs at Harare City Municipality?

The paper is organised as follows: firstly, there is the introductory part, the second part is a literature review which bridges the gap between theoretical and empirical studies. The third part explores the methodology that was used in this study. After the methodology, there is the research findings section which provides the discussions and implications. Lastly, the paper wraps up by highlighting the key points and future research directions and recommendations.

**Literature Review**

This section broadly reviews literature that is related to the research. The section offers the theoretical and conceptual review of literature which is also backed up by the empirical review and hypothesis development.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

This section discusses the theoretical and conceptual background of literature review where it unpacks the concept of paradiplomacy and how it relates to MICs. This is also followed by the unpacking of the concept of MICs. The section proceeds to provide an empirical review of the concept of city twinning as a form of MICs. Additionally, the different partnerships are examined to bring to light how the North-North and North-South city twinning partnerships exist.

**The concept of Paradiplomacy**

The concept of “paradiplomacy” was first discussed in scientific literature in the 1980s and it was mainly used to describe the international activities of numerous provinces in Canada and American states in the context of globalization (Paquin and LaChapelle, 2005, p.3). Over the years this concept is now used to define international relations and diplomatic activities undertaken by regions, states and low tiers of the central government, with the determination of transforming the operations of these local authorities (Oszaj et al., 2012, p.1). Various scholars of paradiplomacy assert that the key impetus of these international relations is the quest for economic benefits through collaborations with foreign municipalities, export promotion and the attraction of international investments (Jones and Blunt, 1999, p.389; Cornengo, 2000, p.1; Nganje 2014, p.89). Additionally, these relations enable local governments to seek for resources they lack domestically, while at the same time try to gain recognition in the international arena, a critical procedure in any effort at national building (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011, p.232). Although there are numerous debates around this concept (Nganje, 2014, p.89), these authors use the concept of paradiplomacy to describe the involvement of municipalities in international relations with their fellow counterparts around the globe to achieve social, economic and commercial growth as noted by (Jones and Blunt, 1999, p.389; Cornengo, 2000, p.1; Nganje, 2014, p.89).

**Defining Municipal International Cooperations**

For DeVillers, Coning and Smit (2007, p.2) Municipal International Cooperations refer to the international relations between municipalities or local authorities. These relations can be in form of short or long term partnerships between two or more municipalities. Additionally, MICs could also refer to border associations and membership of international networks of municipalities in line with the ongoing globalisation movement which also encourages people to follow the trend in order to do away with political barriers (Farmanekiewicz 2020, p.145). In other words, MICs testify as a facet of regionalization and internalization bringing to light that the order-producing impacts of national borders are disappearing. Moreover, MICs offers a very direct and cost effective strategy for development cooperation bringing together municipalities in partnerships based on professional expertise, innovation, joint ownership and mutual benefit (APEC 2008, p.2). According to Chilunjika and Chilunjika (2021, p.3) these partnerships have benefits of being small-scale, targeted and commonly founded on a long-term commitment of municipalities involved, which provide for a
strong element of continuity and sustainability. As part of a systemic look at MICs, two forms of MICs which are city twinning, and decentralised cooperation are defined and described in more detail below.

**City twinning partnerships as a form of MICs**

As DeVilliers (2005, p.19) notes, there is no consensus on the exact definition of city twinning. Different scholars suggest different interpretations and use various synonyms. DeVilliers (2005, p.19) provides an overview of definitions proffered by numerous scholars who have written on the subject. Despite a variety of actors, approaches, goals and means involved in city twinning, he highlights some points of convergence which include: the concept of a strategic alliance between municipalities being at the centre of the partnership, the overall goal of sustainable development, the notion of jurisdiction of a municipality and the participation and involvement of civil society and community members. The description that DeVilliers (2005, p.19) gives to city twinning partnerships is founded upon these insights and emphasize the fact that it takes place between municipalities aiming at sustainable local development through some form of technical exchange and support carried between partners.

Scholars such as Joenniemi and Sergunin (2011, p.2) however, choose to define city twinning in terms of domestic and international contexts. In the domestic context, city twinning refers to a special case of two cities founded in close geographic proximity that grow into each other over time. In most cases they merge to fulfill specific functions such as hosting techno-parks, transport infrastructure and industries (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011, p.2). At times, these are a result of pressure for larger and more competitive urban towns (APEC, 2008, p.4). It should be noted however that these not very popular in most African countries as municipalities often lack resources and the autonomy to merge without the approval of the central government (Davis, 2008, p.100). Instead these are popular in Europe where states and municipalities enjoy more autonomy for instance Fredrikstad and Sarpsbory in Norway and Severodvinsk and Arkhangelsk in Russia (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011, p.2).

Under the international context, the term has been used to connote cooperative agreements between cities and towns in other countries to promote economic and cultural ties. Most of these twinning relationships take place between cities or countries experiencing similar social, economic and political situations or sharing historical links (Davis, 2008, p.99). The adoption of city twinning strengthens the merged towns/cities or countries as the strengths of the other compliments the weaknesses of the sister partner (Laguerre, 2019, p.32). Additionally, city twinning is one of the strategies used by modern cities aspiring for distinct, favourable and visible profiles. Municipalities in both developed and developing countries are incorporating city twinning in polices of town marketing and branding in the context of the increasingly intense wave of regionalization and globalization (Laguerre, 2019, p.19).

Lastly, Joenniem and Sergunin (2011, p.2) note that city twinning in the international context contribute although in varying degrees to the formation of unity reaching beyond national configurations thus enabling cooperation transcending statist borders.

City twinning can also be discussed in terms of geographic orientation that is North-North linkages, North-South linkages and South-South linkages (Bandauko and Bobo, 2018, p.38). North-North linkages comprise mostly of municipal or country partnerships in the developed North (Dialogue, 2017, p.3). They mainly focus on cultural and social issues and exchanges of their citizens. Although the dominant focus of most North-North linkages may be socially rooted, many of these partnerships also incorporate issues on economic development through technical cooperation activities (Oszaj, 2012, p.4; Chilunjika, 2023) South-South linkages are between local governments in the South who seek to learn from each other as they experience similar social, economic and political challenges (Nganje, 2015, p.3). The idea behind these partnerships is that actors involved can learn from solutions developed by one another. These have been strongly promoted in recent years as they have great potential to transform the operations of local authorities in the region and enhance regional solidarity as witnessed in North-North partnerships. However, these linkages still remain limited (Bandauko and Bobo, 2018, p.38) as they are constantly threatened by resource constrains (human resources, financial and infrastructure) faced by many of these developing countries. North-South linkages on the other hand describe mostly donor funded cooperations between municipalities in the North and those from the underdeveloped South for the purposes of supporting local development in the latter (Nganje, 2015, p.2).

**Research and Methodology**

This study is largely hinged on interviews and the extensive review of literature. To this effect, the study reviewed some council annual reports, newspapers, research reports, journal articles and other secondary sources were reviewed to answer the research questions. In addition to document analysis, interviews were also conducted with two officers who were purposively selected from the Public, International Affairs and Protocol section of the Harare City Council to get their insights on the subject under study. Additionally, three academics from the field of Governance and Public Management from the Midlands State University (Zimbabwe) were also purposively selected for their weighty knowledge and profound experiences in local government operations, devolution and international relations. Data from these sources were then analysed using textual and content analysis.
Findings and Discussions

This section proffers the research findings as well as the discussions to address the research questions as well as fulfill the objectives of the study.

Findings

The practice of Municipality International Cooperations in Zimbabwe

This section discusses the conditions under which Zimbabwean municipalities take part in MIC and why these international partnerships are fundamental for the development of these local governments. Soon after gaining independence in 1980, local governments in Zimbabwe began to increasingly engage with fellow counterparts outside its boundaries. The activities undertaken under these partnerships are guided by the Constitution of Zimbabwe and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. To date numerous municipalities in Zimbabwe are signatories to many MICs as the wave of globalization and the winds of change in public policy continue to sweep across the globe.

However, all interviewees expressed that policies governing MICs arrangements in Zimbabwe limit municipalities from freely engaging in these partnerships without state oversight or approval. For instance, the law in Zimbabwe requires the central government to approve or refute MIC partnerships on the basis of relations existing between Zimbabwe and potential partner. For instance, Zimbabwe’s relations with the West are generally sour as a result of the targeted economic sanctions that were imposed on her. Therefore engaging in a twinning arrangement with a city in one of the so-called imposers of sanctions will not easily get support from the government because of the political undertones that such an arrangement are likely to exhibit (Charumbira, 2015, p.25). Additionally, municipal officials are to seek government permission when travelling for twinning business. This indicates the need to give municipalities more independence when it comes to MICs and to allow them to make strategic alliances that benefit them.

The practice of MICs by local governments indicates a shift from international relations being reserved only for the central government as the scope and character of municipalities have widened in its mandate to provide basic goods and services to the populace. This came after the recognition of the centrality of municipalities in addressing development challenges that are largely localized and are increasingly becoming urbanised (Dialogue, 2017, p.5). Although the interest and growth of local government participation in international relations is multifaceted, the economic factor is at the fore in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. In light of this municipalities in Zimbabwe take part in MICs to develop a global existence so as to attract foreign investments and business, promote tourism and scout for novel markets for their exports.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are other key factors that drive Zimbabwean local governments to engage in MICs other than economics and these may include technical, cultural, technological and educational factors just but to mention a few. Additionally, these municipalities may also be driven by the quest to enhance their image and identify more than the one projected by the central government (Jonson and Wilson, 2006, p.74). Interviewee C noted that over the years, the drivers of MICs have continued to evolve and in some cases these partnerships may feature both economic and cooperation components and in some occasions an agenda motivated by politics. This is supported by the Harare-Munich (Germany), Bulawayo-Thekwini (South Africa), and Mutare-Portland (USA) partnerships which have taken place in Zimbabwe (Chilunjika and Chilunjika, 2021, p.7). The above mentioned factors are imperative in guarding and defining the kind of partnerships that local governments partake in as they point out what municipalities seek to achieve with the MICs agreements.

Harare Metropolitan City a brief overview

Before discussing the various international relations that Harare Metropolitan City is part of, it is important to give a brief overview of the municipality in terms of population demographics, economic outlook and the mandate of the Public, International Affairs and Protocol section responsible for international relations. The Harare Metropolitan City also known as the “Pulse of Zimbabwe” houses the country’s capital city Harare and located in North Eastern Zimbabwe. The city is made up of five municipalities (Harare City Council, Ruwa Town Council, Chitungwiza Municipality and Epworth Local Board). According to the 2012 National Census the city’s estimated population is about 2,098 million. The city is considered to be the country’s economic hub, and remains a significant centre of commerce, technology, manufacturing and finance. Harare City Council is however, the most vibrant player in regional and international relations and therefore this paper will focus mainly on it.

Harare City Council (HCC) is an administration body responsible for the provision of basic services such as sanitation, waste management, water, electricity and recreational facilities for Harare residents. Since independence one of the key objectives of the municipality was to address the disparities in service delivery brought by the Rhodesian government. However, the 2000s decade stalled such efforts as a result of hyperinflation, international isolation and the dwindling revenue base for local authorities. This saw the rise of the opposition, mainly the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) to bring about accountability in local authorities. Since then the governing party ZANU PF has failed to retain the municipality. To date there is political squabbling between the Minister of Local Government and the municipality’s authorities. Moreover, there is infighting between elected councillors and administrative authorities (Marumahoko, Afolabi, Sadie and Nchede, 2020, p.50). All these challenges have resulted to the detriment of service delivery. To clearly articulate the challenges faced by HCC interviewee B had the following to say:

63
"Over the past two decades service delivery trends at Harare City Council expose a prolonged dearth in the provision of quality services. This deficit has been a result of interlinked elements that include corruption, resource constraints, political interference, mismanagement and rapid urbanization. As a result of this HCC has been chained into an ending cycle of poor service delivery".

The year 2012 saw the adoption of the Vision 2025 strategy by the municipality in a quest to revamp its operations and image. It was widely expected that the strategy would transform the municipality. This however, turned out to be wishful thinking. Ten years into the project the municipality continues to be characterised by deplorable service delivery. This among other things is evidenced by the dilapidated service delivery infrastructure, unfinished capital projects, erratic water supply, poor sanitation programmes and sporadic refuse collection (Marumahoko et al., 2020, p.48; Chilunjika, Uwizeyimana and Chilunjika, 2023, p.579). Although the strategy creates a window of opportunity for the municipality to engage in MICs political encroachment hampers the success of these initiatives.

For instance, the Minister of Local Government’s alleged abuse of powers in the Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15) to undermine decisions made in opposition controlled cities and towns (Chigwata, Marumahoko and Madhekeni, 2019, p.46). In this regard it is often claimed that the Minister uses certain provisions in the Act to interfere with local urban processes (Marumahoko, Chigwata and Nhende, 2018, p.208). For example, the Minister can overturn the decisions and resolution of municipalities to engage in certain city twinning partnerships (Section 314 of the Urban Councils Act). In summary, the power struggles between the Minister of Local Government and the opposition controlled Harare City Council coupled with corruption, dwindling revenue base, inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure have locked the municipality into a never ending cycle of deplorable service delivery.

**The purpose and objectives of engaging in MICs at Harare City Council**

Interviews conducted brought to light a number of reasons that drive HCC to engage in MICs and these reasons include:

i. The quest to exchange various technical skills and knowledge that relate to economics, governance, town management and technology. Interviewee A however, noted that these factors change from time to time and therefore officials at HCC should ensure that the municipality is associated with vibrant cities and has the right networks to be continuously empowered on international issues concerning municipal management.

ii. To market Harare as a city of choice worth of investment and tourism. In this era of globalization it is key that a city presents and markets itself globally. This does not only benefit the municipality but the citizens as these partnerships can open for them avenues for educational advancement and job opportunities.

iii. To improve and enhance the operations and skills of HCC and its human resources through institutional and human resources capacity building initiatives.

iv. To find more innovative ways to tackle global issues and challenges which affect HCC, but demand to be addressed and solved on a wider platform. This is in line with Camagu (2018, p.70) who stipulates that there are a numerous Northern municipalities that municipalities in the South can partner with to confront various global challenges ranging from climate change, crime and immigration, and finally,

v. To assist in the promotion of international peace building and diplomacy through cooperation. According to Interviewee D all twinning arrangements that Harare has entered into have gone a long way towards strengthening the ties between Zimbabwe and the twin country an indicator that MICs are very instrumental in fostering diplomacy of states. The interviewee gave an example of the Harare-Munich (Germany) twinning arrangement which has being in existence since 1996.

In summary, Harare City Council has been driven by the above mentioned objectives in order to engage in partnerships that are beneficial and fruitful for the council to deliver its mandate to local communities.

**Key actors involved in Municipal International Cooperations programmes at Harare City Council**

According to Council Reports between 2019 and 2021 there are three main actors involved in MIC programmes at HCC and these are: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing and the Public, International Affairs Protocol Section. Their roles in MICs are highlighted below.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade**

The ministry is responsible for promoting Zimbabwe’s political and economic interests, image and influence in the global community. When it comes to MICs the ministry has the following specific roles:

i. It suggests and recommends the most suitable towns that HCC can partner with based on the relations that Zimbabwe has with the country of that town.

ii. As such it has the authority to refute towns that are willing to partner with Harare that it deems unsuitable.
However, interviews conducted brought to light the issue of bureaucratic red tape in the approvals of twinning partnerships by the ministry. Interviewee E noted the following:

“The greatest challenge that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has is delaying the approval of these partnerships. At some point a twinning proposal sent for approval by the HCC in 1992 got staled along the way. This therefore hinders the HCC from partaking in MICs”. As such, she recommended that municipalities be given autonomy to make their own decisions when it comes to MIC matters.

**Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing**

This Ministry is tasked with the mandate to oversee all local authorities in Zimbabwe. As the parent ministry to HCC it is the Ministry’s duty to provide the municipality with strategic direction on issues pertaining to MICs. Additionally, the ministry is responsible for facilitating cabinet authority applications approval for HCC officials seeking to travel to sister cities for MIC business. However, due to political interference deliberate moves by the ministry to decline elected officials from the main opposition party to travel was considered retrogressive by all the interviewees. According to Charumbira (2015, p.25) the Ministry of Local Government has been criticized for blocking the efforts by HCC to engage in technical exchanges trips as most Cabinet Authority applications do not pass the ministry level.

Based on the interviews, it was apparent that in some cases the ministry actually denies HCC officials authority to travel to foreign countries to sign MIC agreements. For example in 2015 it is alleged that the ministry declined to approve requests by HCC officials to travel to Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) to sign a twinning contract. Additionally, in 2003 Elias Mudzuri from the MDC who was the then elected Mayor was removed from office by the Minister of Local Government citing “disobedience”, a move that soured relations between Harare and Germany for about five years (Bandauko and Bobo, 2018). In the end, the political squabbles between the ruling party and the main opposition are affecting HCC from pursing MICs that can actually benefit the municipality and the populace at large.

**Public, International Affairs and Protocol Section**

The overall responsibility of administering international city relations at HCC is handled by the Public, International Affairs and Protocol Section which under the office of the Chamber Secretary. The main function of this section is to market HCC as a strategic international player by establishing networks with various stakeholders and international organizations including the German Association of Cities, New Partnerships for African Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) (Harare City Council, 2021, p.20) The section also facilitates the involvement of domestic stakeholders including tertiary institutions, community based groups, NGOs and faith based organizations in these MICs.

Moreover, it was established that the Section has a significant role of coordinating and steering MIC related projects and programmes. In other words, this Section is the heart beat of MICs at HCC as it deals with the day to day aspects of these partnerships such as hosting events and receiving donations from sister towns. However, as highlighted earlier the unit’s operations are at times hampered by the complex political environment it operates in.

**Harare City Council twinning partnerships and their status**

Presently, HCC has bilateral relations with various cities including Munich (German), Nottingham (United Kingdom), Cincinnati (United States of America), and Cheonan (South Korea) to mention a few. Through its twinning arrangement with Munich, the town is now part of a tripartite partnership with eThekwini (South Africa).The table below gives a summary of some of HCC’s twinning arrangements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Active enough and exchanges place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Dormant</td>
<td>There is limited communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Munich</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Very Active</td>
<td>Technical, goods and people exchanges taking place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Dormant</td>
<td>Communication ended in 1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lusaka</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Awaiting signing</td>
<td>Last communication recorded in 1981.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guangzhou</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>In stages of finalisation</td>
<td>Negotiations still taking place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madrid</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
<td>Negotiations ended in 1988</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Harare City Council Records (2021).
From the table above it is clear that the Munich-Harare International Cooperation seems to be very vibrant with various exchanges taking place. From the council records reviewed it was however determined that little is being done by the City to pursue, revisit or cancel municipal relations that have been lying dormant as shown in the above table. The respondents identified lack of commitment between the two partners, lack of proper planning, and the lack of constant and reliable communication between the towns as some of the key reasons some of the partnerships are not fruitful. Therefore, there is need for Harare’s MICs to be supported with well-articulated plans stipulating objectives and steps to achieve them. Additionally, HCC and her partners should stay in constant communication and as far as commitment is concerned, management from all the partners should be highly committed to make the MIC work.

**Nature of activities undertaken by Harare City Council and her Municipal International Cooperation partners**

Bandauko and Bobo (2018) note that activities that are undertaken within MIC partnerships can be categorized into five main groups that are collaborations on specific projects, information and training exchanges, cultural exchanges and technical exchanges. The subsequent paragraphs will discuss the various activities that HCC and its international partners are involved.

**Technical exchanges**

From the interviews it was established that through its partnership with Munich, projects centred at improving Harare’s water supply and waste management have taken place through expert technical exchanges between the two towns. These projects sought to address a number of challenges that HCC was faced with including the collapse of the city’s sewer system in 2008 and inadequate equipment for solid waste collection. A situation which has resulted in illegal dumping and the amassing of uncollected refuse in open spaces around Harare’s suburbs and the Central Business District. Munich has provided technical expertise on the implementation of Geographic Information Systems to monitor water and sewer systems in real time. In an addition to this, it was also established that Munich has donated waste collection vehicles and at some point 100 000 Euros emergency aid to the HCC for water treatment after the 2008 Cholera outbreak that raged Harare. As a result of this project council reports indicate a strong upward trend in improved sewer management in Harare between 2009 and 2010. Important to note however, is that despite such projects Harare still faces waste and sewer management challenges. The gains from these projects have not been been sustainable due to financial challenges that the municipality continues to face.

**Collaboration on a specific project**

After the realization that Harare City Council lacked a functioning Information Technology infrastructure the “IT concept for the City of Harare” project was launched in 2011 between Harare and Munich. The project was targeted at improving the work of the Finance Department and other key specialized sections within the municipality. Similarly, Bandauko and Bobo (2018, p.42) noted that the project intended to revamp the municipality’s billing system which was outdated and the revenue collection system which was deemed porous. Before the commencement of the project, HCC was rocked with numerous mismanagement and corruption scandals and therefore the project was a chance to tackle these challenges and rebrand the municipality. IT specialists from Munich visited Harare to provide strategic direction on the project and also to enlighten Harare City officials on how they could maximize ITCs to enhance their administration operations and improve service delivery (City of Munich, 2014, p.9). This project was highly praised by all the interviewees a step towards corruption reduction and a mechanism to improve accountability and transparency.

Council financial reports reviewed showed a steady positive trend since the implementation of the IT project.

In addition to this, HCC has adopted more transparent procurement procedures to improve transparency and accountability in the procurement process. This saw the creation of the council’s website where the citizens can access information and advertisements on tenders. Nevertheless, regardless of such efforts procurement and corruption scandals continue to rock the municipality (Dubec, 2019, p.10; Chilunjika, Intauno, Uwizeyimana and Chilunjika, 2022, p.89).

**Information and training exchanges**

Since the Harare-Munich twinning partnership was sealed in 1996, training exchanges have been taking place especially in the form of councillor exchanges. These exchanges mainly serve to equip the inexperienced elected officials from HCC with information on how to deal with a matrix of challenges they face in particular, corruption, social and economic problems of the local community and dilapidated municipal infrastructure. Additionally, Interviewee E highlighted that information exchanges between Harare and Cincinnati have enabled officials at HCC to gain an international perspective on numerous issues including environmental management and urban governance. This exposure has also increased their understanding on current global issues such climate change and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR).

**Cultural exchanges**

According to Ehlers (2001, p.24) towns also decide to enter into MICs to promote their cultural identity internationally and this also known as cultural democracy. The concept of cultural democracy is aimed at protecting the culture of a country and this case a town globally. As a town Harare is rich in terms of historic sites, culture and heritage, thus making it a cultural diverse town with a lot to share with the world. Examples of these historical and cultural sites include the National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Domboshava rocks, the National Heroes Acre and Mukuvisi Woodlands just to mention a few. Through the Harare-Munich twinning partnerships,
residents from both towns have participated in various cultural and arts festivals such as Munich-Harare Arts Festival and LitFest. Moreover the partnership has opened doors for Zimbabwean artists to establish studios in Munich for instance the Pamuzinda musical group which has had a branch in Munich for years now.

However at some point activities between the two cities were interrupted due to the political developments in Zimbabwe which affected Harare as the capital city. According to Bandauko and Bobo (2018, p.46) between 1999 and 2001 cultural activities and citizen encounters were also discontinued. This was instigated by political interference and the removal of the opposition mayor who was a key factor in the Harare-Munich partnership. As a result of this, Munich protested against the government and formal contracts with HCC were frozen for a period of two years (City of Munich, 2014, p.20). It should however be noted that despite the turbulent times that have threatened to weaken the partnership relations between Munich and Harare still remain strengthened by the long history that the two towns share.

Discussion

Municipal International Cooperations are partnerships and relationship pacts that are born from a mutual desire for international peace and mutual benefit (Bandauko and Bobo, 2018, p.30). These partnerships have been credited for promoting economic development, trade, cultural exchanges and tourism in line with the current globalization wave. MICs likewise, allow local communities to directly participate in international relations in novel and meaningful ways, resulting in long-term benefits to their societies (Ehlers, 2001, p.30). These relationships also encourage people from different continents, cultures and social backgrounds to exchange ideas and information so as to acquire an international perspective and enhance their comprehension of global issues (Joenniemi and Sergunin, 2011, p.223).

MICs undertaken by Harare Metro have produced a number of benefits to both the municipality and Harare residents. From the findings it was established that MICs are offering HCC a very direct and effective avenue for development cooperation based on technical, cultural, information and training exchanges. Although the study brought to light that one partnership (Harare-Munich) is the most vibrant and most twinings are dormant, it suffices to say that there are positive benefits both economically and socially that have been achieved. HCC has profited in terms of in ICT municipal management, staff capacity building and operational efficiency in regards to service provision, while Harare residents have benefits from cultural and educational exchanges.

It was also established that North-South Municipal International Cooperations are not meant to be a one way transfer of resources and expertise to developing municipalities. Rather, they signify a paradigm shift from the traditional “benefactor-recipient model to a more shared and mutual beneficial type of relationship (Dialogue, 2017, p.3). Nganje (2015, p.2) notes Northern municipalities can also benefit from these partnerships. As such Harare’s Northern partners can benefit from cultural awareness, greater mutual understanding and can have respect to diverse ways of thinking and unique indigenous approaches to problem solving.

The importance of political, legal and economic factors can never be underestimated when it comes to fruitful MICs at HCC. Examples can be found where MICs failed due to unstable political, legal and economic environment in Zimbabwe. For instance the sustainability of the achievements of Bulawayo City Council (Zimbabwe) -eThekwini municipality (South Africa) partnership were constantly threatened by currency changes and policy inconsistencies experienced in the country (Chilunjika and Chilunjika, 2021, p.9). Similarly policy inconsistencies and political interference have also derailed Harare’s MICs from time to time as witnessed by the Harare- Munich twinning. Hyperinflation and currency changes in the country also affect Harare from benefiting from foreign investors as a result of investor perception of economic risk. As noted earlier that MICs are to benefit both partners, the economic situation in Zimbabwe can hamper Harare’s partners from getting returns from their investments. Policy and financial frameworks should thus be structured in ways that allow MICs at Harare City Council to realize their full fruition.

Conclusions

Municipal International Cooperations have become a widely acceptable and viable tool for sustainable development at local level globally. The phenomenon has grown tremendously since its inception from mere friendships between towns to a more powerful instrument for learning, development and universal unity building. This paper therefore set out to investigate the benefits of such partnerships in Zimbabwe using Harare Metro, the largest municipality in Zimbabwe as the unit of analysis. The study concludes that there are positive outcomes both socially and economically that can be achieved through MICs in Zimbabwe as evidenced by the partnerships that Harare Metro is involved in. These valuable benefits include improved urban governance, city diplomacy through cooperation, staff capacity development, and tourism and city internationalization. It was also established that Harare’s Northern partners can also benefit from these engagements. These benefits can be in form of cultural awareness, respect for diverse ways of thinking and the establishment of peace and goodwill with their Southern partners. However, it was noted that there a number of success factors that should be upheld if MICs are to realize their full potential and benefits and these include, an enabling policy, economic and political environment, and constant communication between the partners. The study contributes towards the forging of sustainable partnerships that promote effective and efficient service delivery and long-lasting developmental co-operations among local and international municipalities. The study recommends the government of Zimbabwe to fully support MICs and give municipalities full autonomy to freely engage in these partnerships without political interference in line with its devolution programme.
Acknowledgment

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, Data Collection, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing by authors with equal participation. All authors have read and agreed to the published the final version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, due to that the research does not deal with vulnerable groups or sensitive issues.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References


**Publisher's Note:** Bussecon International stays neutral with regard to jurisdical claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

International Journal of Business Ecosystem and Strategy by Bussecon International Academy is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.