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## Parliamentary babelism and the future of democracy in disasters: The case of Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

Disasters are a good test for global operationalisability of the concept and practice of democracy as well as the relationship between state institutions and the constituency. During moments traditionally known for fog and friction, suppression of deontological ethics by governments and their partial replacement by the teleological ethic branch of philosophy called consequentialism is witnessed globally. Modern states and in particular parliamentary democracies have accountability mechanisms for checking, balancing and harnessing negative forms of abuse of power especially by the executive in order to maintain state efficiency for the public good. There are new challenges coming with the rise of incidences of disasters including pandemics that collapse whole of society. These include cases of human rights violations often heard from the general public, civil societies as well as the social and mainstream media although the role and voice of parliament have to a larger extent been drowned. This partially answers whether and why the notion of parliamentarianism is being relegated to players other than parliament during abnormal and uncertain times like disasters. The august institution even under such circumstances, can still degenerate into babelism. This paper is guided by the Agency Theory. In coming up with the paper, an explanatory research design was adopted and review of existing literature, conduction of structured interviews and ethnographic observations were employed. It was found that parliament is increasingly degenerating into a muzzled third cousin with its membership mostly reduced to philanthropies during disasters, due to excessive bounded rationality among other aspects. That is making parliaments less impactful in practice; which is a disservice to the sustainable development agenda and its underpinning principles of accountability, inclusivity in participation and transparency important for poverty alleviation just mentioning a few. Reversal of the anomaly on the part of parliament is possible through expansion of its rationality in public choice representation, to a greater extent being curtailed by its membership's 'insecure' personal interests.

**Key Words:** *parliamentary babelism, agency, principal, accountability, deontology, privilege*

### Introduction

This paper is guided by the Agency Theory. The principal-agent theory strand was adopted for understanding and explaining the relationship between the concept of parliamentarianism and the different principals of parliamentarians as well as their effect on role efficiency and effectiveness of the institution of parliament in Zimbabwe. As revealed during the COVID-19

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state of disaster that came to force from 30 March 2020, parliament's role of upholding constitutionalism and government accountability was to a greater extent limited. That result is attributed to limitations imposed by the nature of the institution, position of parliamentarianism in the government system, competing interests of principals and agent loyalties, the political polarisation in the country and capacity of the institution's employees among others. Parliament can reassert its position and restore lost confidence of citizens around its capacity. Its voice which also represent the poor has been drowning. Same pertinent issues have been raised in parliament mainly midway into and post disaster. The debates however, have mostly minimally convincingly presented substantiating data and arguments for significantly influencing policy change in the area of disaster risk reduction and management, which are key components for sustainable poverty reduction and national development. A number of options are advanced in this paper for relevantly strengthening the role of parliament globally as the voice of the voiceless, using the case of Zimbabwe.

#### **An overview of the Agency theory**

The agency theory advances the metaphor of a contractual relationship between and in which one party that assumes the role of the principal, delegates work to the other party that becomes the agent for performing specific roles on behalf of that principal (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014 and Shapiro, 2005). The agency theory is associated with two problems namely that (i) the goals and desires of the principal and agency may conflict and (ii) it is difficult or expensive for the principal to verify what the agency is doing (Eisenhardt, 1989). The main unit of analysis advanced through this theory is the contract which governs the relationship between the principal and the agent (Bosse & Phillips, 2016). In modern democratic societies, there perceivably exist two key groups of people who enter into the contract. Those governing, and the governed. More specifically, the governed are the electorate which invests power in a government which will then execute its mandate on behalf of the citizenry in general (Shapiro, 2005). To ensure the executive remain focused on its mandate without being drenched into absolute power that corrupts absolutely as noted by Lord Acton, the citizens in their role as principal(s) under the parliamentarism doctrine, elect representative parliamentarians to become their agents through the purported popular vote (Blaug, 2010). Parliamentarians' role is to guarantee effective operationalisation of the social contract between the elected government and its broader society inclusive of its electors (Asamoah, 2018; Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Gey, 1999 and Rousseau, 1752). This paper provides an analysis of the performance of the institution of parliament as the agency through which parliamentarians act on behalf of their principal(s) including poorer voters who demand adequate representation of their dreams. In parliamentarianism, the principals are the electorate as well as other related natural or juristic persons involved in the election in addition to those concerned with the effectiveness of government in particular, and achievement of the public good in general (Lilly & White, 2020; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014 and Power & Shoot, 2012).

Key postulations of the theory revolve around people, organisations and information. People are assumed to be self-interested, though their interests are bounded in practice. They are also

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risk averse; hence, they are expected to act within bounded rationality (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Daly, 2015; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014; Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Shapiro, 2005; Simonsen, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989 and Simon, 1955). Bounded rationality implies limitations on the agent's access to information as well as computational and cognitive abilities of his, her or their minds. That then negatively impact on their input options relative to optimum decisions that have to be made (Ballester & Hernandez, 2012). The agency is the organisation through which agents operate. It however exudes semblances of partial goal conflict among participants, affirms superiority of efficiency as the criterion for effectiveness characterised by information asymmetry between the principal and the agent, and existing mechanisms for agency cost control. In that relational setting, information is viewed as a purchasable commodity while the principal-agent contract revolves around the nature of the relationship between the principal and agency. More notably, principal and agent have different goals and risk preferences. These contracting parties' operational challenges also emanate from the moral hazard, adverse selection of the agent and the risk sharing mechanism that exist between the principal and agent as parties to the contract (Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014 and Shapiro, 2005).

There are two broad Agency Theory strands. These are the positivist and principal-agent approaches. Their differences are largely on mathematical rigor, dependent variables and application styles; although they are also complementary. The first of the two main hypotheses of the positivist approach are that the agent is most likely to behave in the interest of the principal whenever their contract is outcome-based. The second postulation is that, where the principal has information to verify the behaviour of the agent, the agent is more likely to behave in the interest of the principal. On the other hand, the principal-agent approach has mainly been used to determine the optimum contracting alternative in a given situation as well as to ascertain the impact of the principal-agent relationship on the agent, organisational behaviour and the contract outcomes. Variables primarily used in studies that have sought to understand principal-agent relationships are task programmability, information systems and outcome uncertainty. Others are the organisational environment, organisational structure and form, length of the principal agent relationship and nature or characteristics of the industry, agency and the agency employees (Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989).

The main challenge associated with the agency is that the principal and agent normally have different goals while the principal further has limited mechanisms for determining whether the agent has performed the delegated tasks appropriately. Moral hazard on the part of the agent speaks to the lack of effort and more bluntly putting no effort towards achieving desired goals. Adverse selection is interpreted as the misrepresentation of ability or possession of certain skills or attributes by the agent due to failure by the principal to judge veracity or to verify claimed skills during the time of hiring and along the assignment tenure. Goal conflict between the principal and agent is however anticipated to be resolvable through bargaining, negotiation, coalition and co-alignment of incentives (Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989). Nonetheless whereas the goals of the

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principal and agent can differ as they seek to achieve conflicting self-interests, people do not always seek to serve self-interests or to exploit opportunism. They also resemble traits of being good stewards, team players, other-regarding, cooperative, coordinative and altruistic; contrary to opportunism and individualism alone (Shapiro, 2005 and Bentham, 1781).

The theory further advances the claim that agents as individuals are naturally rationally bounded. They usually do not have adequate information and knowledge of issues they are dealing with. That is so because knowledge and information are distributed disproportionately throughout the agency and among agents. Since information is regarded as having a cost, agencies also control and prevent unwanted agent opportunism through investing in information systems among others (Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989). Organisations are therefore assumed to be having uncertain futures and members of the organisation partly control its future although other socio-environmental factors further influence both agents and agency outcomes (Rui, 2017; Bets, 2013 & Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Consequently, organisational uncertainty is viewed in the sense of risk and reward trade-offs of its members and not as a result of its membership's mere inability to pre-plan. Role outcome uncertainty and risk appetite differences among members further influences the principal-agent contract. In that regard, the theory advances that smaller and newer organisations with relatively lesser resources for weathering uncertainties have a higher likelihood for failure. That means, they are more risk antagonistic and sensitive to outcome uncertainty (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014; Daly, 2015 and Eisenhardt, 1989).

This theory fits for analysing multiple principals and agents whose interests converge at a given agency such as a parliament (Shapiro, 2005). In such circumstances, teams of principals and agents can coalesce and compete for the same and different interests and goals yet they are still expected to achieve the different principals' desired outcomes (Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Adams, 1996 and Simonsen, 1994). Notably, where principals and agents are multiple, those many groups will also receive mixed and conflicting messages and instructions in the course of conducting their duties. Those instructive messages are usually generated from different sources and for different end-goals; hence, the mixed and conflicting messages and instructions. As a result of the nature of the organisation resultantly, the contract can actually become vague by design so as to incorporate the irreconcilably different interests of the multiple principals and agents involved in the agency (Shapiro, 2005). The agents moreover have potential to align against and for certain principals according to their diverse cleavages and incentives which can be perceived differently by dissimilar agents (Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015). Those alignments nonetheless increase information and power asymmetries and shifts among the agents and principals. That becomes so because, vertical and horizontal competition inevitably breeds among contractors who are party to the agency (Daly, 2015; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989).

Given that background, the political systems in which parliament reside are complex networks of principal-agent relationships. The networks comprise of citizens, nation states or

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provinces, elected officials and lawmakers, members of the executive branch, administrative agencies, courts, international agencies, bureaucrats, patronage appointees and the intelligence branch of government among others (Shapiro, 2005). In that whole network the principal-agent relationships dominate. Acknowledging that web of relationships, the theory concedes that existence of a perfect agency is rare hence deviant behaviours persist and are somewhat tolerable. As a result, whereas some agency theory proponents view the agents as more self-interested and infested with many other unknown weaknesses, agents have naturally remained most practically acceptable for good corporate and national governance. Theorists grapple on how to attain and maintain control of the agents so that they remain pedantically focussed on successfully carrying out delegated tasks and the achievement of anticipated outputs and outcomes (Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014 and Simonsen, 1994). The central challenge is realistically not always on the principal-agent conflict of interests especially where the agents' interests are somewhat bounded. Under such circumstances, the challenge is predominantly on how to manoeuvre through the thicket of different loyalties the agents owe to different principals as well as the sanctions associated with different levels of conflict. Noting that rarely do agents align their interests to a single principal. They therefore have to negotiate a balance between their interests and the usually irreconcilable interests and differences of the diverse principals. Understanding the source of goal conflict, as well as the social conditions that inflames it, is equally important in analysing these relationships instead of using self-interest alone as the major issue for explicating such contexts (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Daly, 2015; Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012 and Shapiro, 2005).

### **The concept and practice of parliamentarianism, its position and linkage to the Agency Theory**

Parliamentarians as agents have multiple principals and parliament forms part of the three horizontally separated traditional arms of government which include the executive and the judiciary (Wiseman, Rodríguez, and Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Albert, 2010; Beetham, 2006; Shapiro, 2005; Adams, 1996 and Simonsen, 1994). Each parliament has its own unique character and traditions. In that view, other vertical and diagonal power separation models outside the executive, judiciary and legislature exist differently in given countries (Albert, 2010). Those three core horizontal arms of state exist in light of the doctrine of the separation of powers that Montesquieu (1899) advances as necessary for safeguarding citizens against tyranny and for the preservation of life, liberty and private property among others. In fulfilment of that doctrine in practice, the roles of government are separated into three independent yet dependent institutions whose overlapping powers ideally do not exceed those of the other. That perceivably creates a system of checks and balances for the maintenance and perpetuity of good governance critical for development and poverty reduction (Lilly & White, 2020; Benwell & Gay, 2011 and Fombad, 2005). Realisation of good governance inclusive of transparency, accountability and improved public participation in decision making, is the main goal and desire of the principal who can be the voter for instance (Abbasi, 2018 and Hughes, 2006). That goal may however be in conflict with other goals and interests of agents and their other principals. The agent nonetheless tries to balance the

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competing interests and that behaviour impacts on their subsequent role outcomes. Unfortunately, the voter as a principal among others usually fail to objectively verify what the agent is doing or not doing, due to various reasons among them already noted earlier (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989).

The concept of the separation of powers is also practised differently in presidential, parliamentary and other hybrid forms of democratic governments globally (Abbasi, 2018; Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015 and Linz, 1990). Hence dependent upon the adopted power matrix, parliament's roles as an agency in practice, differ from country to country. Shapiro (2005) notes that the main unit of analysis in the agency theory is the contract followed by the involved people and their cognitive abilities to conceptualise issues, the nature of organisations through which they carry out their mandate and the levels of access as well as limitations imposed on access to information (Hogarth, 2020; Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Daly, 2015; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014; Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Shapiro, 2005; Simonsen, 1994; Eisenhardt, 1989 and Simon, 1955).

The United States of America (USA) is famed for practising presidentialism that purely or strictly adhere to the theoretical dictates of the separation of powers doctrine. Separation of powers is however accorded lesser prominence in the United Kingdom (UK). In the UK exists a form of parliamentarism that bears semblances of extensive fusion and overlapping of powers instead of a pure separation of powers. The former Soviet Union until its collapse in the 1990s and its allies however, practises the hybrid model commonly known as the Assembly or conventional government. Those have dominant traces of the English and French practices mainly witnessed during interregnums and around the 1870s respectively (Fombad, 2005). The separation of powers doctrine is further strictly visible where presidentialism is practised. For example, in the USA. Fusion of powers on the other hand is prevailing where various forms of parliamentarism are dominant. The latter form of governance has been dominant in UK, Canada, France and Botswana among others. In such countries, the executive arm of state has been enjoying more control over legislative business and practices (Benwell & Gay, 2011; Albert, 2010; Fombad, 2005; Lemco & Regenstreif, 1984 and Bagehot, 1872). Thence, parliamentarians' ability to fulfil assigned roles in line with expectations of different principals has to a greater extent been variously constricted (Hogarth, 2020; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014; Power & Shoot, 2012; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Simonsen, 1994).

Deductively, the separation of powers principle is more synonymous to stricter presidential as opposed to parliamentary systems of government which accept extensive fusion and overlapping of powers philosophically and in practice (Albert, 2010). In most parliamentary systems the head of government relies on the legislature for his or her executive's political survival. That executive is adorned with powers to trigger elections by dissolving the legislature atypical of presidential systems principally rooted in strict separation of power practices. Conversely in classic presidential systems, no single organ of government should possess absolute power. That builds the necessary distrust among key pillars of government;

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making the separation of powers more practical. Such distrust dissuades arbitrary government and legislative supremacy over any other arm of the state. Thereby promoting governmental efficiency, observance of the rule of law, accountability, promotion of common interests and a balance of diverse national interests (Strauss, 2018; Benwell & Gay, 2011; Albert, 2010; Fombad, 2005 and Lemco & Regenstreif, 1984). A scrutiny on most governments in Africa nevertheless reveals an inclination to hybrid forms of government more skewed towards parliamentary than presidential system characteristics. Some of those characteristics are attributable to colonial vestiges. A hybrid of parliamentary and presidential governments' characteristics has predominantly led to poor rankings of national governments' efficiency levels. Thence, more conflict of interests between the agents and principals as well as the reduced confidence on the agency by the principals (Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015; Makumbe, 2009; Suleiman, 2007; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Fombad, 2005).

Primary forms of parliamentary systems are identified as the British or Westminster model, constrained model and the semi-presidentialism model (Benwell & Gay, 2011). British parliamentarism comprises of the head of government whose cabinet is drawn from the pool of elected legislators. In addition, government powers are not equally fused or concentrated between the executive, legislature and judiciary. The powers are mostly overlapping between the executive and the legislature with the judiciary trailing behind the two. Constrained parliamentarism which is closer to the fusion of powers model has been adopted in Canada, Germany and India among others as already noted above. Semi-presidentialism existed in countries such as Croatia, Slovak Republic, Poland, Russia and Hungary among others since the end of the Cold War period. The constrained model straddles presidentialism and parliamentarism although it rejects the prevailing USA type of separation of powers in existence between the executive and the legislature. The model nevertheless grants broad powers to a governmental coalition that gains more parliamentary support (Fombad, 2005).

In semi-presidentialism models, the citizens elect the president directly as in presidential systems but the president can dissolve the legislature in given circumstances. The president cannot however veto legislation. He or she can suggest its reconsideration, and legislate by decree if he or she is assigned powers to do so. In that system further, cabinet members do not usually sit in the legislature simultaneously (Fombad, 2005). The president's powers are correspondingly not easily offset by checks and balances unlike in the presidential systems. Implementing that model conversely has the danger of threatening parliamentarianism with relegation to obscurity particularly where the presidency becomes more powerful. That can result in unbearable substantial consequences on the promise of the doctrine of the separation of powers in practice in spite of criticality of its role to the less powerful (Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015 and Albert, 2010). Those semi-parliamentarism characteristics are however more synonymous with the prevailing practice in Zimbabwe where Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa (2015) viewed its parliament as the weakest of the three arms of state. In the Zimbabwean case referred above, power levels have also been swinging depending on the institutional role importance in achieving the desired political actions. Many countries nonetheless continue to implement the hybrid system of government with different effects on

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the role of parliament for example in times of disaster (Abbasi, 2018 and Suleiman, 2007). The Agency Theory is relevant and to a greater extent applicable in analysing efficiency of parliaments as complex networks of principal-agent relationships and a key component in the sustainable development discourse. These networks exist in organisations where information is a purchasable commodity where agents hold competing interests yet perceivably coalescing for achieving certain common outcomes (Wiseman, Rodríguez, and Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Adams, 1996 and Simonsen, 1994).

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted for coming up with this paper is explanatory and ethnographically reflective in nature. The researchers have mainly used both direct internal participant and external observation methods in understanding the subject matter at national, regional and continental levels. That method exposed and involved researchers closely in the business of parliamentarianism over many years. Appropriate literature was further reviewed and findings were resultantly generated therefrom. Results were also reinforced with data that was collected through unstructured interviews. The unstructured interviews were purposively conducted and results crystallised through discussions with people involved with parliaments at country, regional and continental levels. Those discussions were held after formal workshop presentations, as one on one informal discussions and through sharing of participants' direct personal experiences. The methodology provided a deeper insight into the practice of parliamentarianism and the paper is premised on a qualitative research methodology.

### **The theory and practice of parliamentarianism in Zimbabwe**

Parliamentarians in Zimbabwe as is universally, are multiple agents in practice. They operate through and as an agency which is an organisation known as parliament. Their work is carried out more effectively where they access and act upon information that they would have received (Draman *et al.*, 2017). In Zimbabwe as is the common practice globally, parliamentarians are primarily agents of principals. Those principals are particularly the electorate or individual constituencies, political party leadership and membership, office of the president and cabinet, the business community, former colonial powers, liberation movement sponsors and the broader international community as alluded in Shapiro (Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015 and 2005). Conventionally and legally, parliament ought to protect national constitutions, promote democratic governance and ensure that the state institutions sincerely adhere and subsist within constitutional provisions for the national interest. In that respect all institutions and agencies of the state and government are accountable to parliament (Hogarth, 2020 and Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ), 2013). The extent to which this role is fulfilled in Zimbabwe is questionable although performance of such institutions is perceived diversely in different countries. That validates the view that there is no perfect agency; hence, some level of imperfection should be tolerable. There are consequently different extremes to which governments adapt the separation of powers doctrine as noted by Abbasi (2018); Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC) (2015) and Linz (1990). In that regard, difficulties abound in defining the actual government system

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prevailing in a country because these systems broadly belong to different hybrid categorical extremes (Bosse & Phillips, 2016; Asylum Research Consultancy (ARC), 2015; Daly, 2015; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014; Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Hudson & Wren, 2007; Shapiro, 2005; Simonsen, 1994; Linz, 1990; Eisenhardt, 1989 and Simon, 1955).

### ***Common roles of parliamentarianism in disaster situations***

The roles of parliament are broadly articulated as representative, legislative and oversight (Abbasi, 2018). These traditional roles have been static although the practice have been broadly shifting in line with the prevailing agent and agency bounding environment, as well as the cognitive abilities of agents who are the parliamentarians in this case. The capacities of the agents and agency are bounded due to a number of factors (Lilly & White, 2020; UNISDR, 2019; Draman *et al.*, 2017; Ballester & Hernandez, 2012; Alabi, 2009 and Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003). For example, the constitution of Zimbabwe provides for the proclamation of a state of public emergency in the government gazette. The proclamation should legally cease to have effect within fourteen days unless that declaration is approved by at least two thirds of the membership of parliament at its joint sitting among others (GoZ, 2013). Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 pandemic, that procedure was not being followed despite the fact that parliament later resumed its sittings during the time of the state of emergency. At the resumption of sittings, it never deliberated around need for fulfilment of the preceding constitutional requirement by the executive (GoZ, 2013) and that similarly prevailed in the British Parliament (Hogarth, 2020). It is thence argued that an earlier resumption of parliament sittings was mainly meant to settle and fulfil a political agenda for principals (the executive and ZANU PF party) as well as the personal interests of agents (the parliamentarians) respectively. The view is supported by the fact that one of the political principals recalled specific members of parliament from the agency on the day of the first sitting after the long COVID-19 induced recess (New Zimbabwe, 2020). In addition, the agents' self-interests were fulfilled in lifting suspension of parliament sittings as failure was also affecting their additional earnings in the form of sitting allowances and fuel coupons and not necessarily interests of the general electorate (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015 and Shapiro, 2005). The fact that the Zimbabwean and Zambian parliaments among others were suspended due to COVID-19 and resumed after sometime as the pandemic roared on while the executive was always active also highlights the bounded nature of parliaments as agencies (Lilly & White, 2020; Hogarth, 2020; New Zimbabwe, 2020 and Xinhua, 2020).

The higher legislative role noted above having not been fully fulfilled, parliament has always been getting progress reports of disaster response or recovery efforts through the committee system. This has been achieved through inquiries, site visits, ministerial statements, motions and question and answer sessions in performance of parliamentary oversight function (Abbasi, 2018; Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015 and Makumbe, 2012). Other disaster related duties which parliament traditionally performs include financial matters which basically straddle the legislative domain. In that regard the executive has to bring financial budgets targeted for disaster risk reduction or management to parliament for approval or

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condonation (UNISDR, 2019). This requirement has not been adequately and transparently fulfilled in Zimbabwe. In many cases the executive has been bringing monthly, quarterly and yearly reports of risk management interventions progress and budget performances for related tasks. Those reports were being sent to the specific committee or the executive advises the committee through oral evidence hearings, inquiries and ministerial statements at and in parliament. That however has been done mostly as a greenwashing and diplomatic stance for media coverage and to a greater extent, that has targeted the electorate and international community in a bid to vindicate the ruling party that predominantly forms the executive.

Disaster finances or budgets are usually incidental than the traditional primary incremental budget allocations wholesomely presented annually at the beginning of the year or as a supplement at any other time of the year. The budgets which are allocated for government use usually puts parliament in an oversight, developmental and budgetary role. National budgets are primarily key in the development of a country. As the vanguard of constitutionalism that ensures accountability, parliament as an agency broadly performs the oversight role through the question time and other parliamentary debates which allow opportunity for the agents to save both self-interest and interests of other principals through different behaviours. However, since reports from government departments are normally submitted from time to time and mostly after sometime where they are analysed, the committees may not be able to present their findings to the committee of the whole house on time. Where that happens, the main recourse becomes the media that amplifies shaming of the institutions involved through journalistic reports selectively presented to the public where reporters attend committees' hearing sessions. That therefore weakens the role of parliament pertaining to disaster matters since some committees are naturally darlings while others are orphans relative to media attention in Zimbabwe as is common in many other countries.

Parliament as an institution, a collective of individuals from different groupings, a system as well as a grouping of self-interested persons further performs the humanitarian role. It has been gathering humanitarian response resources in addition to playing the diplomatic and advocacy roles at national and international platforms (Mudyandzo & Nkomo, 2016). That was visible at international forums such as the African Union and the Inter-Parliamentary Union sessions soon after some countries including Zimbabwe had experienced the Cyclone Idai induced disaster (African Union, 2019 and IPU, 2019). A call for international action to support Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe on the 140<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly was actually put on the international body's agenda (IPU, 2019). In that regard further, members of parliament individually have been seen in various communities performing the humanist or empathetic and educative roles in line with their representative, intermediation and leadership roles (UNISDR, 2019).

In that vein during the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of Cyclone Idai disaster in Zimbabwe, portfolio committees have always been inviting the Department of Civil Protection, Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance among others for committee hearings depending on the nature of the hazard. The departments would brief the committees of parliament on their role challenges and usually parliamentarians have

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advocated for incremental budgetary allocations for the respective departments as reflected in Langa (2020) for example. That tide however mostly dies down when the media subsides its focus on that most recent disaster. Committees also visit the disaster impacted areas subject to availability of adequate financial resources for travel including with selected representatives, for handing over the gathered humanitarian goods. The Zimbabwean parliament has a facility in place for receiving humanitarian aid from its staff, serving members of parliament and all people able to access its vicinity. As individuals during Cyclone Idai and COVID-19 disasters, many members of parliament were seen participating in various disaster response committees and other interventions throughout the country. One independent Member of Parliament (MP) was in particular observed enforcing social distancing epidemiological rules and adherence to the use of masks in supermarkets under his constituency. The MP even threatened closure of business premises where adherence was not observed (Clairs, 2020). In addition, a message of compassion that called for donations as well as observance of a minute of silence for the missing and lost lives were being conducted in parliament. Several ministerial statements were additionally being made in parliament by the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing as well as by the Minister of Health and Child Care. They updated the nation on Cyclone Idai and COVID-19's effects on the society, the summary of interventions implemented, aid received and identified gaps among other related aspects respectively although follow-ups on implementation progress of reported projects post-disaster, were always weak (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2020a; Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2020; Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2019a and Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2019).

Over and above the roles already noted, parliament has another role of causing remodelling of the nature of disaster management institutions in the country (UNISDR, 2019). It can cause creation of a disaster management framework for harnessing the different efforts of players towards a more common objective through the agency's oversight role advanced in Harkey (2014). Parliament has to further ensure that the government asserts its primary role in national disaster management and in ensuring risk free societies as opposed to current reactionary practices in many developing countries (United Nations, 2017; United Nations, 2016 and Harkey, 2014). In the same manner the institution has to cause government to be more accountable on use of resources gathered for disasters as that has the propensity to build confidence of both local and international altruists as also suggested by Tyrell et al. (2020). Parliament in addition has to always cause responsible institutions to be more pro-active in investing advanced and relevant technologies as well as the building of local, regional and international synergies which can be tapped into as national social capital in future as claimed in Harkey (2014). The agents must however acquaint themselves with knowledge of the minimum humanitarian standards if they should meaningfully cause government to observe basic disaster and post disaster humanitarian standards for example, with regards to quality and quantities of expected food and shelter, health conditions, livestock standards and small-scale businesses' sustainability considerations among others (UNISDR, 2019; Sphere Association, 2018 and Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards Project, 2014). That should ensure easy monitoring of gaps and identification of areas which may need more

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attention for improvement in preparation for future disasters instead of analysing such, in the manner every other street greenhorn can always do (UNISDR, 2019).

In line with the representative role of parliament in Zimbabwe, members have further been using the parliamentary privileges procedure to raise awareness of disasters experienced or witnessed, register concerns and uphold positive risk reduction interventions observed in constituencies. In this case a member initiates the discussion and is given the floor to address parliament on the matter perceived to be of national interest without giving prior notice. In Zimbabwe, that was being witnessed in many occasions and on one particular occasion, it was a matter of a family of five that was struck by lightning (Parliament of Zimbabwe, 2020b). In that context, condolences are expressed while at the same time awareness to the nation is made including through debates which allow raising of concerns around efficiency and effectiveness in handling such matters and any further confirmation of similar incidences witnessed in any constituencies. Additionally, government departments involved in response or any other related work are commended or criticised accordingly. Since that behaviour can raise awareness, it can create the therapeutic potential of sympathisers towards the community at risk as the criticisms can cause government reprioritisation based on identified gaps. It is not always given that where such issues are raised, will immediately receive requisite attention especially from government or other potential interventionists since interventions are mainly premised on possibility for activation of mechanisms for allocation or reallocation of existing resources. That however gives room for advocacy for interventions and accountability from government and in particular the agencies delegated with those tasks. Such reactions nevertheless usually lack proper follow-up on whether the raised issues have been addressed appropriately. Raised matters can nonetheless receive media coverage and public expectation in response, thereby creating more awareness and a basis for citizens to demand for requisite support although discussions do not directly imply closure of the identified gaps in practice. Parliamentary voices may not impact practice as anticipated by principals such as the voters.

### ***Limitations in the practice of parliamentarianism including in disasters in Zimbabwe***

The major challenges associated with parliamentarianism in Zimbabwe revolves around the nature of the institution of parliament (Alabi, 2009; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003). Parliament comprises of heterogeneous agents (members) with multiple principals and varying interests, goals and risk preferences as enunciated in Makumbe (2004). Those circumstances normally promote, although it also stifles pragmatic debate and depth of committee inquiries especially in a country highly politically polarised such as Zimbabwe (Abbasi, 2018). The principal-agent contract is further not well defined in practice as noted in theory and effectiveness of parliamentarians as members mainly depend on their level of initiation and media reportage that is based on journalistic independent initiatives which do not always guarantee coverage of requisite issues. Implementation of the initiatives is also normally hamstrung by task programmability, information systems and outcome uncertainty; organisational structure and form, length of principal-agent relationship, the organisation and

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its employees as well as the characteristics of that industry, which are predominantly political in nature (Wiseman, Rodríguez & Gomez-Mejia, 2012; Shapiro, 2005; Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003 and Eisenhardt, 1989). In that context, information access including from the agent's other principals, becomes a commodity as it can influence the position of the agent in parliamentary business, to the extent that, they can do posturing (Makumbe, 2004). Because it is difficult to verify the agent's performance in practice, members of parliament as agents to a larger extent use undefined approaches in carrying out their roles especially in light of the electorate as part of the principals (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015; Agarwal, Goel & Vashishtha, 2014 and Simonsen, 1994). Task programmability is influenced by parliamentary rules and traditions, financial availability, interests of committee membership, institutional leadership as well as flexibility of employees of the organisation as the role support mechanism mentioned in Draman *et al.* (2017) and Makumbe (2004).

Moral hazard, that is, putting no effort or complete lack of effort and or adverse selection that implies misinterpretation of ability or possession of certain skills or attributes by the agent due to failure by the principal to judge veracity of claimed capabilities during the time of hiring and along the assignment tenure, further limits the role of parliamentarianism in practice (Abbasi, 2018; Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014 and Shapiro, 2005). In that regard, these agents may not always be the preferred candidates especially by the electorate as one of the principals. Some agents become, as a result of what the electorate receive from the principal who can be the political party for example in the context of a foreseeable election. The electorate are made to believe what they are told as capacities possessed by the proposed agent without being given the opportunity or lacking the capacity to verify the claims especially in political parties where factionalism and authoritarian populism are dominant (Murisa, 2018 and New Zimbabwe, 2015). It has been observed that skills and attributes are not only a result of academic capabilities but the agent's character, courage, proximity and vulnerability to other multi-principals as well as the agent's risk perception. On the other hand, since moral hazard relates to failure to put effort or its complete lack, it is commonly witnessed in poorly resourced mobilisation capabilities evidenced among parliamentarians who only await to redistribute what is allocated to them through their principals either in the form of constituency development fund or other political party initiatives other than own ingenuities. Moral hazard can moreover be a result of lack of certain skills-set although resources are always available somewhere globally (Abbasi, 2018; Draman *et al.*, 2017; UNISDR, 2015; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Makumbe, 2004). Adverse selection may also not be purely a result of misrepresentation of certain capabilities but many times, the misreading associated with equating the character of the political industry with any other leadership positions during the aspiration stage (Hudson & Wren, 2007). Where that happens, some agents get frustrated and join the fray of the moral hazard yet pusillanimously fulfilling interests of other principals.

Partial goal conflict among the different agents in parliament, information asymmetry and bounded rationality further limits parliamentarianism in Zimbabwe as postulated by Alabi (2009). In many instances parliamentarians get information through their party whips and that

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information can even weaken their role performance (Makumbe, 2004). Where the agents' roles conflict with those of principals or among themselves for example on a given proposed bill; bargaining, negotiation, coalition and co-realignment of initiatives can be resorted to particularly where risk is perceived reasonably lower. That however can be done with some negative effects on other principals. Those principals can be communities or more specifically part of the electorate that can be the communities at risk wanting a permanent solution to their plight through resource allocation or alignment of laws in line with new socio-economic and environmental developments in the sense of the contingency theoretical views (UNISDR 2019; Rui, 2017; Bets, 2013 and Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). If that exists, expected action from other principals and especially those perceived to be weak, can be delayed. This narrative can be linked to what has been prevailing in Zimbabwe where particular proposed bills and programmes have never seen the light of day due to unbridled lack of political will. Information asymmetry has also limited the agents in the conduct of their role (Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003). They have mostly received information through hearsay and media leakages with minimum room for collectively finding pragmatic solutions for advancement of new initiatives mainly due to mistrust and extensive fusion and overlaps between parliament and the executive. Where that thrives, parliament trails behind the executive as a second cousin (Makumbe, 2004). As a result, the agent (parliament) gets rationally bounded especially where it fails to work with institutions performing similar roles and or with better mechanisms and powers which can reinforce its capacities (Alabi, 2009 and Hudson & Wren, 2007). Otherwise, some principals' agencies correspondingly continue to invest in information systems for controlling and preventing unwanted agent opportunism by parliament in that regard (Agarwal, Goel, & Vashishtha, 2014; Shapiro, 2005 and Eisenhardt, 1989).

### ***Effects of Zimbabwean parliamentarianism on parliament, government and communities at risk***

Effects of Zimbabwean parliamentarianism include cautious risk and reward trade-offs on the part of the agents relative to their principals. That has been resulting in ultimate positive and negative effects on the electorate and the agents individually and collectively as the agency (Power & Shoot, 2012 and Alabi, 2009). One of the negative effects is lack of confidence in parliamentarianism by the electorate, continuous weakening of the institution of parliament and relegation of its primary role to players other than themselves (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015; Abbasi, 2018; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2010; Hughes, 2006; Makumbe, 2004 and Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003). That lack of confidence in the institution of parliament was being witnessed in many other countries (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015; Papanikolaou, Adamis & Mellon, 2012 and Suleiman, 2007). It is also to a greater extent difficult to measure successes and failures of the agents in their roles particularly in terms of role efficiency as that information is usually rarely accessible while the soul of parliamentarianism may not be the real measure of parliamentarians' effectiveness as agents but mainly the material greenwashing tokens given to the electorate (Zinyama, Nhema & Mutandwa, 2015). In addition, the relationship between parliament and the other arms of state have ceased to be horizontally equal (Hughes, 2006 and Born, Fluri & Lunn, 2003).

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Importance of its role have therefore been fluctuating depending on existing risks and reward trade-offs than linearly as a result of the primary institutional mandate (Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Makumbe, 2004).

Objective monitoring and evaluation of government policies and programmes further weakens. Government departments have been hiding pertinent information to parliamentarians. Whenever they are invited for oral hearings, they would rather speak to the gallery with impunity in order to get intended media coverage than to be honest and real to the purpose of addressing societal problems. The effect however is perpetuation of corruption among other vices which thrive as a result of the dictatorship of democracy (Alabi, 2009). Suspicion has also been rising among parliamentarians as agents. They have been increasing grandstanding behaviours for perceived political expedience and personal gain yet retarding institutional efficiency and effectiveness (Makumbe, 2004). That approach is mainly a result of the need for the country's agents to also play to the local and international gallery for varied reasons. During the COVID-19 disaster that was declared a time of fog and friction in many countries leading to the incorporation of the military, parliament was to a greater extent rendered inoperative when deontological ethics were naturally superseded by consequential ethics which are the sub-branch of teleological ethics (Hogarth, 2020; Nwadiugwu, 2015 and Kiesling, 2001). The main question that however remains is whether the voice of parliament has any significant impact when compared to the civil society and communities at risk; otherwise, the agency is now a mere portrayal of babelism (Harkey, 2014; Power & Shoot, 2012 and Alabi, 2009). That is asked without undermining the role of parliament in disasters but with the need for parliament to initiate and reassert its power towards its irreplaceable role of upholding constitutionalism as long as the society exists (Hogarth, 2020 and Tyrell *et al.*, 2020).

### **Why and whether the voice of parliament is drowning in times of critical need in Zimbabwe?**

The voice of parliament is definitely drowning due to factors mainly expounded by the agency theory as well as excessive militarism and authoritarianism that dominate government systems and the agent delegators (Abbasi, 2018 and Alabi, 2009). Drowning of the voice without even getting deep into assessing the authority of the institution has been to a greater extent a result of conflicting interests of its members as multiple agents as well as interests of those agents against the institution of parliament itself as partly highlighted in Makumbe (2004). The conflicts in the agency mirrors conflicts and interests of principals in rival parties' leadership positions than real national interest. In addition, limitations of the institution of parliament emanate from parliament's traditions, processes and procedures which can impinge its effectiveness as a collective of agents. Hence, there is need for more progressive initiatives which should boost parliament's capacities (Hogarth, 2020; UNISDR, 2019; USAID, 2019; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Makumbe, 2004).

Parliament's voice will continue to drown if its debates remain in the past instead of starting to sustainably identify, compare and develop primary laws and its role capacities in line with other progressive regional and international laws and trends that seek to improve current

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practice (Older, 2020; Lilly & White, 2020; Abbasi, 2018; Power & Shoot, 2012 and Alabi, 2009). Where the capacity to draft the laws is locally weak, advocacy can be done for a model law to be developed at either regional or continental levels (Abbasi, 2018). In the same regard, parliament has to capacitate itself to gather data and conduct independent assessments for strengthening risk and interventions monitoring as relevant tools for parliamentary oversight. Otherwise, its role in disasters will remain reactionary and unconvincing for policy change since monitoring and evaluation is easier where well-defined expectations exist (UNISDR, 2019; USAID, 2019; Draman *et al.*, 2017; Hudson & Wren, 2007 and Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2005).

Parliament further has to strengthen its committee system with understanding of the disaster risk reduction concept, and endeavour to consciously make it a cross cutting measure in its law making, oversight, developmental and financial roles among others; with the mind of always keeping communities resilient (Lilly & White, 2020; UNISDR, 2019; USAID, 2019 and Hudson & Wren, 2007). Such type of advocacy was being conducted successfully around issues of women and gender internationally (Dube, 2013 and UN Women, 2013). Parliament therefore has to lead by example and desist from supporting old development models already known to be injurious to future progeny and unadapting to more beneficial modern trends (Power & Shoot, 2012). It can start to show that particularly in the design and implementation of its constituency development funds by including programmes inclined towards reduction of disaster risks. Introduction of a dedicated support office capacitated to access international low hanging risk reduction related development finances and other tools for disaster risk reduction for example, can be made part of efforts of the institution and its individual agents. Initiatives like the Green Fund can again be harnessed towards promoting implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives in communities. In that way, that can expand the currently drowning voice of parliamentarianism that traditionally has to maintain and strengthen democracy in disasters in individual countries such as Zimbabwe (Lilly & White, 2020; UNISDR, 2019 and USAID, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

Efficiency and effectiveness of parliamentarianism as a concept and practice is built upon people, organisations and information among other factors alluded by the agency theory. The people's interests, relationships, cognitive abilities, experiences and skills are critical in ensuring ability to explore existing capacities towards achieving the desired objectives although those agents are naturally to a certain extent rationally bounded. Parliament as an institution through which the practice of parliamentarianism takes place has own challenges and limitations against effective and efficient discharge of parliamentarians' duties. Realistically in politics, information is a valuable commodity with both negative and positive effects to the practice of parliamentarianism. Parliamentarians are agents with many principals hence they balance different interests. Sometimes balancing the different interests come at a cost to others and more specifically to those who cannot easily and rationally measure the agents' efforts and role outcomes. Finally, the concept of parliamentarianism has been differently implemented by the agents and the voice of parliamentarians as a collective

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and parliament as the institution has been muzzled. Its voice has further been drowning particularly in disaster situations, instead of making more positive strides towards improving implementation of key disaster risk reduction frameworks in Zimbabwe. Disaster risk reduction is a concept meant for achieving sustainable poverty reduction and parliaments have a key role in advancing sustainable development globally though the institution is usually bounded.

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