

# Issue Brief

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Cohort 3: Gender Responsive Peacebuilding

# A creative approach to increasing women's participation in Zimbabwe's national healing and reconciliation process

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## Zimbabwe's first steps on a long journey to national reconciliation

When the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) Act became law on the 5 January 2018, Zimbabwe began a process of reconciliation in its efforts to consolidate peace and enhance social cohesion. The NPRC is a constitutional body mandated to 'ensure post-conflict justice; encourage truth-telling as a basis for dealing with the past; make amends through the provision of rehabilitative support to survivors, as well as establish mechanisms for peacebuilding, preventing the occurrence of conflicts in the future.'

In carrying out its constitutional mandate, the NPRC is required by law to ensure that its programmes are gender responsive. Section 9 of the Act outlines the key provisions dealing with gender, mandating the Commission to ensure that women, girls and other vulnerable groups form part of the core of the country's reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts (NPRC Act, No.11/2017).

As the Commission begins the process of elaborating the nation's strategic framework for healing and reconciliation, there is an expectation that it will develop mechanisms, regulations and policies through which gender provisions will be met. The ultimate goal is ensuring effective participation by women (and other vulnerable populations) in these vital processes.

While there is a global recognition of the role that women play in advocacy for peace and conflict resolution, their involvement in shaping and influencing peace processes

– including in reconciliation efforts– remains limited. There are multiple factors that contribute towards this limited participation. They include the lack of female victims and survivors of conflict as key agents in peace processes. This paper identifies a methodology for including them.

## Purpose of this brief

This brief 'imagines' an innovative and systematic approach that reconciliation mechanisms like the NPRC could consider (among other tools) to ensure responsive and effective strategies to address gender needs – while enabling increased participation of women and girls. In doing so, it theorizes on the utility of 'design-thinking' as a systematic methodology that adopts a human-centered approach through empathy. This entails the needs of target groups being met by prototyping solutions before they are deployed at scale.

This non-linear methodology, which has been widely used by companies such as Airbnb, Apple, IBM and Ericsson, is premised on the notion that: 'the design thinking cycle involves observation to discover unmet needs within the context and constraints of a particular situation, framing the opportunity and scope of innovation, generating creative ideas, testing and refining solutions. Human-centered innovation begins with developing an understanding of customers' or users' unmet or unarticulated needs'<sup>1</sup>.

This paper firstly outlines the key gender provisions within the NPRC law. This is followed by an exploratory analysis of the design-thinking model and its applicability to the NPRC's mandate of responding to the gender provisions in

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its law. It concludes with a set of recommendations for the NPRC or similar bodies as well as practitioners seeking or working towards gender responsive peace building.

### How the NPRC act addresses gender

In recognition of the significant role of women and the gender dynamics in conflict, the Parliament of Zimbabwe has explicitly included provisions on gender in the law that operationalizes the NPRC. Section 9 of the NPRC Act mandates the Commission to establish a specific unit to:

- Develop guidelines and rules on how the Commission will incorporate gender into its work;
- Develop strategies to encourage women, girls and other marginalized groups to participate in the work of the Commission;
- Ensure gender equity in all the structures of the Commission, while ensuring that the Commission address the gender implications of their activities; and
- Develop protocols and tools that are gender sensitive and able to capture data of gender concerns of women and girls.

The law also mandates the NPRC to investigate the use of sexual crimes as a weapon during and after conflicts and to provide survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) with an opportunity, in private or public, to relate their own accounts of the violations or harm they have suffered and to effectively respond to their needs.

The law further prescribes that any form of response ought to be informed by a thorough assessment of the needs of survivors of gender-based violations and marginalisation and make recommendations that may include urgent appropriate measures and policies to redress such violations, marginalisation and to restore human and civil dignity.

Firstly, the Commission will need to understand in totality the needs of women to ensure those are met, and, most importantly, to facilitate women's active participation in the design and implementation of peace building, healing and reconciliation programmes. To kick-start this process, the NPRC has established a Victim Support, Diversity Management and Gender Committee (VSD&GC) to advise on how best to elaborate strategies and methodologies for responding to the gender provisions of the law.

### How design-thinking can empower women

Design-thinking methodologies inform a human-centered approach to decision-making built on a core foundation of understanding the 'unarticulated' needs of key beneficiaries or partners for whom a solution is targeted. The core foundation of design-thinking methodologies is empathy.



In order to gain an empathetic understanding of the problem to be solved, the facilitator needs to understand fully the experiences, needs and aspirations of the key beneficiaries by immersing him/herself in their physical and social environment. This allows for a deeper personal understanding of the issues involved and the beneficiaries' needs, priorities and existing capabilities. For the NPRC, such a process would entail a systematic gender analysis of the country's history of conflicts; mapping the scope and identities of affected women and men, and their needs and priorities; while simultaneously assessing their levels of resilience, available assets, agency and capabilities that can be leveraged for an inclusive healing process.

This process goes beyond a gender analysis and enables facilitators to set aside their own assumptions and biases about the needs / priorities of women and victim groups to gain a deeper insight into their material, physical and psychological needs and capabilities, identities, diversity of needs and the capacities they possess. This level of understanding will provide a platform to collaborate with them and co-create viable solutions.



In the business sector, extensive market surveys are carried out to define the target market and understand their pain-points. In the realm of peacebuilding a range of action-oriented research and analysis tools can be employed, ranging from anthropological and ethnographic studies of conflict to participatory conflict assessment exercises, stakeholder analysis and vulnerability assessment mapping among others. At the core of the process is the notion that women affected by conflicts have a sharper understanding of their problems and, when empowered to

exercise their capabilities, are likely to have better insights into solutions.

Secondly, while the NPRC Act mandates the Commission to ensure that the gender provisions are met, the law, however, does not clearly define the scope of the problem that needs attention, and neither does it outline the minimum priorities needed to meet the needs of women, girls and other vulnerable populations, leaving this as the Commission's responsibility. A well-conducted empathising process as explained above will most likely generate valuable information on the profile of women affected by conflict, their needs and priorities.

Working collaboratively with identified victim-centred groups including women's organisations, associations and others, the Commission will be better placed to clearly define the scope of problem(s) that it seeks to respond to in relation to the provisions in the law.



The design-thinking model recommends developing a series of ideas, alternative solutions and strategies for problem-solving.

This process is referred to as the ideation stage. This phase provides a platform for cross-fertilisation to generation of new ideas— and requires facilitators to provide safe spaces for participation by victim groups and other vulnerable populations, inter-disciplinary teams and key stakeholders in the reconciliation process.. This creative space leverages the power of survivors, not as beneficiaries, but as key agents / actors in the healing and reconciliation process.



The ultimate goal of the co-ideation process is to produce a number of scalable or potentially replicable versions of features or solutions to respond to the problems. Such versions (referred to as prototypes) are subject to field testing and in some cases validation before being deployed.

Prototypes could include a victim-support mechanism with specific recommendations for designing reparation programmes for women affected by conflict, which the NPRC can test to decipher whether they truly enable women's participation.



Prototypes in themselves are not finalised products as they require further field testing and refining to facilitate their adoption or rejection – not by the facilitator – but by the target women and vulnerable groups. This iterative process allows for effective utilisation of resources as guidelines, frameworks or tools are only deployed once they have been tested and proven to meet the needs of targeted populations.

Testing also enhances the understanding of facilitators e.g. the NPRC regarding the constraints and problems inherent within proposed solutions, so they have a better-informed perspective of how the women and other vulnerable groups would behave, think, and feel when interacting with the final solution.

### **This is no quick-fix solution...**

Design-thinking methodology does not provide an automatic solution to the challenge of increasing women's active participation in peace and reconciliation processes. It does however expand the tools available to peace facilitators, such as the NPRC, to ensure that they design strategies, regulations and mechanisms that are responsive to the needs of women and other vulnerable populations - not just as beneficiaries, but as actors and agents for peace and reconciliation.

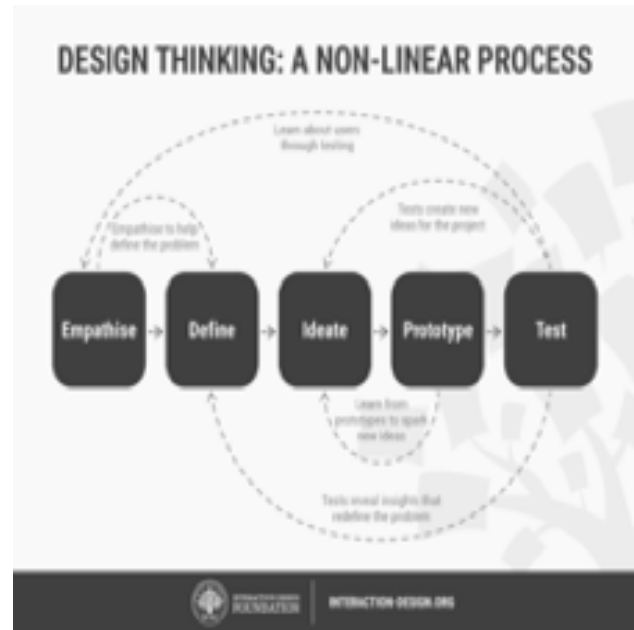
As an iterative process, design-thinking models require time and cannot be rushed. At every loop, the approach calls for the participation and endorsement of end users, compelling facilitators of peace processes to be cognisant of the needs and priorities of those they seek to serve. While it can indeed consume time, the process is rewarding as it can generate the much-needed local ownership of

solutions, which is often lacking in expert-led processes that have characterised peace processes over the years.

If well delivered, design-thinking models provide useful frameworks for nurturing key partnerships – as this methodology thrives on the co-creation of solutions between multiple stakeholders. For the NPRC, strategic partnerships with faith-based organisations (FBOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), traditional leaders and other actors that have worked extensively to support local level peace efforts could support the process through archival analysis, synthesis of information and needs assessments of vulnerable populations. Such partnerships could prove vital in the process of progressing the peace and reconciliation agenda.

### ...But it's a window of opportunity

The ongoing process of elaborating the NPRC's strategy on healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe provides an opportunity for the nation to ensure an inclusive peace process, informed by the sustained participation of women and other vulnerable populations. The gender provisions in the NPRC Act provide a window of opportunity for the Commission to explore innovative methodologies and approaches for guaranteeing effective participation of women – tapping into the strong networks of women's organisations, the peacebuilding community, CSOs, FBOs and other non-state actors. In doing so, there could be an opportunity for the Commission's Victim Support, Diversity Management and Gender Committee (VSD&GC) to test the utility of components of the design-thinking model with probable support from the United Nations (UN) and other development partners.



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### References

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**About the PDA Fellowship:**

UNDP's Oslo Governance Center in partnership with the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme has established a PDA Fellowship Programme in 2016 consisting of several cohorts, each involving between 4-6 PDA's and/or PDA like conflict prevention specialists over a period of two weeks. The Fellowship Programme involves guided reflections to help draw out the Fellows' experience on pre-identified conflict prevention and peacebuilding issues.

**About the Author:**

William Tsuma has over 15 years of experience in the field of peacebuilding, conflict prevention and democratic governance. He is currently UNDP Zimbabwe's Peace and Governance Advisor – where he advises UN Senior Management on Peace and Development issues. He also provides Technical advisory to the Government, The National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, religious & civic organisations as part of the efforts towards consolidating the country's peace architecture.

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Since 2004, the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) have partnered to strengthen support to the UN's work in building national capacities for conflict prevention. Often times, such support is extended through the deployment of Peace and Development Advisors (or PDAs), a growing cadre of UN staff who support Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams adapt and respond to complex political situations and to develop and implement strategic conflict prevention initiatives and programmes.