

Stakeholder Engagement and Reformative Change Management within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder engagement has become an essential component of organisational transformation within public sector institutions, particularly in complex environments such as correctional systems. Contemporary correctional reforms increasingly emphasize collaboration among institutional actors, communities, government agencies, civil society organizations, inmates, and development partners to support rehabilitation and reintegration objectives. This paper examines the contribution of stakeholder engagement to the reformative change management process within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). The findings reveal that stakeholder engagement positively contributes to reformative change by improving communication, resource mobilisation, rehabilitation support, and institutional legitimacy. However, stakeholder participation within ZPCS remains fragmented, inconsistently institutionalized, and constrained by resource limitations, bureaucratic structures, and uneven collaboration mechanisms. The paper concludes that sustainable correctional reform requires inclusive stakeholder participation frameworks, collaborative governance structures, institutional transparency, and long-term partnerships.

Keywords: stakeholder engagement, reformative change, correctional reform, Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service, collaborative governance, institutional transformation, public sector reform.

1. Introduction

Correctional systems worldwide are increasingly undergoing transformation from punitive institutional models toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional philosophies that emphasize offender reintegration, behavioural change and community participation [1] [2]. Modern correctional reform extends beyond institutional administration and security management. It increasingly requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders including government ministries, correctional officers, inmates, communities, civil society organizations, religious groups, families, development agencies, and private sector actors [3].

In Zimbabwe, the establishment of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) under the 2013 Constitution represented a significant shift toward rehabilitation-oriented correctional governance [4]. Stakeholder engagement is particularly important within correctional systems because prisons operate within interconnected social, political, and institutional environments. Rehabilitation and reintegration processes require cooperation between correctional institutions and external actors capable of supporting education, healthcare, vocational training, psychosocial support, employment opportunities, and post-release reintegration [5].

This paper examines the contribution of stakeholder engagement to the reformative change management process within ZPCS.

Drawing from empirical findings presented in Chapter Four and conclusions and recommendations outlined in Chapter Five, the paper analyzes how stakeholder engagement shapes institutional reform, organizational collaboration, policy implementation, and correctional transformation within Zimbabwe's correctional environment.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Anchors

Stakeholder theory argues that organizations depend on relationships with multiple stakeholders whose interests, resources, and support influence organizational performance and legitimacy [6]. The theory emphasizes that organizations achieve sustainable outcomes when they actively engage stakeholders in decision-making, communication, and institutional problem-solving. Stakeholder engagement therefore strengthens organizational legitimacy, trust, accountability, and institutional cooperation.

Systems theory conceptualizes organizations as interconnected systems operating within broader social and institutional environments [7]. Rehabilitation and reintegration processes particularly require collaboration between prisons and broader community systems. Collaborative governance theory further highlights the importance of shared decision-making, institutional partnerships, and collective problem-solving in public sector reform [8].

Institutional theory explains how stakeholder engagement is shaped by organisational norms, traditions, and institutional expectations [9].

Correctional institutions often operate within highly bureaucratic and security-oriented cultures that may limit openness to external participation and collaboration. Reformative change therefore requires institutional adaptation capable of balancing security priorities with participatory governance approaches.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods convergent parallel design. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires administered across ZPCS facilities, with SEM used to assess the relationship between stakeholder engagement and reformative change.

5. Findings

Stakeholder Engagement and Reformative Change

Path / Relationship	Standardized Beta (β)	p-value	Statistical Significance	Hypothesis Status
Stakeholder Engagement $\rightarrow$ Reformative Change	0.421	< 0.001	Highly Significant	Supported

Statistical Result: Beta (β) = 0.421, $p < 0.001$ (Highly Significant)

Application Narrative: Structural Equation Modelling indicates that Stakeholder engagement is identified as a critical, primary direct driver of transformation, demonstrating a strong and highly significant positive effect on reformative change. This empirical evidence highlights that correctional system reform cannot succeed in isolation; external collaboration with government agencies, civil society, and development partners significantly enhances institutional legitimacy, accountability, and resource mobilization.

Participants reported that "churches now assist with counselling and donations" and that "NGOs help with rehabilitation programmes." These findings indicate that external stakeholder participation contributes to expanding institutional capacity within resource-constrained correctional environments. Stakeholder engagement also improves institutional communication and public awareness regarding correctional reform objectives.

However, stakeholder engagement within ZPCS remains uneven and inconsistently institutionalized. Stakeholder collaboration often depends on individual relationships, donor interests, or isolated institutional initiatives rather than formalized governance structures. The triangulated findings conclude that stakeholder engagement within ZPCS is functional but fragmented. Stakeholder participation is concentrated primarily at strategic and administrative levels rather than frontline operational engagement.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that stakeholder engagement contributes meaningfully to correctional reform by extending institutional capacity, improving rehabilitation programming, and strengthening organizational legitimacy. These findings are consistent with stakeholder theory, which emphasizes that organisational effectiveness depends on sustained relationships with diverse stakeholders capable of contributing resources, expertise, and institutional support.

The fragmented nature of stakeholder coordination within ZPCS reflects broader public sector governance challenges where collaborative governance systems are inadequately institutionalized.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with institutional staff, stakeholder representatives, and community partners. Thematic analysis and triangulation were employed to validate and integrate findings.

4. Data Analysis

SEM analysis assessed the direct contribution of stakeholder engagement to reformative change outcomes, examining path coefficients, significance levels, and mediating variables. Qualitative thematic analysis identified themes including stakeholder collaboration, resource mobilization, community partnerships, institutional communication, and reform legitimacy. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder engagement dynamics within ZPCS.

Collaborative governance theory suggests that sustainable partnerships require formal coordination frameworks, clear accountability systems, and structured communication channels capable of sustaining long-term stakeholder relationships beyond individual personality-driven interactions.

The concentration of stakeholder engagement at strategic levels, rather than frontline operational integration, creates a significant implementation gap. Rehabilitation outcomes are most effectively improved when stakeholder partnerships are operationally embedded within daily institutional practices rather than confined to administrative and policy discourse.

7. Policy Recommendations

First, ZPCS should establish formal stakeholder engagement frameworks that define institutional roles, communication structures, partnership guidelines, and collaborative governance procedures. Formalisation would strengthen accountability, coordination, and sustainability.

Second, institutional leadership should strengthen partnerships with communities, churches, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private sector actors supporting rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. Stakeholder engagement should become more participatory and operationally integrated.

Third, government policymakers should support stakeholder collaboration through resource allocation, policy support, and institutional coordination systems capable of facilitating rehabilitation-oriented partnerships.

Fourth, stakeholder coordination mechanisms should include monitoring and evaluation systems capable of assessing partnership effectiveness, programme outcomes, and institutional reform progress.

Finally, organizational culture transformation should prioritize openness, transparency, and collaborative governance values capable of strengthening institutional trust and stakeholder confidence in correctional reform initiatives.

8. Conclusion

This paper examined the contribution of stakeholder engagement to the reformatory change management process within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service. The findings demonstrate that stakeholder engagement contributes significantly to institutional reform by strengthening rehabilitation support, communication, resource mobilization, organizational legitimacy, and collaborative governance. However, engagement remains fragmented, unevenly institutionalized, and concentrated at strategic levels. Sustainable correctional transformation requires institutionalization of collaborative governance structures capable of integrating stakeholders into operational, strategic, and policy processes.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service or any government institution. This paper is intended for academic and policy discourse purposes only.

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