

The Effectiveness of Human Rights Support Programmes in Zimbabwean Prisons: A Case Study of the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service

Obey Jasi¹ and Mbwirire John²

¹Great Zimbabwe University,
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-6338>

²Great Zimbabwe University
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4888-9641>

Corresponding Author's email: tkjmbwirire@yahoo.com

Abstract

This research study outlined the effectiveness of human rights support programmes offered by Non-Governmental Organisations at Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service in the Harare Metropolitan Province. ZPCS had formed partnerships with NGOs to address human rights issues concerning incarcerated prisoners. A mixed research methodology approach was employed, gathering data from correctional officers, NGO representatives, inmates and independent commissions. A quantitative sample of 300 participants was drawn using probability sampling, while a subsequent qualitative sample of 60 was purposively selected from a population of 894. The research utilised self-structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. The findings indicate a strong understanding of human rights among participants. However, the majority perceive the human rights support programmes as ineffective. Key challenges identified include a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust between ZPCS and NGOs, a lack of tailored interventions and inadequate internal capacity within ZPCS to manage these programmes effectively. The study recommends establishing a central human rights coordinating office at the ZPCS national headquarters, developing a comprehensive organisational human rights policy and conducting thorough needs analyses prior to programme implementation. These steps aim to enhance collaboration, improve the alignment of NGO activities with ZPCS's needs, and ultimately strengthen the protection of human rights for inmates.

Keywords: Human rights, human rights support programme, human right violations, peace, development

Introduction

Human rights within the penal justice system have become a global, regional and international topic of discussion at platforms such as the United Nations, the African Union (AU) and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Human rights have emerged as a primary benchmark for operations in public organisations, as noted by Chigora and Chikomo (2021). The origins of human rights can be traced back to the Magna Carta, a royal charter of rights agreed upon by King John and the Barons of England on 12 June 1215. This was later enhanced by the establishment of the European Commission on Human Rights. The concept of human rights gained significant momentum with the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 1948, in response to the atrocities of World War II, including the Holocaust, the use of nuclear weapons and a massive refugee crisis. The UDHR was founded on the principle that all human beings are born free and equal, underlining that these rights are universal, inalienable and applicable to all people regardless of nationality, gender, ethnicity, race, creed, colour, religion or culture (More 2023).

The UDHR was further expanded through two conventions: The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights (ICECSCR). However, the universal application of human rights has been challenged by unique cultural beliefs, religious practices and national identities (More 2023). Prisoners, as a vulnerable group, are also intended to be protected by human rights principles. As people incarcerated for violating a country's laws, they are often in a defenceless situation, subject to abuse from both prison officers and fellow inmates. Globally, prison environments are often marked by gangs, overcrowding and the use of physical punishment such as leg irons, chains and handcuffs, which can make movement a painful ordeal. Matveeva (2009) noted that beatings are often an accepted part of prison life. In Venezuela, for example, a police-to-prisoner ratio of 1:4 makes it difficult to control a black market for weapons, leading to frequent inmate-on-inmate killings. The rights of prisoners, including the right to privacy, are routinely violated by such violence (Matveeva 2009).

Challenges to human rights in punitive systems are also exacerbated by old, obsolete and physically dilapidated prison infrastructure. Many prisons in countries like the United States, Mexico, Russia and Britain require urgent maintenance. Even modern facilities often fall into disrepair due to a lack of upkeep, with many lacking functional plumbing systems. In Hong Kong, prisoners in some facilities have had to "defecate in plastic buckets, which they were intermittently allowed to empty," while in Venezuela, the situation is worse, with inmates defecating in newspapers and throwing them out of windows (Van Hout and Wessels 2022). African prison systems face similar problems, with issues rooted in the legacy of the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism. The African Union's push for development and sovereignty has led to significant steps in human rights discourse, culminating in the establishment of the African Commission of Human and People's Rights in 2000. This commission was designed to monitor human rights in an African context, connecting them to the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which emphasises harmony and respect for human dignity (Chigora and Chikomo 2021). Since gaining independence, several African countries have made noticeable efforts to improve prison conditions. For instance, South Africa's prison system has undergone significant reform since 1994, with the official abolition of racial segregation and the elimination of discriminatory practices in the criminal justice system. The Prisons Act of 1959 was amended to the Correctional Services Act, and a new law in 1998, aligned with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, included guarantees of human safety and dignity for prisoners (United Nations, 1948). These reforms, guided by the South African Human Rights Commission, led to the abolishment of the death penalty in 1995 and affirmed the courts' role in protecting marginalised groups, including prisoners (South African Human Rights Commission, 1998; Cameron, 2020).

In post-conflict African nations, criminal justice systems are often dysfunctional, with many people lacking access to legal aid, courts, or representation. International standards for prison conditions are outlined in declarations such as the Kampala Declaration (1996), the Kadoma Declaration (1997), the Abuja Declaration (2002) and the Ouagadougou Declaration (2002) (UNDOC 2018). While some African prison systems are incorporating rehabilitation programmes, gathering essential data remains a challenge due to bureaucratic complexities and lack of academic interest (Mhlanga-Gunda et al., 2020; Shorten and Smith, 2022; Van Hout and Mhlanga-Gunda, 2019).

The Zimbabwean criminal justice system inherited the legacy of a biased colonial past. Initially renamed the Zimbabwe Prison Services (ZPS) in 1980, it was later redesignated the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) in 2013, shifting its focus on restorative justice over punitive approaches (Musingafi, Dumbu and Chadamoyo 2018). The ZPCS, a paramilitary organisation, is constitutionally mandated to protect society through the incarceration and

rehabilitation of offenders, facilitating their reintegration as law-abiding citizens. It is governed by the Prison Act (Chapter 7, Section 11) and falls under the security sector as per Section 227 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Number 20 of 2013. The Constitution (2013), particularly Chapter 4, Sections 49, 50, 68, 69 and 70, outlines the rights of those who are arrested, detained and deprived of their liberty.

The ZPCS aims to become a leading correctional service provider by 2030 and has entered partnerships with various human rights organisations. Despite this, a deep-seated scepticism remains among some security officials towards NGOs, who are often viewed as a threat to national security and a form of neo-colonialism. This distrust limits the scope and duration of partnerships, often restricting access to crucial information and premises. NGOs are also limited in the types of programmes they can implement, with some areas deemed to be strictly government space. Mashumba and Moroleng (2004) highlighted the government's tightening control over NGOs through legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), and the proposed NGO Bill. This has made ZPCS cautious about partnering with NGOs like Amnesty International and Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, often limiting collaborations to short-term, "once-off" events or a maximum of five years (Musila, 2019).

Despite these challenges, NGO interventions have improved the ZPCS's human rights record. For example, refurbishment projects by NGOs have modernised colonial-era facilities at Gwanda, Mazowe and Hurungwe prisons, improving sanitation, ventilation and safety. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has ensured a supply of clean water at Harare Central and Chikurubi prisons by drilling boreholes and connecting them to the city's water supply, installing solar-powered pumps for uninterrupted water access.

The poor human rights situation within the ZPCS affects not only inmates and officers but has a wider impact on the nation. The ZPCS has a capacity of 17,250 prisoners but holds between 20,000 and 22,500 inmates at any given time, all of whom are subject to a strained human rights system. Over a million people in the community are directly affected, as inmates have families and relatives. The dire human rights situation in Zimbabwean prisons also risks impeding the government's international re-engagement efforts, as failure to align with global best practices in prison management and human rights undermines the rule of law (Mhlanga-Gunda, 2019). As former South African President Nelson Mandela stated, "If you want to know a country, visit their prisons," as a country should be judged not by how it treats its elite but how it treats its lowest (Van Hout, 2020). When prisons fail to rehabilitate offenders, communities suffer the consequences, underscoring that the success of the correctional system is contingent upon the promotion of fundamental freedoms and entitlements for inmates.

A legal-realist assessment by Van Hout, Bigland and Mariniello (2022) during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted systemic issues in Zimbabwean prisons, including power and water shortages, poor quality and insufficient food, lack of proper ventilation and inadequate medical supplies and bedding. The government's reliance on NGOs and faith-based organisations to provide essential supplies like personal protective equipment and medicines further underscores the resource gap. A scorecard programme by Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) aimed at improving prison healthcare revealed that inmates prioritised access to sexual and reproductive health services (SRHS) but faced challenges with STI tests, cervical cancer screenings and poor sanitation (Matonhodze, 2021). Although antiretroviral and TB drugs were available, common painkillers were not, and a shortage of protein-rich food meant that prisoners' dietary needs were unmet. The Raoul Wallenberg Institute, through an ongoing

Memorandum of Agreement with ZPCS, conducts human rights training and monitoring, while Pamumvuri Private Voluntary Organisation provides mental health assistance to inmates at Chikurubi Psychiatric Unit and Mlondolozi prison. VSO's programmes include establishing nutritional gardens, HIV support groups and the health scorecard programme (ZPCS Strategic Plan 2022).

The purpose of this study was to identify challenges faced by the ZPCS in human rights support programmes offered by Non-Governmental Organisations during the period 2018 to 2024. The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) face numerous challenges in partnering with NGOs to implement human rights programmes, which potentially undermines the effectiveness of these initiatives and the protection of human rights for prisoners. Despite the importance of these partnerships, there is a lack of understanding of the specific challenges faced by the ZPCS in collaborating with NGOs. This knowledge gap hinders the development of effective strategies to address these challenges and improve the implementation of human rights programmes in Zimbabwe's prisons. The following questions guided the research.

1. What are the human rights support programmes done by Non-Governmental Organisations in prisons?
2. What are the challenges faced by ZPCS and NGOs in implementing human rights support programmes?
3. How effective are Non-Governmental Organisations' human rights support programmes in prisons?

Materials and Methods

This study employed a mixed methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to explore the challenges faced by the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service in partnering with Non-Governmental Organisations on human rights programmes. Data were collected through structured questionnaires from a sample of 300 respondents, utilising a stratified random sampling approach to ensure diverse representation among correctional officers, inmates and NGO personnel. Additionally, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with management from both ZPCS and NGOs, providing rich qualitative insights into operational dynamics and trust issues. Focus group discussions further facilitated the exploration of collective experiences among inmates and correctional staff. This methodological framework aligns with Creswell's (2014) assertion that mixed methods research enhances the comprehensiveness of findings by integrating multiple perspectives, thereby addressing complex social issues effectively.

Results

Human rights support programmes for inmates

This section presents the findings related to the availability and perceived effectiveness of human rights support programmes for inmates, integrating both quantitative data and qualitative insights from study participants. The findings are categorised to reflect participants' understanding of human rights and the specific support initiatives identified.

Understanding of human rights

The study revealed a strong and consistent understanding of human rights across all participant groups. The quantitative data showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents defined human rights accurately. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Understanding of human rights among participants (n=300)

Definition of human rights	Response %
Freedoms and entitlements that are inherently accorded to human beings by virtue of their personhood	96%
Universal, interdependent and inalienable human entitlements	97%
Other	3%

Source: (Fieldwork 2024)

Qualitative data corroborated these findings, providing a deeper understanding of this awareness. For instance, a ZPCS officer articulated, *"I understand human rights support programmes as intervention strategies proffered by NGOs to ensure that ZPCS are in line with international, regional and national agreed standards in correctional service."* This statement not only aligns with the quantitative data but also highlights a critical theme: The role of NGOs in bridging the gap between national practice and international human rights standards.

Human rights support programmes in prisons

Quantitative findings consistently showed that 100% of respondents viewed human rights support programmes as "assistance rendered by NGOs to support human rights work." This finding underscores the participants' clear recognition of NGOs as key partners in this domain. Further analysis of how participants gained knowledge about human rights revealed interesting dynamics. The quantitative data indicated the primary sources of human rights knowledge for the study participants, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sources of knowledge about human rights (n=300)

Source of Knowledge	Response %
Through ZPCS induction training/refresher course	53%
Through NGO human rights support programmes	33%
Through academics	5%
Through peer training in ZPCS	4%
Other	5%

Source: (Fieldwork 2024)

The qualitative insights, however, added a layer of nuance to this distribution. Thematic analysis revealed a disparity in training based on an officer's tenure. Most junior officers reported receiving their primary human rights training through ZPCS, while more experienced officers often credited NGOs for their continued education.

One key informant stated, *"Most experienced officers only received training through NGOs under various human rights support programmes."* This suggests that while ZPCS provides foundational knowledge, NGOs play a crucial role in providing continuous and up-to-date training, especially to a more experienced cohort.

Table 3: Training sources by experience level (Qualitative insights)

Experience level	Primary training source
Junior officers	ZPCS training
Experienced officers	NGO-led programmes

Source: (Fieldwork 2024)

The qualitative findings also highlighted a critical challenge: The lack of a coordinated approach among NGOs. Participants noted that many NGOs operate in silos, leading to overlapping services and a failure to address all critical thematic areas. This fragmentation was noted by an informant who stated, *"The streamlining of NGOs according to their areas of specialisation was not prioritised."*

Participants knowledge of human rights NGOs partnering with ZPCS

N=300

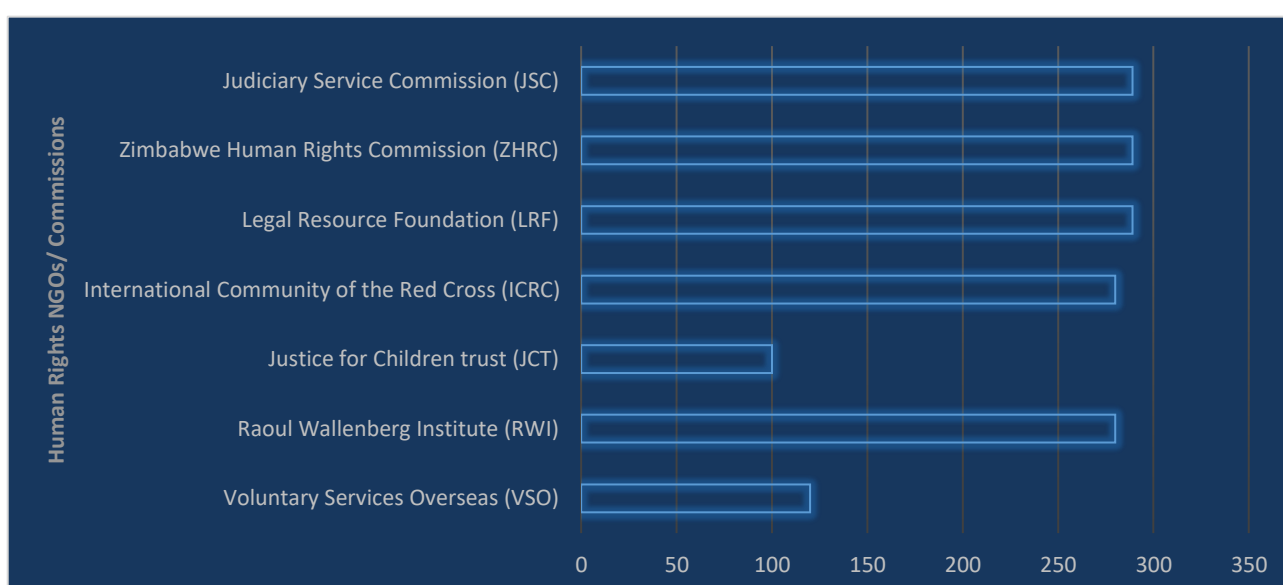


Figure 1 Human rights NGOs partnering with ZPCS

Source: (Fieldwork 2024)

As shown in Figure 1, prominent organisations like the International Community of the Red Cross (ICRC), Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) and two independent commissions (ZHRC and JSC) were known by 100% of all participants. Other organisations such as Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and Justice for Children Trust (JCT) were recognised by 40% and 33% of the respondents, respectively. The study revealed a high level of awareness among respondents regarding key human rights organisations partnering with the ZPCS.

Knowledge of human rights support programmes in thematic areas

The study investigated participants' knowledge of the thematic areas covered by NGOs in their human rights support programmes. The data, collected from a sample of N=300, is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Thematic areas covered by NGOs on human rights support programmes (N=300)

Thematic area for human rights support	Response %
Training/Research/Sensitisation	99
Legal aid	60
Policy/Regulations review/Advocacy	67
Material aid (food, clothing, medical supplies and more)	96
Sustainability projects (Nutrition gardens, support groups, piggery and more)	19
Infrastructural development	11
Counselling, advocacy and other social interventions	22
Process interventions (Migration, parole, probation, repatriation)	13
Assessments and grievance remedy	27

Source: (Fieldwork 2024).

According to Table 4 above, several thematic areas proved to be particularly well-known. Training/Research/Sensitisation scored the highest at 99%, closely followed by material aid (96%), Policy/Regulations review/Advocacy (67%) and Legal aid (60%) were also popular. Conversely, the study revealed that some crucial thematic areas remained largely unaddressed, with very low scores for Infrastructural development (11%), Process interventions (13%) and Sustainability projects (19%).

The findings on Table 4 suggest that NGOs operating in the penal justice sector tend to concentrate their human rights support on areas that are either less complex or more aligned with short-term, visible outcomes. Crucial thematic areas that require long-term investment and systemic change—such as infrastructural development, sustainability projects and process interventions—were found to be the least common. This concentration of effort on certain areas, to the neglect of others, suggests that NGO activities may not be strategically aligned with the ZPCS's most critical needs. In fact, it was revealed that NGOs seem to focus on areas where the ZPCS already has a degree of independent capacity or requires only minimal external intervention.

Challenges faced by the ZPCS when partnering with Non-Governmental Organisations on human rights support programmes

This section presents a qualitative analysis of the challenges faced by the ZPCS in its partnerships with NGOs concerning human rights support programmes. The findings, derived from in-depth interviews with key informants, reveal several systemic issues that undermine the effectiveness of these collaborations.

The interviews consistently highlighted a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion as a central challenge. This bilateral lack of confidence was found to be a significant barrier to effective partnership. NGOs were often perceived by ZPCS officers as seeing them as potential misusers of programme resources, while ZPCS officers, in turn, viewed NGO-implemented human rights support programmes as "mileage-seeking gimmicks" designed primarily to secure grant funding from international donors.

This sentiment was powerfully articulated by one key informant:

All they are concerned with is the name of the project being under them, imagine giving an organisation such as ZPCS a batch of layers with no feeds and expect every egg to be fed to inmates in the guise of enhancing food and nutrition security. Mind you this project would have not been budgeted for by the ZPCS, and even if you stretch your capabilities, you are still treated like a potential thief!

This example illustrates a fundamental disconnect. NGOs are perceived as implementing projects that are not holistic or self-sustaining, while ZPCS is seen as a potentially untrustworthy partner. This mutual suspicion leads to a lack of open communication and information sharing, with critical information often withheld by one or both parties.

Furthermore, the study discovered a significant internal challenge within the ZPCS: The absence of specifically trained project and programme officers dedicated to human rights support. The training received by ZPCS staff is often described as short-paced and general, lacking the specialised skills required to efficiently manage complex, externally funded programmes. This training deficiency makes the ZPCS overly dependent on NGOs for implementation, yet at the same time, it creates a capacity gap that NGOs are hesitant to fill due to the lack of trust.

Another finding was that many NGO programmes fail to address the specific needs of the ZPCS because they are not tailored before implementation. The data revealed that some organisations had difficulty even securing a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the ZPCS, despite having identified potential areas for intervention. The limitations on the duration of these MoAs further complicate matters, as they are often short-lived, preventing long-term, impactful programme implementation.

The findings from this qualitative component underscore that the challenges in ZPCS-NGO partnerships are deeply rooted in institutional and political dynamics. The pervading mistrust is a symptom of a larger issue where collaboration is viewed through a transactional lens rather than a shared commitment to human rights. The anecdotal evidence, such as the quote about the poultry project, highlights how a lack of comprehensive planning and genuine collaboration can render well-intentioned programmes ineffective and, in some cases, counterproductive.

Ultimately, the combination of a lack of mutual trust, a capacity gap within the ZPCS, untailored programmes, and government-imposed restrictions creates a complex and difficult environment for human rights support. For these partnerships to be successful, a fundamental shift is required—one that moves from suspicion to collaboration, from donor-driven priorities to needs-based interventions and from short-term agreements to long-term strategic alliances.

Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations' human rights support programmes in prisons

This section presents the findings regarding the perceived effectiveness of human rights support programmes offered by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) within Zimbabwean prisons.

Table 5: Perceived effectiveness of human rights support programmes (N=300)

Perceived Effectiveness	Percentage of Respondents
Effective	32%
Not Effective	58%
Do not Know	10%

Source: Fieldwork (2024)

As illustrated in Table 5, only 32% of respondents viewed the programmes as effective, while a significant 58% considered them ineffective. The remaining 10% of respondents were undecided or did not know. The study revealed that respondents do not perceive the human rights support programmes offered by NGOs to be effective. These findings define effectiveness as the extent to which a programme satisfies its stated purpose. While some improvements were acknowledged in targeted thematic areas, the overall perception of ineffectiveness highlights a critical gap between the objectives of the programmes and their tangible impact.

Qualitative insights gathered through interviews supported these quantitative findings. A popular view among interviewees was that NGO human rights activities were not addressing areas of dire need, particularly in remote provinces and stations. Instead, NGOs were perceived to concentrate their efforts in major urban centres, where they could gain greater media visibility and coverage.

Discussion

This observation aligns with Malouthchz (2018)'s perspective which notes that key human rights areas often remain underserved despite numerous NGO interventions. The lack of targeted and coordinated efforts by NGOs undermines the overall effectiveness of their support programmes, leading to inefficient resource allocation and inconsistent programme delivery. The study found a robust understanding of human rights among ZPCS personnel, with both the organisation's formal training and NGO-led programmes contributing significantly to this awareness. However, the data revealed a notable gap in the continuous and unified delivery of human rights training, particularly for experienced officers, who often rely on NGO interventions rather than a structured internal system. The findings suggest that a more integrated approach, as advocated by More (2023), is essential. By addressing the absence of a universal policy for NGO engagement and fostering better coordination, the ZPCS and NGOs can establish a more dynamic and effective system for the promotion and protection of inmates' human rights.

The pattern of resource allocation raises serious questions about the effectiveness and sustainability of NGO-led human rights support in Zimbabwean prisons. The data triggers a concern regarding overdependence on aid, supporting the dependency theory as analysed by Jeffery (2021), who suggested that a heavy reliance on external aid can hinder a nation's ability to achieve self-sustenance and promote a culture of perpetual dependency.

Furthermore, these revelations are consistent with Mutongwizo (2017) who found that NGOs often emerge as a "second site of employment" rather than a genuine means to an end in their stated areas of operation. This study discovered that the activities NGOs engage in are often determined by the priorities of their funders, rather than being based on a genuine needs analysis of the host organisation. This dynamic creates a complex and fragile relationship where the objectives of local and international NGOs may diverge from the fundamental human

rights support needed by the ZPCS. The findings therefore underscore the necessity for a more coordinated and needs-based approach to NGO engagement, which prioritises long-term, systemic change over short-term, donor-driven projects.

The struggles with securing and maintaining Memorandums of Agreement (MoAs) directly support the analysis of Musila (2019), who noted the significant restrictions placed on NGOs by the Zimbabwean government. This study's findings demonstrate how these political restrictions manifest at the operational level, creating bureaucratic hurdles that limit NGO access and the duration of their work. The limited lifespan of these partnerships prevents the maturity of programmes and inhibits NGOs from making long-term, sustainable contributions. The finding that most human rights support programmes offered by NGOs are perceived as ineffective provides a crucial context for understanding the state of human rights within the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS). This perception of ineffectiveness helps to explain why numerous previous studies have cast a negative light on the ZPCS's human rights record, with direct references to reports by the OCHA (2013), U.S. Embassy in Zimbabwe (2020), Van Hout, Bigland and Mariniello (2022), Chigora and Chikomo (2017), UNHCR (2021), USSD (2016), United Kingdom Home Office (2017), Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission (2018), Jongwe (2019), Chivandikwa et al. (2020), Pillay et al. (2021) and Mhlanga-Gunda et al. (2022).

While these studies have often focused on the ZPCS's shortcomings and its reliance on government support, the present study offers a unique perspective. It highlights that the lack of human rights compliance is not solely due to government-related issues but is also a function of ineffective external support. The findings suggest that previous research may have primarily assessed ZPCS capabilities without fully considering the impact, or lack thereof, of NGO interventions. This study underscores a critical distinction: The role of NGOs is to provide support, not merely to observe and report on ZPCS failures that both parties should be working to rectify. The perceived ineffectiveness of these support programmes, particularly in addressing a full spectrum of needs and focusing on remote areas, directly contributes to the persistent challenges that the ZPCS faces. It therefore becomes clear that a collaborative, strategic, and needs-based approach is necessary to ensure that NGO efforts genuinely contribute to meaningful and sustainable human rights improvements within the penal system.

The key findings of the study are:

- The ZPCS and its partners possess a strong and accurate conceptual understanding of human rights and the purpose of human rights support programmes.
- NGOs tend to concentrate their support on thematic areas such as training and material aid, which are perceived to be less complex and more aligned with short-term, donor-driven objectives. Conversely, crucial areas that require long-term investment, such as infrastructural development, sustainability projects and process interventions, are largely underserved.
- A pervasive atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion exists between NGOs and the ZPCS. NGOs are seen as being motivated by "opportunity-seeking" agendas, using partnerships for mileage and grant applications, while ZPCS officers are perceived as potential resource misusers. This mutual distrust hinders effective collaboration and information sharing.
- The study revealed a significant internal weakness within the ZPCS, namely the absence of specifically trained project and programmes officers. This capacity gap forces a reliance on NGOs but also contributes to the inability to properly manage or sustain these external programmes.

- There is a lack of a universal human rights policy within the ZPCS that would provide clear guidelines for NGO engagement, programme streamlining and monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, a proper needs analysis is rarely conducted prior to programme implementation, resulting in activities that are not tailored to the organisation's specific requirements.
- Human rights support programmes were ineffective, indicating a critical failure to satisfy their intended purpose.

Conclusion

This study concludes that while the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service and its NGO partners share a common understanding of human rights, the human rights support programmes offered by these NGOs are largely perceived as ineffective. The ineffectiveness is not a result of a lack of effort but is rather rooted in a series of systemic, operational and political challenges. The study's findings reveal a fundamental disconnect between the needs of the ZPCS and the agendas of the NGOs, a gap exacerbated by a lack of trust, uncoordinated efforts, and the absence of a clear institutional policy to guide partnerships. This misalignment compromises the potential for meaningful, long-term impact on the human rights of inmates. The research, therefore, concludes that the persistent negative perception of ZPCS's human rights record is not solely due to its own shortcomings but is also a function of the fragmented and often self-serving nature of external support.

References

- Chigora, P. & Chikomo, S.L. (2021). Human Rights in Colonial, 20th and 21st Centuries Zimbabwe and the West's Foreign Policies. *Journal of Public Administration and Development Alternatives (JPADA)*, 6(3), 21-32.
- Chigora, P. & Chikomo, S.L. (2019). Human Rights in colonial, 20th and 21st centuries Zimbabwe and the west's foreign policies. Midlands State University, Zimbabwe. <https://doi.org/10.55190/JXFP3433>
- Chivandikwa, N., Mhlanga-Gunda, R. & Van Hout, M.C. (2020). Prison conditions and standards of health care for women and their children incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 16(3), 319-336. DOI: 10.1108/IJPH-11-2019-0063.
- Jongwe, H. (2019). The impact of prison conditions on the mental health of inmates in Zimbabwe: A case study of Harare Central Prison. University of Zimbabwe Press.
- Matveeva, A. (2009). Legitimising Central Asian authoritarianism: Political manipulation and symbolic Power. In *Politics of the Spectacular: Symbolism and Power in Central Asia*, 61(7).
- Mhlanga-Gunda, R., Kewley, S., Chivandikwa, N. & Van Hout, M. C. (2020). Prison conditions and standards of health care for women and their children incarcerated in Zimbabwean prisons. *International Journal of Prison Health*, 16(3), 319-336. DOI: 10.1108/IJPH-11-2019-0063.
- Moore, D.H. (2023). Treaty Interpretation at the Human Rights Committee: Reconciling International Law and Normativity. *University of California Davis Law Review*, 1311.
- Musila, G. (2019). Freedoms under threat: The spread of anti-NGO measures in Africa.
- Mutongwizo, T. (2017). Expectations and encounters: Comparing perceptions of police services among the underprivileged in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *The Palgrave handbook of criminology and the Global South* (pp. 569–585). Springer.
- OCHA. (2013). Zimbabwe: Humanitarian situation report. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.
- Pillay, N., Mhlanga-Gunda, R. & Van Hout, M. C. (2021). The effects of COVID-19 on the health and human rights of prisoners in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 17(2), 154-168.
- UNHCR. (2021). UNHCR Zimbabwe: Fact Sheet. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.
- United Kingdom Home Office. (2017). Zimbabwe: Country policy and information note.
- United Nations. (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. UN General Assembly.
- U.S. Embassy in Zimbabwe. (2020). Human Rights Report on Zimbabwe.
- USSD. (2016). Zimbabwe 2016 Human Rights Report. United States Department of State.
- Van Hout, M.C., Bigland, C. & Mariniello, T. (2023). A legal-realist assessment of the Zimbabwean correctional system response to COVID-19 during state disaster measures. *International Journal of Prisoner Health*, 19(3), 290-305. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPH-10-2021-0104>
- Van Hout, M.C. & Mhlanga-Gunda, R. (2019). Prison health situation and health rights of young people incarcerated in sub-Saharan African prisons and detention centres: A scoping review of extant literature. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 19(1).
- Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission. (2018). Annual Report.
- ZPCS Strategic Plan. (2022). Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service Strategic Plan 2022-2026.