



HOW CREATIVE SPACES FOSTER CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A Case Study of the Book Café
(Harare, Zimbabwe)

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Hivos
people unlimited



THE
BOOK
CAFÉ



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Paul Brickhill



Thomas Deve

*In memory of Paul Brickhill
(Founder and Director of Book Café)
and Thomas Deve
(Art critic, human rights activist
and veteran journalist)
who participated in the
Book Café Summit on 23 July 2014 and
passed away in the period during the
compilation of this publication.
May your souls rest in peace.*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study explores how the Book Café, as a particular model of creative space, has fostered activism and civic engagement in Zimbabwe. Hivos, an internationally focused development organisation and long-time funder of the Book Café, commissioned the research. Hivos seeks to better understand whether and how space for cultural/artistic expression increases citizens' critical consciousness. The organisation aims to use the findings to strengthen its own future policies and programmes and to connect others interested in "creative activism" with new knowledge.

The research focuses on a creative space in a country in the developing world and explores its influence on activists over a 15-year period. This is in contrast to the extant literature in which evaluations of short-term programmes in the US, UK, and Australia predominate. Our methods include a literature review, interviews with 19 activists and five representatives from Hivos and the Book Café, a survey of activists and other Book Café participants, and group discussion via a mini-summit. Through these varied approaches, we explored other efforts to conceptualise and document the role of creative spaces in fostering civic engagement, established the greater context in which the Book Café operates, gained insights into

the Book Café's role in fostering activism, and shared and "ground-truthed" preliminary findings.

We discovered the subjective and culturally-specific understandings of various civic and arts terms, and the didactic, discursive, and ecological theories of action for how creative spaces, as sites of artistic expression and participation, could be linked to civic engagement.

We traced major political and economic developments in Zimbabwe, post-Independence, and concurrent developments within activism and creative activism, and within the Book Café. The Book Café has been a product of its environment and helped shape Zimbabwean activism—as repressive governmental policies and acute social, political and economic challenges fuelled activism and efforts to stifle dissent.

Interview and survey data suggest that the Book Café fosters civic engagement and activism through four main channels. It provides platforms for freedom of expression and debate. It empowers marginalised groups, specifically women and youth. It fosters connections and collaborations by serving as a meeting ground. Lastly, it nurtures art and artists committed to socially relevant work.

We theorise a model for how the Book Café's different functions help foster individuals' development as activists. Exposure to art, discussions and ideas helps to expand artists' and activists' thinking and awareness. Through informal interactions and by experiencing powerful works of art, their sense of isolation is lessened and they find the courage and inspiration to commit to social change. New skills and collaborations also expand their capacity to effect change.

We also probe the perceived limits to the Book Café's collective impacts and opportunities to deepen and expand impacts. Some interviewees credited the Book Café with an immense ripple effect. Others characterised it as an elitist venue, primarily preaching to the converted, and said that the activity that transpires may have limited potential to actually make discernible social change. To expand the sphere of impact, interviewees proposed that the Book Café take socially-engaged productions on tour, use media more effectively, and work to cultivate a national network of creative spaces. By reducing barriers to access, the Book Café could attract greater participation beyond the 'usual suspects'.

The Book Café offers a number of lessons to others interested in cultivating creative spaces to foster civic

engagement in repressive contexts. Interviewees saw five values and offerings as instrumental to deepening the Book Café's stewardship of civic engagement and activism: cultivate a sense of 'home' for participants; offer an eclectic mix of activities; maintain a staunch commitment to freedom of expression; demonstrate integrity, persistence, and savvy in the face of political repression, and; strive for relatively autonomous funding streams and spaces.

These findings lend support for Hivos's assumption that space for cultural/artistic expression increases citizens' critical consciousness. The majority of survey respondents rated the Book Café as being very or extremely important for fostering civic engagement in Zimbabwe and Harare—61% and 88%, respectively. In the future, by expanding the research to include comparative case studies, we hope to discover the degree to which these findings translate to other contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Commissioned by Hivos, a long-time funder of the Book Café, this case study explores the Book Café's role in fostering activism and civic engagement in Zimbabwe. Specifically, it examines whether and how the Book Café, as a particular model of a creative space, has fostered civic engagement, fostered the development and work of Zimbabwean activists, and/or supported the work of activist organisations. It probes, "what works?" What lessons does the Book Café offer others seeking to use creative spaces to advance civic engagement in other places, particularly in repressive regimes?

This case study is the culmination of Hivos's four-year "learning agenda" in creative activism. Informed by its humanistic values and holistic approach, the internationally-focused development organisation had always justified its support for arts and culture on the assumption that space for cultural/artistic expression leads to more "citizen agency", which it defines as "engaged citizens that act critically towards the existing social order". However, even though Hivos regularly evaluates the impacts of its programmes and grantees' projects, Hivos had never specifically tested its assumption prior to this learning agenda. Through its learning agenda, and this case study specifically, Hivos hoped to gather more and detailed lessons about "what works" vis-à-vis creative spaces and activism, in order to enable it to strengthen future policies and programmes.

Hivos also sees this research effort as a fulfilment of its responsibility as a field leader. Through an internal literature review, Hivos staff determined that there

was a lack of existing research that explored the links between arts, culture, and "critical acting and thinking" outside the contexts of primary and secondary education and Western countries. By commissioning this research and making the findings available to others interested in the connections between the arts and civic engagement (including Book Café leadership, Zimbabwe activists, and international audiences), it hopes to rectify that knowledge gap and strengthen the field of "creative activism" overall. Lastly, the scope of work also meets a learning agenda obligation to Hivos's own funder, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Our report first details our methodology, then reviews the existing literature that links creative spaces and civic engagement. Next we contextualise the Book Café's development and character, against the backdrop of Zimbabwe's social and political history and the larger activism landscape. The report then delves into findings. It explores the Book Café's civic engagement functions, i.e., the offerings that stakeholders tie to civic engagement aims. Next we develop a model for how different offerings support activists' development. We then probe the extent of collective civic engagement impact and present opportunities to expand the Book Café's own civic engagement impacts. The report then takes up lessons learned: it synthesises the offerings and values most applicable to others who seek to cultivate creative spaces to foster civic engagement in repressive regimes. We conclude with reflections on implications of the findings.

METHODOLOGY

Florence Mukanga-Majachani (independent researcher, Zimbabwe) and Anne Gadwa Nicodemus (Metris Arts Consulting, USA) developed the case study research design in close collaboration with Hivos. Hivos's earlier literature review found numerous evaluations of short-term programmes in the US, UK and Australia. In contrast, we chose to focus on a developing world country and explore the case study creative space through the lens of the lives of activists over a 15-year time frame. By adopting a longer time horizon, we hoped to better explore the complex and long-term phenomena of creative space's links to civic engagement.

We addressed the research objectives through a mixed methods approach that included: a literature review, interviews with activists and other key stakeholders, a survey, and group discussion via a mini-summit.

Literature Review: Building on Hivos's internal literature review, we investigated prior research efforts that attempt to conceptualise and document the role of creative spaces in fostering civic engagement. Through a review of press accounts and policy papers, we also established the local historical context for civic engagement and activism, and situated the Book Café's development and structure within the landscape of Zimbabwe's major post-independence social and political developments.

Interviews: We conducted 24 interviews: 5 with representatives of Hivos and the Book Café and 19 with activists. Our objectives were to gain detailed

insights into the Book Café's role in fostering civic engagement and activism, and to deepen our understanding of the Book Café's development, structure, programmes, activities and policies. Activists ranged from seasoned NGO leaders to founders of fledgling and informal organisations to a woman who only considered herself "maybe an activist in the making". The types of activism and causes represented spanned human rights (5), cultural activism (6), youth (1), gender (3), LGBTI (1), media (1), and a self-described "pan-African activist". We also strove to achieve a gender and age balance and to include perspectives from activists based in Harare and other cities. We conducted the majority of interviews in person, with five of them conducted via Skype. We identified potential interviewees using recommendations from Hivos and the Book Café, Makanga's existing local knowledge, and survey respondents. For a complete list of interviewees and their affiliations and interview questionnaires, see Appendix A.

Survey: To glean insights from a larger number of activists than would be possible with interviews alone, we administered a survey to a targeted list of over 400 civically active Zimbabwean residents and Book Café participants (67 returns, 17% overall response rate). For full survey results and a discussion on response rates and representativeness, see Appendix B. Questions explored the possible ways in which the Book Café could have fostered civic engagement for both individuals and organisations, as well as the relative importance respondents ascribed to the Book Café, overall, for fostering civic engagement in Harare and Zimbabwe.

Mini-Summit: Through a one-day mini-summit, we “ground-truthed” preliminary findings and facilitated group learning through reflection and dialogue. Eighteen activists/civically engaged individuals participated, as well as four representatives from the Book Café and five from Hivos.

The research design faces limitations and methodological challenges common to this type of research. The study lacks a control or comparison group. We were unable to incorporate random sampling into our survey design, so respondents may not accurately reflect the “true” population of civically engaged Zimbabwe residents or other participants in Book Café activities who may not (yet) be civically engaged. We have attempted to adopt a generous time frame – Book Café activity and activism within the last 15 years – out of recognition that “civic participation is a complex phenomenon with many causes, some immediate and others going back years and decades” (Stern and Seifert, 2009, p. 27). However, this is not a longitudinal study. We rely on retrospective qualitative interviews, and memory is fallible.

We also acknowledge that the Book Café’s focus extends beyond civic engagement and activism. As such, this is not a comprehensive evaluation, but a targeted research inquiry. The views expressed in the survey do not necessarily reflect those of the Book Café, Pamberi Trust (the Book Café’s parent organisation), or Hivos.



Background: LINKS BETWEEN CREATIVE SPACES AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

What evidence exists that creative spaces foster civic engagement and activism? What do we even mean by those terms? Why would we presume such a link exists? How would one go about testing such a hypothesis or investigating a “theory of change”?

Hivos staff set out to answer these specific questions via the first phase of the organisation’s learning agenda. In the course of the literature review and the development of an internal working paper (available upon request), staff scanned and synthesised the existing English-language literature on these topics, drawing from academic literature (anthropology, art history, history, philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies), as well as ‘grey literature’, the non-peer-reviewed, professional and policy-related reports emanating from academics, private-sector researchers, the public sector and NGOs (Vranic, 2013). Below, we summarise Hivos’s analysis and synthesise it with framing offered by Stern and Seifert in their formative *Civic Engagement and the Arts: Issues of Conceptualization and Measurement* (2009). We relate both to this specific case study.

Civic Terms

Through its literature review, Hivos unearthed the subjectivity and importance of issues of conceptualisation (i.e. “definitions of notions of art, change and social impact”). As Stern and Seifert note:

*The conceptualisation of both **civic engagement** and **the arts** presents challenges that complicate the task of data gathering and measurement. Civic engagement overlaps a variety of concepts in the social science literature, including social capital, public sphere, community capacity, and civic capacity (2009, p. 8).*

The arts and culture as concepts are a no less knotty definitional issue ... we use a wide interpretation of the arts and culture that encompasses all the artistic disciplines and the humanities, including the range of folk and cultural expressions. Civic and social goals can also be addressed across the full spectrum of community-based, experimental, and mainstream arts as well as popular culture (2009, p. 13).

Through the course of the case study research, the subjectivity of terms – critical thinking, critical consciousness, civic engagement, activism, cultural hubs and creative spaces – became strikingly apparent, particularly given different national/cultural contexts.

Critical thinking vs. critical consciousness. Hivos colleagues realised that they had never fully vetted, even internally, what they meant by “critical thinking and acting toward the existing social order”. Hivos staff member Tanja Vranic (2014) explains, “We support critical culture: culture that opens the taboos or critical questions, or brings new imagination or new solutions to the wicked problems; that kind of stuff”. This usage of critical thinking is far narrower, however, than the Foundation for Critical Thinking’s definition: “the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (2013). Through discussion, we realised that in the Zimbabwean context “critical consciousness” was much more commonly used and understood to be closer to Hivos’s meaning than “critical thinking”. Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire originated the term, which is grounded in post-Marxist critical theory (Freire, 2000). It focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the

world, including social and political contradictions. Particularly relevant for Hivos's desired application, the concept of critical consciousness also includes taking action against the oppressive elements in one's life, illuminated by increased understanding (Mustakova-Possardt, 2003).

Activism vs. civic engagement. Daniel Maposa (2014) said that activist "is a bad word in Zimbabwe" and that in contrast to working on a range of possible social issues, "people think that you are in politics when you talk about activism". In the Zimbabwean context, the term activist is often conflated with people working for civil society organisations, even though in reality individuals also pursue activism independently. Some people even criticise those within formal NGOs as becoming too divorced from issues on the ground. For instance, Fungai Machirori (2013) writes:

I began to look at all the other people around me, who by virtue of working in NGOs or women's organisations were labelled activists. Sometimes all they seemed to do was attend conferences and workshops, give PowerPoint presentations, give out business cards and speak the language of mainstreaming, sensitisation, gender budgeting, and rights-based approach.

Through correspondence and contractual agreements regarding the case study, Hivos emphasised that its interest was not restricted to political activists or those embedded within NGOs, but a diverse range of activists (or civically engaged people who act critically towards the existing social order). Sectors of interest span political, media and LGBT, as well as students', children's and women's rights. As Vranic (2014) said, "They can be active in their communities

with the poor people, or orphans, or HIV patients, or protecting the girls and women in society – just being active about *something* that bothers them". Hivos wished to gain insights from both experienced and recent activists and those working within and outside formal institutions.

To best meet Hivos's objectives, given different interpretations of the word activism, we frequently simultaneously employed the terms 'activism' and 'civic engagement'. We use Michael Delli Carpini's definition of civic engagement: "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (American Psychological Association, 2014). We explicitly defined the term for those that might be unfamiliar, for instance those taking our survey. Delli Carpini notes that civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organisational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem, or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. As Stern and Seifert note (Stern and Seifert, 2009, p. 8), Delli Carpini's definition of civic engagement:

...suggests that civic engagement is about behaviour. Although one's attitudes and beliefs are potential motivations and consequences of civic engagement, engagement itself has to do with action. Second, civic engagement is purposive and conscious. One's actions are designed to do something; civic engagement does not occur by accident. Finally, civic engagement is public. It can occur in either individual or collective settings but is directed at issues of public – not private – concern.

We feel that this concept elegantly encompasses what Hivos has termed "critical thinking and acting

towards the existing social order” and in the Zimbabwean context is a less loaded (though less widely used) term than activism.

Creative spaces/cultural hubs. We were remiss, as researchers, in not thoroughly specifying what constitutes a creative space or cultural hub from the research onset, and for using the terms interchangeably. Vranic (2014) explained that Hivos is currently undergoing a shift in both its terminology and work from “cultural spaces for free expression” (with cultural hubs being one particular form) towards “creative spaces”.

As Vranic (2014) stated, more than an exhibition space for art objects, creative spaces accumulate “creative energy, diverse programmes, and diverse actions”. In her view, the ideal model includes a mixing of people from different professional backgrounds, who nonetheless find commonalities through creative, entrepreneurial and action-oriented approaches.

Through an iterative process and consultation with Hivos staff, we eventually adopted the following fairly narrow definition of creative spaces:

Spaces in which artists, other creative people, and affiliated organisations develop, exhibit, or perform their work. They also serve as meeting ground and provide platforms for self-expression, discussion, exchange, collaboration, and showcasing creativity.

In other words, an artist working in isolation in his or her studio, or museums and galleries that do not function as meeting grounds and sites for discourse – although creative – are not included in our frame. Our usage of ‘creative space’ is not restricted to one form of art. (The Book Café includes film, music,

theatre, poetry, literature, and topical discussions on issues of general concern.) Although this definition was adopted late in the research process, we hope that the interviewees and survey participants extrapolated our meaning to be “spaces akin to the Book Café”, since that venue was the focus of the case study.

Theories of Action

Why and how should creative spaces, as sites of artistic expression and participation, be linked to civic engagement? Stern and Siefert provide a useful summary of the three main conceptual paths advanced by practitioners (2009, pp. 15–23):

1. Didactic theories of action focus on the ability of arts and culture to instruct or persuade the population. Didactic approaches use arts and culture to improve the public’s understanding of civic issues and its moral stance.
2. Discursive theories of action focus on the arts as a means of furthering public dialogue. The arts provide a setting in which people can discuss ideas, form connections and take action.
3. Ecological theories of action focus on the unintentional consequences of cultural engagement. Those who advance ecological theories of action view all cultural participation as a form of civic engagement. They assert that the arts generate a variety of spillover effects that increase social capital and community capacity.

Didactic approaches to civic engagement include the use of art and culture for social movements and for political control. In the course of its literature review, Hivos found that across time and different geographies, academics, researchers, and historians theorised about the ability of the arts to mobilise

I began to look at all the other people around me, who by virtue of working in NGOs or women's organisations were labelled activists. Sometimes all they seemed to do was attend conferences and workshops, give PowerPoint presentations, give out business cards and speak the language of mainstreaming, sensitisation, gender budgeting, and rights-based approach.

people to critique regimes (Vranic, 2013). Rulers' attempts to either censor artists or use them to consolidate support (via propaganda, etc.) lend credence to these views. In specific examples, Benford and Hunt (1992) analyse dramaturgical elements of several social movements and Petty (1997) explores the use of dramaturgy as social action in the AIDS/HIV movement in the U.S. In the African context, Jane Plastow (1996) documents didactic theories of action when she notes the longstanding history of using performing arts, especially theatre, in political processes in Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Tanzania. In Zimbabwe's liberation struggle, for instance, liberation fighters used performing arts to politicise the masses and mobilise them to participate in the war.

Discursive theories of action encompass numerous approaches (Stern and Seifert, 2009, pp. 17–21). Artists may act as provocateurs/animateurs of dialogue. Through civic ritual and construction of community through cultural practices, the discursive space itself is seen as a work of art – a place where creativity and magic “occur”. Public artworks and even public space itself may also serve as discursive approaches to foster civic engagement. For instance, new public spaces may increase opportunities for people to engage with one another. Hoffman explains the usual actions of authoritarian states towards public spaces. He observes that, “authoritarian regimes of whatever brand include in their repertoire mechanisms of control along with the manipulation, co-optation and restriction of media and the public sphere” (2012, p. 221). Lastly, “placemaking” and arts as social inclusion strategies may also fall within discursive arts-based approaches to fostering civic engagement. In the latter, arts offerings may serve as an invitation and safe place to draw in individuals and groups who have historically been excluded from public dialogues. For

instance, one study – of the Kurdish and Iraqi participants of the Dancing to Connect workshop in Erbil, Iraq – documents a significant improvement in feelings towards dancing with others of different background (Hollander, 2012). As we explore in our *Findings* section, interviewees and survey data suggest that the Book Café primarily fosters civic engagement and activism through discursive approaches.

In contrast to didactic and discursive approaches, ecological theories of action focus on the social impacts of art-making on civic culture and community vitality, regardless of intentionality. For instance, the Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicators Project views community wellbeing and cultural vitality as interdependent (Jackson et al., 2006). In another example, research carried out on Philadelphia by the Social Impact of the Arts Project suggests a relationship between cultural engagement and “collective efficacy”, or “social cohesion among neighbours combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (Stern and Seifert, 2008, p. 3).

Despite the thorough mapping of the theoretical terrain, Hivos deemed the literature lacking with respect to specific studies focused on critical thinking and action (i.e. critical consciousness). Extant studies related to art and critical thinking confined their focus to child education (Freedman, 2003; Garoian, 1999). Hivos also found no instances of research focusing on the developing world (Vranic, 2013).

ZIMBABWEAN HISTORICAL CONTEXT: POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AND ACTIVISM

Introduction to the Book Café

As a community cultural centre, the Book Café seeks to respond to the needs of the arts and culture sector. Its programming spans arts events that showcase both Zimbabwean and international arts, platforms for self-expression for women and youth, public discussions, and events organised by other civil society organisations. Paul Brickhill (2008), who until his recent death served as the creative director of the Book Café's development partner organisation, Pamberi Trust, described it as "a focal point for arts events refusing to be silenced by Mugabe's repressive regime". Activist Samm Monro (2014) of the Magamba Cultural Activist Network describes the space as a place of open discussion, dialogue and expression. And as the BBC reports:

Over the years, the café has become the epicentre of Harare's alternative culture. Six nights a week audience gathers here, which is as varied as the city itself. The events each night vary greatly, but they have one thing in common: at the Book Café there is no censorship (Ulman, 2007).

The Book Café has been located in Harare since its first incarnation, as Grassroots Books, in 1982, and has been at its current location in the Avenues area since 2012. Harare is Zimbabwe's administrative and commercial capital. With a population of over 1.4 million, it is Zimbabwe's largest city (ZimStat, 2012). Harare is home to most of Zimbabwe's industrial activity and population growth is fuelled by migration, primarily for employment opportunities. Harare's centrally-located Avenues area has a reputation for 24/7 activity, including prostitution.

Besides being the popular arts venue that it is, the Book Café offers platforms for artistic development

in mbira, jazz, theatre, spoken word, comedy and film, as well as high-profile youth and gender programmes and platforms. Working alongside its development partner organisation, Pamberi Trust, it also provides a career path for emerging and intermediate artists to create sustainable livelihoods, for instance, connecting emerging and intermediate artists to national festival stages and providing training in arts management. It promotes cultural diversity and re-links communities through culture, for instance through its intersections with the African Music Festivals Network, the African Tour Circuit and cultural musical collaborations.

How does the Book Café's larger environment shape its work vis-à-vis civic engagement and activism? Where does one situate it within the realm of Zimbabwean history and activism? To answer these questions, this section explores the interrelated histories of the Book Café and civic engagement situated against the backdrop of major changes in Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic spheres. Starting with independence, it summarises major historical periods and highlights the political and economic situation, civic engagement developments (activism in general, and creative activism in particular), and the Book Café's operations and functions. The timeline below illustrates these developments and is followed by descriptions of the historical periods.

Liberation and Gukurahundi (1980-1990)

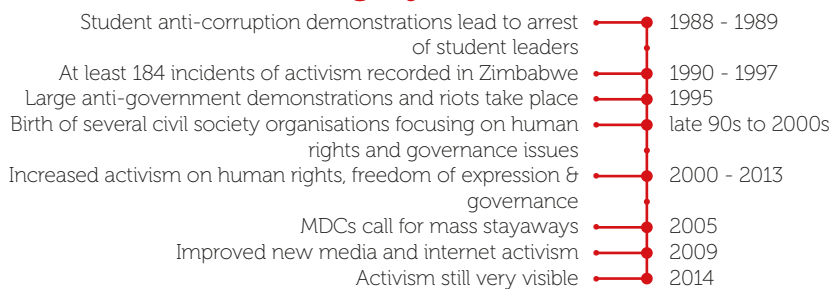
Political and economic landscape. Zimbabwe's political culture since independence in 1980 has been characterised by intolerance towards divergent views and dissenting voices. Waves of violence punctuated the country's post-independence

Figure 1: Timeline

Category: Political and economic



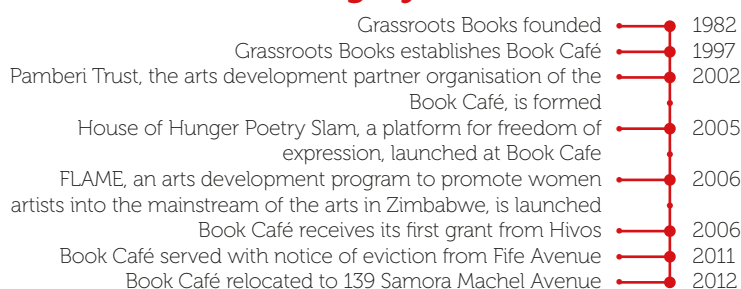
Category: Activism



Category: Creative activism



Category: Book Café



history, starting with the Gukurahundi massacres¹ in the Matabeleland Provinces from 1982-1987.

Activism developments. Until the late 1980s, neither activism nor political opposition had yet coalesced into organised movements. A prominent student demonstration in 1988, led by the University of Zimbabwe Student Representative Council, marked the emergence of student activism. Due to increasing government censorship in academia, students ended their long-time support of government policies that redressed colonial era imbalances. They protested censorship, and later other economic and political events (Hwami and Kapoor, 2012).

Developments within creative activism. The staging of Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* in 1986 marked one of the earliest open criticisms of the Zimbabwean government through the arts. The play criticised government officials as corrupt hypocrites. Its banning – and the implications this had for other artists' freedom of expression – caused a deep sense of unease in the arts community. The Writers' Union perceived the episode as a fundamental challenge to free speech (Kaarshol, 1990, p. 273).

The Book Café. During this period, former Liberation War fighters led by Albert Ndindah donated funds for the development of Grassroots Books, the business that would evolve into the Book Café. Grassroots Books opened to the public in 1982. It sought to redress imbalances in the area of literature created by the Rhodesian government during the colonial era. The company had the broad goal of social entrepreneurship, seeking to emancipate writers and readers in post-independence Zimbabwe from the bondage of censorship and provide a wide range of books, including those that had been previously banned.

Economic Crisis and Birth of Open Activism (1990-2000)

Political and economic situation. The early 1990s marked a turning point in the country's political economy. In 1991 the government adopted the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). McCandless (2011) observes that ESAP resulted in a fundamental restructuring of the Zimbabwean state, economy and society, with the welfarist economic policies of the 1980s swiftly replaced by a neoliberal package of trade liberalisation, deregulation and public sector restructuring, including large cuts to the health and education budgets. It was the turn to ESAP which catalysed the full-scale collapse of Zimbabwe's economy (Sutcliffe, 2013).

Activism developments. This period marked the birth of open activism. Economic collapse triggered widespread demonstrations by workers and students in the late 1990s and the formation of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in 1999. Its emergence represented a confluence of several social forces and processes, including a culmination of the growing disenchantment with the government's state authoritarianism among civil society groups (Sachikonye et al., 2007).

Several activist organisations were formed during this period, including Media Institute of Southern Africa (1992), Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (1998), Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (1996), and Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (1999). These organisations focused on causes that included human rights, media freedom, freedom of expression, civil activism, democracy, good governance and elections.

Relations between civil society and the State have been characterised by mistrust and intolerance. TH Muzondo (2008), a civil society organisations consultant, observed:

During the post-independence era, there was a quiet displeasure over civil society as demonstrated by attempts to silence some organisations or, failing that, to ensure government control of them. From the late 1990s onwards, the State has loudly voiced its displeasure with the volume increasing with each passing year.

¹: During Gukurahundi, due to suspicion that members of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) were planning to topple the ruling government, many

people were killed, homes were destroyed, and some residents of the Matabeleland Provinces were buried alive.

Creative activism. With the increased visibility of activism, the government tightened censorship of the arts. Offenders faced arrest, detention and torture.

Numerous cultural activists and protest artists, however, continued their work. Musicians and performing artists composed songs and staged performances that explored the prevailing political order. Political satires became common and their jibes became a force that aggravated government hostility towards the arts. For example, in 2000 Edgar Langeveldt was severely beaten by state security agencies for presenting comedy that mocked the government (Freedman, 2009).

The Book Café. During this tumultuous period, Grassroots Books rebranded itself as the Book Café and expanded to include the performing arts. Paul Brickhill explained that “among its new aims in 1996 was the issue of broadening freedom of expression within the community and among individuals” (Mukanga-Majachani and Chifunyise, 2012). As The Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity (2007) reports:

In 1997, looking for new ways to expand book readership, Grassroots established a centre called the Book Café. The goal was to bring together – in a community setting – books, performing arts and a café that would become a meeting place for artists and intellectuals. It proved a stunning success and rapidly grew into a vibrant performing arts centre with an ‘African’ feel.

It became a popular venue for the performing arts. Different people, including students, civil society organisations and artists, met there to discuss issues affecting them and to access the Internet.

Crisis: Human Rights Abuses & Increased Resistance (2001-2008)

Political and economic landscape. This period was punctuated by acute economic challenges – hyperinflation, widespread poverty, and the mass exodus of skilled people from the country. The government passed repressive legislation such as POSA and AIP-PA², which severely restricted freedom of speech

and assembly and granted unprecedented powers to the police. In addition, the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme triggered unrest and gross human rights violations³. Though Zimbabwe held elections regularly, local and international election observers described all three elections held during this period (2002, 2005 and 2008) as not being free or fair. Operation Murambatsvina, implemented in 2005, was also a major humanitarian disaster and abuse of human rights carried out on the citizenry by its own government. Its forced evictions displaced 700,000 people.⁴

Activism developments. In reaction to the economic challenges and restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, political and human rights activism solidified and intensified. More civil society organisations (CSOs) formed in this period,⁵ and they continued to perform critical watchdog functions in the democratic governance arena, carrying out tasks such as tracking public opinion and monitoring elections, political violence and corruption.

Repressive legislation, however, severely restricted CSO’s operations. The ruling regime used POSA to stifle their activities. Its provisions outlawed many of the activities that would allow citizens to participate in the governance process (Sachikonye et al., 2007, p. 55).

Developments in creative activism. As other forms of activism intensified, creative activism did too. Zimbabwe’s creative sector became an increasingly integral part of civil society movements. Cultural activists influenced public opinion and policy through live performances, targeted and professional campaigning, policy advocacy and other social activism.

Between 2000 and 2009, the performing arts sector played a crucial role in tackling bread and butter issues such as corruption, human rights violations and continually shrinking space for freedom of expression (Mukanga-Majachani and Chifunyise, 2012). For in-

2: Public Order and Security Act and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act

3: After independence the Zimbabwean government was determined to redress land ownership imbalances created

during the colonial era, but this happened very slowly. The level of congestion reached catastrophic levels and political pressure for redress mounted. In 2000 the government decided to compulsorily acquire land for resettlement.

4: A crackdown on illegal housing and commercial activities, and an effort to reduce the risk of the spread of infectious disease in these areas – but described by the United Nations as an effort to drive out and make homeless large sections of the urban and rural poor, who comprise

much of the internal opposition to the Mugabe administration.

5: New CSOs launched in this period include Media Alliance of Zimbabwe (2004) and the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (2000).

When *What They Said What They Got* was being done at Theatre in the Park, it was very dangerous because every night state security agents came to watch it. Their presence destroyed debate to a point where you always felt that it inhibited free discussion. Now this is the problem throughout Zimbabwe. You cannot fully freely express yourself, your own opinion, because if you said something that's contrary to the ruling party or the government you are an enemy of the state (Ravengai, 2012).

Since the Zimbabwean government introduced tough media laws in 2002, theatre has taken on a new and edgy role. It is a place where entertainment can express, yet mask, deep-rooted anger; where in the face of a dying culture, humour and humanity can be tended like glowing coals, ready for igniting in the future. And since the media crackdown, audiences have started to grow exponentially (Glyn-Jones, 2004).

Sometimes the police and CIO⁸ complain about political issues raised by some theatre groups. I tend to go back to the groups and tell them to recreate so that they don't get in trouble with the security agents. Our policy is that for all arts to be marketable they must be independent of all political interference. (Athanasius Ruswa, 2008, former provincial arts manager for the Manicaland branch of the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe (Ravengai, 2011).

stance Rooftop Promotions, the owners of Theatre in the Park⁶, continued to produce provocative theatre projects, working with playwrights such as Stephen Chifunyise, Silvanos Mudzvova and Tafadzwa Muzondo. New arts activist organisations also formed during this period. For instance, Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights (2007) and Magamba Cultural Activist Network (2007) formed to tackle the same issues addressed by mainstream civil society organisations.

In particular, following the closure of several media houses in the early 2000s, creative spaces such as Book Café, Theatre in the Park and Amakhosi Centre⁷ became some of the only spaces where Zimbabweans could express themselves with relative freedom. Unsurprisingly, the creative sector has also faced government censorship. Plastow (1996) described the general tendencies of Zimbabwean government officials to support non-critical artists' voices and silence those who express dissent. As a result of their work, government officials have branded some creative spaces as political and anti-government. For instance, the late actor Walter Muparutsa was quoted as saying, "Anything that is associated with Amakhosi you got a problem, because Amakhosi has been stigmatised as anti-government" (Ravengai, 2012).

The Book Café. As we detail in *Key Findings*, during this period the Book Café became a vital public space. It became a place where people could gather, create and watch art that ranged from controversial to 'escapist'. The Book Café hosted discussions that could not be hosted in hotels and other spaces due to censorship. Artists and activists joined hands in solidarity.

The Book Café also went through some structural and funding changes. Between 2001 and 2002, in pursuit of its development and social goals, the Book Café established Pamberi Trust, a development partner organisation with a legal status and governance structure that is generally synonymous with development work. Through a Deed of Trust, Pamberi Trust was formed as a Non-Governmental Organisation, thereby providing a proper structure to an arts and

6: Located in Harare, Theatre in the Park (established by Daves Guzha in 1996) is one of the leading theatre venues in Zimbabwe.

1981, is Zimbabwe's first privately-owned cultural centre. It is located in the boundaries of the city centre and the townships of Bulawayo.

7: Amakhosi Arts Centre, established in

8: Central Intelligence Organisation





Workshop in the Book Café garden space. Photo courtesy of the Book Café.

culture development 'vision' that had been so integral to the establishment of the original bookshop and the Book Café. By 2006 the two entities had developed a unique hybridised relationship between an arts development organisation and a commercial enterprise.

Hivos developed a funding partnership with the Book Café during the same period, due to the synergies between diverse, high-calibre artistic programming, and workshops on social issues, such as HIV/AIDS and gender equality, where young people could 'find themselves' and develop their artistic and leadership skills. The Book Café received its first grant support from Hivos in 2006. Over time, Hivos's support has evolved from funding a space for free and creative expression to also supporting specific programmes, such as the gender project (Matinanga⁹, 2014).

Gradual Stability (2009-2014)

Political and economic landscape. After the 2008 elections, Zimbabwe experienced gradual economic and political stability. The main political parties agreed upon and signed the Global Political Agreement, which gave birth to the Inclusive Government and facilitated the creation of a new constitution with positive changes for citizens. For instance, the constitution has provisions that uphold and guarantee freedom of expression, media freedom and access to information. Whether or not these freedoms will be upheld by the government is yet to be seen, given the historical pattern of governmental abuse of citizens' rights in order to protect political interests. Elections held in 2013 saw ZANU PF winning with the majority, though opposition parties dismissed them as neither free nor fair.

Along with gradual socio-economic and political stability, Zimbabwe registered significant increases in the number of Internet users and in mobile-broadband penetration. Internet subscribers grew from 2.2 million in the first quarter of 2012 to 3.27 million recorded in the second quarter of 2012 (POTRAZ, 2012). This was unlike all the other periods, in which Internet connectivity and penetration of mobile telephone technology was weak. This trend influenced the Book Café, as explained below.

Activism developments. During the crafting of the Constitution, civil society organisations played a critical role. After the 2013 elections, the government's attitude towards civil society organisations shifted. As the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Zimbabwe (n.d.) observed:

While the Inclusive Government period was distinguished by an atmosphere of mistrust that manifested itself in continued surveillance, threats, and victimisation of CSOs, especially those working in the areas of governance, human rights and democracy, since elections 2013 ZANU-PF has so far displayed some gestures towards tolerance and disposition to engage with CSOs, as well as the international community. For instance, Zimbabwean CSOs were consulted in the process of preparation of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation in the last quarter of 2013.

Many civil society organisations are currently redefining themselves, focusing energy on how to more effectively engage the government in order to influence decision-making processes. However, draconian legislation still limits their operational space.

Developments in creative activism. Creative activism remained very active between 2009 and 2011, and so did government hostility. For instance, in 2009 Bulawayo artist Owen Maseko was arrested for exhibiting his paintings on the Gukurahundi massacres, which were meant to promote national healing. Since around 2012, many artistic performances have taken up socially-engaged content, such as the discovery of diamonds and corruption alongside vigorous questioning of politics.

The Book Café. During this period, the Book Café continued to foster civic engagement by providing a space for freedom of expression and debate, and an activist meeting ground. Two notable developments contrast with the previous period.

First, with more widespread Internet access, the Book Café was no longer one of the few places Zimbabwean activists could get online. This meant that the space lost congregants who used to visit it only for Internet access. However, the space still provides a 'hotspot' workspace for activists and artists who may have other access to the Internet. In addition, although smartphone penetration has resulted in

9: Programme Officer for Expression and Engagement.

young people using platforms like WhatsApp groups to discuss issues, the Book Café continues to offer unique platforms for face-to-face civic engagement.

Secondly, the Book Café lost its original venue at the Fife Avenue Shops in December 2011. Although the Book Café reopened in its current venue in March 2012, it took 30 months to become licensed for full operations. The new venue has a bigger performing space and stage, a garden where patrons can relax, a bookshop, a film screening room and two bars. However, the Book Café no longer has two separate venues (the Book Café and Mannenberg), as it did at Fife Avenue. The number of events decreased from an average of 18 events per week to 9 per week. However with the construction of the garden stage, the Book Café is now averaging nearly 11 events per week (White, 2014).

In conclusion, the growth of activism in Zimbabwe has been a direct response to unfavourable government policy coupled with acute social, political and economic challenges. Student demonstrations in the late 1980s, and labour movement fermentation and widespread demonstrations by workers beginning in the early 1990s, signalled the birth of open activism. By the late 1990s it had become more organised, with the formation of civil society organisations working mostly in the areas of human rights, democracy and freedom of expression. The government responded by intensifying human rights abuses and enacting draconian legislation aimed at curtailing freedom of expression. Open creative activism, having shown budding signs in the late 1980s, had grown in strength by the late 1990s and throughout the increased crisis period. It also became a government target. During these processes, the Book Café evolved from a bookshop to a vibrant space that not only responds to the needs of the arts sector, but also those of wider civil society. It became one of the spaces where people could meet, debate, enjoy art, and work on their laptops. Even with the current signs of changing government-civil society relations, the importance of the Book Café remains undoubted. Next we discuss key findings and explore which offerings stakeholders tie to the Book Café's civic engagement functions and the degree to which they are valued.

KEY FINDINGS

This section examines the *what* and *how* of the Book Café’s links to civic engagement. We first explore the Book Café’s civic engagement functions, the offerings that stakeholders tie to civic engagement aims, and the extent to which they are valued. We then consider more cumulative impacts. We theorise about how different offerings work together to support individual activists’ development. We also probe the extent of collective impact. Lastly, we explore opportunities to expand the Book Café’s civic engagement impacts.

The Book Café’s Civic Engagement Functions

What are the ways in which the Book Café fosters civic engagement and activism? Interview and survey data pointed to four main channels. The Book Café provides vital platforms for freedom of expres-

sion and debate. It empowers marginalised groups. It serves as a meeting ground that helps foster connections and collaborations. Lastly, it nurtures art and artists that have a focus on social change.

Provides Platforms for Freedom of Expression and Debate.

Founder Paul Brickhill (2014) described the Book Café’s origins as being based in the desire to realise “a normal, simple right of Zimbabweans to be able to express themselves, and create a space where freedom of creative expression was sanctified and celebrated and protected, no matter what”. The great majority of survey respondents suggest that they have succeeded in this vision. Ninety-four percent of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café has fostered freedom of expression (Table 1).

Table 1: The Book Café as a platform for freedom of expression and debate

Has the Book Café fostered civic engagement? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café has...	Agreement (%)*
fostered freedom of expression	94
presented art that persuades people to take action	88
presented art that sparks debate	95
provided a platform for dialogue	94
drawn in individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues	82
Has the Book Café fostered the civic engagement work of the organisation with which you are affiliated? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café helped...	Agreement (%)**
our organisation’s efforts to promote freedom of expression	73
our organisation’s efforts to use art to persuade people to take action	58
our organisation’s efforts to use art to spark debate	56
our organisation to connect with individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues	68

*Survey respondents selecting ‘somewhat agree’ to ‘completely agree’. Based on a 6-point scale, with a “don’t know” option.

**Based on a 7-point scale, with a “don’t know” option. Source: Activist survey. See Appendix B.

You know that if you go to Book Café, you meet like-minded people. You know that if you go to the Book Café ... you can meet other people that can inspire you. At the end of the day, the number of cultural activists grows.





Hand in hand with freedom of expression, the Book Café has fostered debate and discussion. Ninety-four percent of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café fosters civic engagement by providing a platform for dialogue (Table 1). In 2013 the Book Café hosted 44 discussions, including literary discussions and topical discussions related to the arts, gender and human rights, and civil society, with attendance at nearly 3,000 people.

Why does providing a space for freedom of expression and debate matter? First, because of the scarcity of other such venues in Zimbabwe. During Zimbabwe's most severe crisis (2000–2008), activists faced real and serious threats of political repercussions, including violence. Michael Mabwe (2014) explained that state security agents infested hotels and the police blocked certain discussions from taking place. The Book Café was one of few venues that maintained a commitment to freedom of expression. It "became a space where you could come and hide and do your stuff and cushion yourself from the draconian pieces of legislation", he said.

Even today, activist John Stewart (2014) has explained that it is one of the few city-centre venues where many different performing arts can actually be performed. And Samuel Matsikure of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe states (2014) that it remains a safe place for activists, which is relevant because a lot of the public spaces have closed.

The Book Café was a citadel for freedom and a platform to evade repressive laws that were used to curtail freedom of assembly, freedom of expression and other fundamental civic and political liberties during the time of the crisis (Ruhanya, 2014).

As a space for freedom of expression and debate, the Book Café also helps individual activists' development by expanding their thinking, increasing their awareness, and inspiring them to take action. For example, 95% of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café fosters civic engagement by presenting art that sparks debate (Table 1). We explore these dynamics in the *Model of Activists' Development* section.

Serving as a space for freedom of expression and debate benefited not only individuals, but also organi-

sations. Seventy-three percent of organisation-affiliated survey respondents agreed that the Book Café has helped their organisation's efforts to promote freedom of expression (Table 1). The Book Café's commitment to freedom of expression often makes it the venue of choice for events sponsored by other social-change-focused organisations, such as the Magamba Network.

Empowers Marginalised Groups

By serving as a space for freedom of expression and debate, the Book Café has been able to provide another critical civic engagement function. Survey responses and interviews suggest that it provides a platform for marginalised groups, specifically women and youth, to contribute to public discourse and develop their artistry and critical consciousness. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café draws in individuals and groups historically excluded from public dialogues (Table 1), and numerous interviewees spoke positively about the ways in which the Book Café offerings empower women and youth.

Women and youth have historically been excluded from public dialogue in Zimbabwe. One anonymous activist explained that youth comprise a large portion of the population, but "they minimally participate in the process of national development". Another anonymous interviewee explained that, even today, women have a very restricted role in civic life:

Mainstream civil society is very male-driven. It's led by the big boys who literally groom each other and give each other space. It's a mirror of the cultural norms in our society. As a woman, you're told that what you have to say is not as important as what a man has to say.

The Book Café responds to this need to serve women and youth with two dedicated programmes, each of which has a staff co-ordinator. Offerings within the FLAME (Female Literary, Arts & Music Enterprise) and Youth Programmes range from open mic series to capacity-building workshops to artist development support services. Within the Gender and Youth programmes in 2013, the Book Café hosted 59 and 139 events respectively. Gender programme events attracted 732 attendees and Youth events attracted over 3,000.

Table 2: The Book Café as a gathering space for making connections

	Agreement (%)*
Has the Book Café fostered civic engagement? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café has...	
helped activists to network with one another	91
helped connect individuals to activist organisations	88
helped connect activist organisations to each other	85
fostered collaborations between activists and artists	88
offered opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage one another	88
fostered partnerships between civil society NGOs	82
Has the Book Café fostered the civic engagement work of the organisation with which you are affiliated? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café ...	Agreement (%)**
helped our organisation to connect with new people	78
helped our organisation to engage people of different backgrounds	81
helped our organisation to connect with activists	76
helped our organisation to connect with policy-makers	60
helped our organisation to connect with other activist organisations	69
fostered partnerships between our organisation and other civil society NGOs	71
helped our organisation to collaborate with others on issues affecting civil society	76

*Survey respondents selecting "somewhat agree" to "completely agree". Based on a 6-point scale, with a "don't know" option.

**Based on a 7-point scale, with a "don't know" option. Source: Activist survey. See Appendix B.

The Book Café even defies the wider cultural pressure that curbs women's freedom of movement in the public sphere. Even though the Book Café is situated in the heart of the Avenues area, where women walking alone after dark risk arrest for intent to commit prostitution, it serves as a rare 'safe space' oasis. It provides a stark contrast to most bars, where women are assumed to be 'working girls' if they venture out alone. Reflecting on Sistaz Open Mic, Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) said:

Having a space where I could go on my own, sit down, buy a drink and spend a Saturday afternoon without having anyone to ask me anything, so, even if content had not been in some way infused with civic engagement and some politics, that in itself did a lot for me as a young woman around being able to claim my space and have a voice. To realise that as a young woman, I can go out into the world, on my own, and be safe in an environment that isn't necessarily safe for me in other ways and other spaces.

Mhlanga goes on to describe how interacting with other female artists and activists and witnessing their artistry imbued with gender politics gave her inspiration and lessened her sense of isolation. "It begins

to feed your consciousness in a healthy way, so you can go into other spaces with confidence and with somewhere to draw from."

The culture and reputation that the Book Café established around empowering women and youth also extended to partner organisations' work. Sixty-eight percent of organisational respondents agreed that the Book Café helped their organisation to connect with individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues (Table 1). Sally Dura (2014) of Sally Women's Institute said:

The Book Café has a mixed kind of space that allows men and women to interact and be comfortable to discuss about gender issues, to discuss about critical issues of concern that advance women's rights ... We have done a series of gender forums, we have done trainings ... We have done public forums where women could feel safe to be in this space and discuss issues that concern them and contribute to democracy processes and civic society activism and promoting human rights.

Unfortunately the Book Café has not yet been able to offer similar levels of support to empower

LGBTI individuals, another marginalised community in Zimbabwean society. Some patrons¹⁰ and artists express homophobic views, which Book Café management has opted not to police, out of a commitment to avoid censoring content. Interviewees explained that such sentiments, as well as the fact that the Book Café's prominent location would put individuals at risk of violence and discrimination, have so far impeded LGBTI empowerment at the Book Café. Ironically, despite these limitations, some interviewees said that because of the Book Café's relative tolerance towards the LGBTI community, conservative members of government and the general public sometimes curtail their involvement in order to avoid 'guilt' by association with the community.

Fosters Connections and Collaborations

One of the Book Café's most important facets, in terms of fostering civic engagement, is simply to provide a meeting ground where activists and artists can forge connections and collaborations. Ninety-one percent of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café fosters civic engagement by helping activists to network with one another, and 88% agreed that it fostered collaborations between activists and artists (Table 2).

This role is more important in the Zimbabwean context, because few other places provide this function. Speaking about the Book Café's temporary closure of operations after the Fife Avenue eviction, Fungai Machirori (2014) explains:

There is generally a lack of other spaces that people can congregate and share ideas or just be in the same space for whatever reason, and I think that without that space, people then feel it a lot more. Then they feel isolated or they feel disjointed, separate from something they are used to, which is the interaction.

Facilitating connections not only lessens activists' and artists' isolation, it also yields very practical and tangible benefits useful for advancing social change. Tsitsi Dangarembga (2014) spoke of how female artists active in film, music and poetry leveraged connections made at the Book Café to learn new skills

to advance their careers, and forged new artistic collaborations. In one example, Tsitsi Mhlanga decided to dedicate a small grant, received from Oxfam, to curate an event centred on young men discussing and understanding gender-based violence through hip hop. Her direction was inspired by hip hop events she had attended at the Book Café. She found artists and a producer through connections made at the Book Café. The Book Café provided a space to launch the completed project, and close friendships made through the process led to other artist-initiated series at the Book Café (T. Mhlanga, 2014).

Interviewees also valued the Book Café because it offered them access to policy-makers, although this was most prevalent in earlier, less-polarised periods such as the late 1990s. Daniel Maposa (2014) explained, "There were discussions that involved issues of governance and issues human rights ... They not only built our consciousness in terms of information, but also managed to link us with government authorities". And one summit participant stated, "I am an NGO activist, and we have benefited much from this diverse audience. Government officials come here, diplomats come here".

The last quote references access to diverse audiences beyond policy-makers. Survey and interview data suggests that, as a meeting ground, the Book Café also provided opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage one another. Eighty-eight percent of survey respondents agreed that this was one way that the Book Café fostered civic engagement, and 81% of organisational respondents agreed that the Book Café helped their organisation to engage people of different backgrounds (Table 3). As Daves Guzha (2014) said:

I think the Book Café is very good place, firstly in Zimbabwe, that brings in such a diverse audience – whether you are an artist, a consumer, whether you are black or white. On age demographics it's across the board ... It has really proved itself to be a success story.

However, this sentiment was not universally held. A number of interviewees spoke to a perception that the Book Café was an elitist venue that primarily preached to the converted. For further discussion of this issue, see the *Extent of Collective Impact* section.

10: In the Zimbabwean context, "patron" refers to a customer or participant, who (although not officially a member) usually subscribes to an organisation's principles.

As a meeting ground, the Book Café helps to foster artists' and activists' connections and collaborations.

Lastly, the Book Café facilitated partnerships, collaborations and networking at the organisational level. Over 80% of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café fostered civic engagement by: helping connect activist organisations to each other (85%), helping connect individuals to activist organisations (88%), and fostering partnerships between civil society NGOs (82%) (Table 2). Lower, but still sizable, majorities drew their inferences from direct experience with their own organisations (Table 2).

Interviewees and mini-summit participants offered some insights into the ways in which these organisation-level partnerships and networking unfold, and the value this yields. Nhlanhla Ngwenya (2014), director of the Media Institute of Southern Africa, said, "Most of the bloggers that I have established relationships with, I met them at the Book Café and they have helped our organisation to strengthen its social media platforms". In another example, Tsitsi Dangarembga of ICAPA Trust launched a film club at the Book Café (see Dangarembga profile).

Representatives of other organisations, including Amakhosi and the Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights, credited the Book Café with building a pool of artists who also engage with their organisations. Michael Mabwe (2014) of Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights said, "For us, Book Café is a breeding ground, is a place where we can identify people who also join our movement and go and do their work outside this space [the Book Café]". The Book Café even played an instrumental role in launching a new, now widespread network of artists/activists—the Magamba Network (see Comrade Fatso profile).

Nurtures Social Change-Oriented Artists and Art

The Book Café also fosters civic engagement and activism by nurturing artists and art forms that often take on a social-change focus. Specifically, the Book Café has been pivotal in the development of Zimbabwe's poetry (particularly spoken word and 'protest poetry'), film, and the advancement of female musicians.

The Book Café "made its position clear, in terms of promoting new and experimental and innovative types of music and poetry", an anonymous activist remarks. "It's been a kind of stimulus for that kind of artistic production". Daniel Maposa (2014) shares this sentiment. "Poetry has grown quite tremendously as a result of the space that has been offered by the Book Café. I think it was a deliberate process to provide a platform for critical poets".

This support occurs in two ways. First, the Book Café's flexible and 'can do' culture impose few barriers for a burgeoning artist/activist to use the space to showcase his or her work. For instance, when Tsitsi Mhlanga wanted to realise her vision of male hip hop artists exploring issues of gender-based violence, the Book Café's approach was to ask, "What do you need from us to make it happen?" (T. Mhlanga, 2014). In another example, filmmaker Collen Magobeya (2014) explained that few people know about his 2010 film *On the Front Line*, which focused on the challenges facing people living with HIV/AIDS, because he could not afford to do a launch event. For his most recent project, which explored cervical cancer awareness, the Book Café gave him space to launch the project and the film has received much wider exposure.

Spaces in which artists, other creative people, and affiliated organisations develop, exhibit, or perform their work.

HOUSE OF

A young boy with short hair, wearing a white t-shirt, is performing on stage. He has his eyes closed and his mouth open as if singing or speaking into a microphone. His right hand is placed over his chest. The background is a large red banner with the words "HOUSE OF" visible in large, dark letters. The lighting is dramatic, with strong red and blue tones.



The Book Café not only provides an accessible space to showcase work, it also facilitates connections and skill-building (both informally and through workshops). In their activist profiles, we illustrate how Vera Chisvo and Felistas Kavhayo, a young female musician and filmmaker respectively, advanced professionally and overcame sexism in their disciplines by learning from other, more established female artists. Tsitsi Dangarembga (2014) also provides insights into how these interactions not only advance individual artists' careers, but can help to develop entire disciplines (see Chisvo, Kavhayo, and Dangarembga activist profiles).

In summary, the Book Café advances civic engagement through a number of means. It provides space for freedom of expression and debate. It empowers marginalised groups. As a meeting ground, it helps to foster artists' and activists' connections and collaborations. Lastly, it nurtures art and artists with a social change focus.

Model of Activists' Development

In the previous discussion we explored the ways in which the Book Café fosters civic engagement. Below, we probe the extent to which different functions actually help to foster individuals' development as activists. We theorise on how this happens. We explore which events, experiences or skill-building awakened activists' critical consciousness and inspired them to work on issues of public concern. We find that the Book Café provides a number of interconnected mechanisms that help to foster individual artists' development. Through exposure to art, discussions and ideas, artists and activists expand their thinking and awareness. Powerful art and infor-

mal interaction and networking lessen their sense of isolation and give them courage and inspiration to deepen their commitment to social change. New skills and collaborations expand their capacity to affect change.

Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents agreed, specifically, that the Book Café influenced their decision to become activists. Through interviews, a number of interviewees explained that as opposed to a 'eureka moment' at the Book Café, their political awakening was triggered by tuning into current events or by a range of personal experiences (often starting in early childhood) that made them aware of broader injustices. A higher percentage (66%) of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café helped them commit to remaining an activist (Table 3).

For some activists, the Book Café played quite a powerful role in inspiring their activism. Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) offers:

In terms of building my own personal activism ... I'd be hanging out with friends and exposed to different things – a book launch, or the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition giving a talk on something, or a Zimbabwe Poets for Human Rights performance. You're getting all this information that feeds your confidence. As you go out in other spaces that aren't as friendly, you stand up ... It's almost like a practicing ground.

As Tsitsi Mhlanga's quote reveals, multiple facets of the Book Café work in conjunction to facilitate activists' development and commitment. As opposed to a neat single cause-and-effect through line or 'indoctrination process', survey and interview data suggest

Table 3: The Book Café fostering individuals' activism

Has the Book Café fostered your own activism? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café...	Agreement (%)*
influenced my decision to become an activist	57
helped me commit to remaining an activist	66
helped me network with other activists	84
helped me connect to activist organisations	84
provided me with training relevant to my activism	31
exposed me to art that persuaded me to take action	75

*Based on a 7-point scale. Source: Activist survey. See Appendix B.

Activist profile: Nhlanhla Ngwenya



Our organisation, working in partnership with other media organisations such as the Media Alliance of Zimbabwe, has organised events at the Book Café. This is because the Book Café is a space that links you to colleagues. You can draw common interests with these colleagues ... (Ngwenya, 2014)

In his late 30s, Nhlanhla is the Director of the Zimbabwean Chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), a regional organisation with eleven chapters in different countries. His organisation promotes the protection of freedom of expression, access to information and democratisation of the media space. An advocate of freedom of expression, Nhlanhla says that he would undertake any activities that facilitate free expression. He has over 15 years' experience as an activist working around media activism.

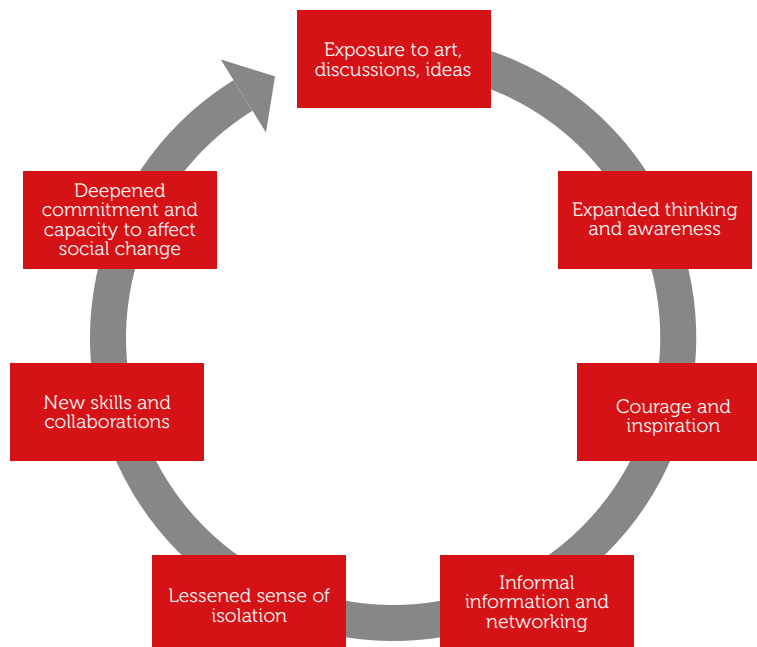
Nhlanhla has been visiting the Book Café since his days at the University of Zimbabwe in the mid-1990s. Recalling experiences at the Book Café in the late 1990s, Nhlanhla (2014) says, "I used to find the Book Café quite refreshing; I could interface with those people holding political offices. For instance I first met Edison Zvobgo at the Book Café. These discussions were robust and people could freely express themselves and engage with political leaders and authorities".

He also enjoyed reading hard-to-find literature at the Book Café bookshop. He notes, "Also they had a book shop with a wide range of books. Book Café would get you books by great pan-Africans, which you would not get from other places" (Ngwenya, 2014).

To him the Book Café has been crucial as networking space to meet with like-minded people. His first experience of protest poetry was at the Book Café, which is also when he first heard about and saw Poets for Human Rights. His organisation later collaborated with these poets on various freedom of expression campaigns. Their involvement helped attract crowds and communicate specific messages. He says that he only discovered the importance of freedom of artistic creativity through the Book Café. "This is when I realised that as an activist it is not good to be boxed in one sector but to collaborate with other sectors for a common cause" (Ngwenya, 2014).

In the mid-2000s his organisation benefited from bloggers working from the Book Café. He says, "Most of the bloggers that I have established relationships with, I met them at the Book Café and they have helped our organisation to strengthen its social media platforms" (Ngwenya, 2014).

He strongly believes that the Book Café has tried to offer a space where people can express themselves, and that the Café is doing well at achieving this aim.

Figure 2: Model of Activists' Development

that the Book Café's multiple functions as a creative space work in conjunction to expand participants' critical consciousness and inspire them to act. We depict these processes in Figure 1 and offer evidence drawn from interviews and survey findings.

Exposure to art, discussions, and ideas. Strong majorities of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café fosters civic engagement by presenting art that inspires people to take action, 88%, in general (Table 1), and 75% in relation to their own personal activism (Table 3). Farai Monro (Comrade Fatso) articulated a sentiment shared by many interviewees: "At the Book Café, I had an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with wider civil society" (Monro, 2014). Fungai Machirori (2014) elaborated:

What perhaps happened to Zimbabwe, over time, is lack of engagement with the outside, with the external, so this space sort of creates the environment for people ... to just find out about different things on how people live and interact. I think it creates space that is not so much mirrored in everyday society, where a lot of people are sealed off from external influences or people.

Expanded thinking and awareness. As participants gain exposure to inspiring works of art and topical discussions, their own thinking and awareness expands. John Stewart (2014), for instance, describes the Book Café not as an activist training ground, but "an area of stimulating people's enjoyment of culture and stimulating a kind of thinking". In a specific example, Daniel Maposa (2014) noted that the discussion series prior to the 2013 election "was very, very informative and linked us to the outside world ... They're actually building critical consciousness among us, the young artists".

Informal interaction and networking. The process of supporting activists' development seems to extend beyond passively watching performances or listening to others debate; it also hinges on interaction. Eighty-four percent of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café fostered their own activism by "helping me network with other activists" (Table 3). This quote epitomised a common refrain that we heard from interviewees and summit participants:

We go to Book Café for interaction ... that is where most artists who are involved in activism hang around

Activist profile: Comrade Fatso (Samm Farai Monro)



Since 1997 Samm Farai Monro, aka Comrade Fatso, has been involved in various forms of political activism. His core passion as an activist is working with youth to open up democratic space. Fatso has become one of the most popular poets and most controversial comedians on the Zimbabwean arts scene, as well as a pioneering cultural organiser. He is one of the founding members of Magamba Network. Magamba Network uses citizen journalism and new media to raise awareness of important issues affecting communities. It challenges social ills through spoken word and comedy, and it opens up spaces for democratic expression to deliver strong messages that cannot be ignored.

Fatso's relationship with the Book Café spans more than ten years. He started volunteering at the Book Café around 2004. He co-ordinated the BOCAPA open mic session, a platform meant to promote free expression among artists. This platform offered (and still offers) young and upcoming artists an opportunity to freely express themselves. In collaboration with a number of poets, including co-founders Victor Mavedzenge and Victor Moyo, Fatso then proceeded to launch the House of Hunger Poetry Slam at the Book Café – Zimbabwe's first-ever poetry slam. The slam continues to this day, promoting free expression and rebellious poetry.

His organisation, the Magamba Network, is an example of an organisation founded via the Book Café. As a space for networking and democratic expression, the Book Café not only cultivates individuals' activism, but catalyses organisations. Samm Monro (2014) said:

At the Book Café, I had an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with wider civil society. It was at the House of Hunger Poetry Slam at the Book Café where I met my friend and comrade Tongai Leslie Makawa, aka Outspoken, with whom I founded Magamba Network. Together we launched Magamba at the Book Café in November 2007.

Through various artistic platforms such as festivals, blogging, concerts and spoken-word events, Magamba Network makes a significant contribution to the struggle for social justice in Zimbabwe. Their work not only reflects on social injustice, but builds young people's capacity to use emerging technology and creative activism in the struggle for social change.

Vera Chisvo (2014) recalls, "Magamba Network – that's another group of people that inspired me. They are very blunt about everything. I went to a performance. There were police everywhere. I was so afraid to even be there. After it, I was less afraid to speak up ... It helps inspire me and other artists to speak out".

An interview with Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) also cited the Magamba Network's Zambezi News project, performed at the Book Café, to illustrate the power of satire to make political commentary. She said:

It would be laced with all these things – on first sight, it's comedians talking about the state of things in general. Actually, then you realise it's more than comedians, but activists that have sat down and crafted messages in a way that has allowed them to stay just on the right side. That has been brilliant.

The Book Café has remained a strategic partner throughout Magamba's work. It offers space to host events, solidarity in times of persecution, and an opportunity to reconnect with like-minded activists for the exchange of ideas. Fatso explains:

The Book Café is a key space for our events because it is an organic space for networking and it promotes events that foster free expression. It is open to the public, and that is where most open-minded audiences are found. For our artists, the space provided freedom of expression on stage while other venues ... are more commercially driven (Monro, 2014).

and also are given space to perform and to dialogue ... You know that if you go to Book Café, you meet like-minded people. You know that if you go to the Book Café ... you can meet other people that can inspire you. At the end of the day, the number of cultural activists grows. It is better for citizen engagement (Maposa, 2014).

Courage and inspiration. Moving from expanded awareness to action requires would-be activists to find the courage to speak out, despite the fear of potential ramifications. Vera Chisvo (2014) credits both the training workshops and art she witnessed at the Book Café with her growing awareness of civil society issues and commitment to speaking out. For instance, with a group of Book Café musicians, she found the courage to talk to sex workers about how they had found themselves in that situation. This then inspired her to create a song on the topic. In another example she described how a workshop on activism towards gender-based violence, led by renowned Jamaican-Canadian poet D’bi Young Anitafrika, inspired participants to write songs on the issue. The songs were then performed at the next Sistaz’s Open Mic (see Activist Profile: Vera Chisvo).

Lessened sense of isolation. Informal interactions also play an important function in lessening activists’ sense of isolation, thereby buoying their commitment to social change. One mini-summit participant explained that spaces like the Book Café are critical, “because it’s lonely being an activist, and it’s nice to know that you have got support”. Recalling Magamba Network events at the Book Café, Fungai Machirori (2014) said, “You could just be hanging out the whole afternoon, and everyone will just be singing the songs, because everyone was just so frustrated and were looking for outlets for that frustration”.

New skills and collaborations. The Book Café also helps to fuel individual activists’ development by facilitating skill-building and collaborations. As discussed in *Nurtures Artists* and the Chisvo, Kavayo, and Dangarembga activist profiles, artists acquire skills from other artists (both through formal workshops and informal interactions), which in turn help to advance their careers and their ability to create socially-engaged artwork. At the Book Café, however, these interactions and offerings are oriented towards helping artists develop professionally, as opposed to

teaching activists the principles of non-violent resistance or how to stage a strike. This focus may explain the modest survey findings that only 31% of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café had provided them with training relevant to their activism. As we discussed in the *Fosters Connections and Collaborations* section, the Book Café also helps individual artists/activists to forge new collaborations. Both the skills and collaborations expand their capacity to effect social change.

In summary, the Book Café helps to foster individual artists’ development through a number of interconnected mechanisms. Exposure to art, discussions and ideas helps to build artists’ and activists’ critical consciousness. Informal interaction and art provide courage and inspiration and lessen the sense of isolation. All these factors work in tandem to deepen activists’ commitment to social change, whereas new skills and collaborations increase their capacity to make a difference.

Limits to Book Café’s Collective Impact

Whereas the previous sections explore the ways in which the Book Café fosters civic engagement, and how these offerings contribute to individual activists’ development, this section attempts to gauge the extent of the Book Café’s collective impact on civic engagement. Although our findings present strong evidence that the Book Café fosters civic engagement, interviewees and mini-summit participants also questioned its extent and identified factors that limit its impact. Some credited the Book Café with an immense ripple affect whereas others saw the Book Café as primarily preaching to the converted. We documented varying opinions as to whether the Book Café was an elitist venue or one frequented by people from all walks of life. Finally, some interviewees and summit participants questioned whether the Book Café’s discussions, art, and even artists actually have a discernible impact on social change.

Sixty-one percent of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café was very or extremely important for fostering civic engagement in Zimbabwe, with even higher percentages for its role in Harare and the work of their own organisation (88% and 72% respectively) (Table 4). This data does suggest that the Book Café has a greater local than national impact. Some interviewees also questioned whether the

Activist profiles: Tsitsi Dangarembga and Felistas Kavayo



The Book Café nurtures both ends of the activism spectrum

For Tsitsi Dangarembga, activism is not a profession; it's simply being receptive to calls to action in society. She fulfils this de facto activist role as a filmmaker and playwright, and as the director of the Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa (ICAPA) Trust, which engages with all aspects of creative art to nurture creativity and promote broader change.

Felistas Kavayo, on the other hand, only considers herself "maybe an activist in the making". Raising her young twins and her studies are her current focus.

Yet the Book Café brought Tsitsi Dangarembga and Felistas Kavayo together.

The offerings and mentorship opportunities at the Book Café, which Tsitsi helped initiate and Felistas benefited from, evolved gradually over the last decade. This happened through both individual leadership and organisational collaborations.

Tsitsi started collaborating with Book Café in 2002, when ICAPA launched the International Images Film Festival for Women. Since that inaugural year, the Book Café has served as one of the festival's main film presentation venues. Now in its 13th year, The Namibian Weekender named it the most important festival in Zimbabwe in 2009.

Felistas was first introduced to the Book Café two years after the film festival launch, through a completely different organisation. While earning her cosmetology degree, she volunteered with a theatre organisation in order to learn theatre makeup. That organisation launched a platform for artists to discuss challenges at the Book Café, and Felistas participated.

Both Tsitsi's and Felistas's relationships with the Book Café deepened over the years. An organic conversation with Ian White, the manager of the Book Café, led Tsitsi to launch a women-oriented film club. The Book Café was looking for ways to play a more meaningful role in society, and Women Filmmak-

ers of Zimbabwe (a department of ICAPA) needed a venue. Over five years the film club evolved into a weekly series, with organisations beyond the Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe, as well as independent filmmakers, presenting films. Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe also held its organisational meetings at the Book Café, which is how Felistas became re-involved with the venue in 2008.

Felistas sought out Women Filmmakers in Zimbabwe because she wanted to learn the craft of documentary filmmaking. As she explains, "I wanted to learn the skills of filmmaking and how to gather information and tell the story, so that when people watch, they see it in their own eyes and really internalise it". Through Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe, she got free advice from more knowledgeable women about how to write proposals and network at functions. She even got the opportunity to work with Tsitsi on two short feature films and create her own independent documentary, a profile of an Italian-based NGO active in Zimbabwe. "For a young woman, I learned a lot", Felistas said. "I reached a certain level".

Neither Tsitsi nor Felistas's current focus revolves around the Book Café. Tsitsi is no longer the driving force behind the film club. In two years, when Felistas's children are a little older, she plans to become an active member of Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe again.

Yet the benefits of these programmes continue. Tsitsi explains, "There's a whole lot of young people who are interested in making film who meet at the Book Café". She comments that because Zimbabwe heavily censors its media, "We don't really have a functioning film sector ... having a place like the Book Café to meet and plan has been really useful for talking about how we can go forward, outside of the formal events that are put up by ministry". An average of 30 people attend each week to critique work, network, and learn what others are doing. On an individual level, programmes offered through Women Filmmakers of Zimbabwe helped Felistas to broaden her skills beyond her cosmetology training. Through her involvement, she learned a craft through which she could express her voice.

Book Café could really have a discernible impact for the nation, overall. Josh Nyapimbi (2014) said, “This research is pitched far too high compared to what I have experienced at the Book Café. The impact of the Book Café is more localised than nationalised”. However, only 7% of respondents indicated that the Book Café was not important to fostering civic engagement at the national level (Table 4).

The Book Café clearly does not operate as an island. For instance, 65% of organisational survey respondents indicated that the Book Café provided a venue for their civic engagement programmes (See Appendix B). John Stewart (2014) spoke to the Book Café’s role in providing a venue for other organisations’ artistic and civic engagement efforts: “Many of the organisations I know have been able to organise events there – Artists for Democracy does events at the Book Café, the Crisis Coalition does events at the Book Café ...”. Paul Brickhill (2014) went so far as to say, “Thousands of artists have been through that space, as well as artist linkages with the rest of the society, with the NGOs, the theatres, and the activists of every possible description”.

Through interviews, some activists credited the art, other events, and networks germinated at the Book Café with a huge ripple effect, while others expressed scepticism as to its extent.

In a world without the Book Café, my life as an artist or activist would be non-existent ... Without the Book Café, half the artists in Zimbabwe just wouldn’t exist ... Zimbabwe would be a completely different place, if wasn’t for the Book Café and the work they are doing (Chisvo, 2014).

If we have a thousand artists coming here, saying what they want to do in over 200 performances and no-one arrests them, no-one harasses them, they are free to do what they want to do. Those thousand artists don’t perform here only. They leave this place and continue to perform the same way they did this. And that’s where the engagement is, that’s where the civic engagement is happening (C. Mhlanga, 2014).

Activism should not be confined to the four walls of the Book Café. The organisation should expand its reach so that its impact is felt outside of the space. It is pointless to talk to yourself, and this is what is mostly happening at the Book Café ... You always see the same faces at the Book Café (Ngwenya, 2014).

The last quote, which characterises the Book Café as mostly preaching to the converted with activity restricted to its footprint, alludes to another challenge – the Book Café’s civic engagement impact may be limited, because the participants are the ‘usual suspects’. Although interviewees also argued powerfully for the importance of a gathering space for like-minded people (see the *Cultivate a Sense of “Home”* section), numerous interviewees raised this concern.

In a related critique, the Book Café also suffers from a reputation as an elitist venue in terms of income and education levels, so the ‘usual suspects’ may exclude important marginalised communities. The following quotes illuminate these issues:

For me the Book Café is catering for a certain class of people. It’s not really a grassroots kind of oriented programme. It doesn’t really attract someone from the township, except if they are in the civic circles. I

Table 4: The Book Café’s overall importance for fostering civic engagement

Please rate the overall importance of the Book Café for fostering...	Survey respondents (%) selecting*	
	Not at all important	Very or extremely important
civic engagement in Zimbabwe	7	61
civic engagement in Harare	5	88
the civic engagement work of the organisation with which you are affiliated	2	72

*Based on a 5-point scale, with a “don’t know” option. Source: Activist survey. See Appendix B.

Activist profiles: Vera Chisvo



I first engaged with Book Café four years ago. A friend of mine told me to sing at Open Mics on a Monday night. I used to go after classes with my friends. I was so nervous. I had to sing a capella music and I didn't have anyone to back me up. If it wasn't for the Book Café, I would have left the music thing a long time ago (Chisvo, 2014).

22-year-old Vera Chisvo is an up-and-coming singer and songwriter. The world around her inspires her lyrics, which broach topics that range from gender-based violence to corruption to human rights abuses. She grew up with a passion for assisting the community, working with orphans and just this year co-founding Project Ithemba with a friend. The project, which is centred on 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence, aims to assist victims of violence by working with them to produce artworks and dedicating the proceeds of the art sales to them.

Prior to her involvement at the Book Café, Vera's activist activities were limited. She started participating in the Book Café's workshops for female musicians, Monday evening Open Mic sessions and Sistaz Open Mic. Since then she has gradually felt more confident about speaking up. She recalled:


I guess with the growth of the whole activism, I went to a lot of workshops. The Book Café hosted a lot of workshops, mostly for promoting women in music. From going to those workshops, we kind of were given help as how to grow musically and not being afraid of speaking out about whatever we need to speak up against (Chisvo, 2014).

Vera represents a generation of young female artists whose artistic careers and activist work has been nurtured by the Book Café. The Book Café provided Vera with a platform for networking and self-expression, allowed her to showcase her work to peers, and offered her capacity-building workshops.

It also helped her and other women to counter sexism. Vera said, "Book Café helps people to gain confidence and it's a safe environment to work in the music industry. As a young girl, most people don't respect you, Book Café does" (Chisvo, 2014). In another example, she recalled a particularly memorable event organised by the Book Café in 2013:

Last year, there was a workshop at the Book Café as part of the lead up to 16 Days of Activism. It was graced by D'Bi Young, a Jamaican-Canadian musician/poet. We had a talk on activism towards gender-based violence. I thought that that workshop was really awesome. The female artists that participated, many of them had directly experienced domestic violence. The week after, we had a Sistaz Open Mic. A lot of the people wrote songs based on themes that they've had – gender-based violence. Since that workshop, it really drew my attention to it [gender-based violence]. It's a bigger issue than we're aware of, usually underplayed. That workshop helped us to remember that it's really affecting a lot of people. I also helped a lot of people to speak up, gain confidence, to get out of their situation (Chisvo, 2014).





“Thousands of artists have been through that space, as well as artist linkages with the rest of the society, with the NGOs, the theatres, and the activists of every possible description”.

In a world without the Book Café, my life as an artist or activist would be non-existent ... Without the Book Café, half the artists in Zimbabwe just wouldn't exist ... Zimbabwe would be a completely different place, if wasn't for the Book Café and the work they are doing.

would argue most people still really don't know what the Book Café is all about (Anonymous mini-summit participant, 2014).

Civic engagement at the Book Café is mainly aimed at empowering the arts sector; hence the majority of people that you find at the Café are artists (Nyapimbi, 2014).

The difficulty of its fostering citizens' engagement is that it [the Book Café] is ... a middle-class urban venue. [It engages] activists who are activists because they think they need to be ... It's the already converted who go to them, more than the otherwise (Stewart, 2014).

Whether these views are perception or reality is debatable. Survey and interview data suggest that it is, at least, not a universally-held perception. For instance, 88% of survey respondents indicated that the Book Café offers opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage with one another, and 81% of organisational survey respondents indicated that the Book Café helped their organisation to engage with people of different backgrounds (Table 2). An anonymous activist stated:

The Book Café is also conducive for people from different cultural backgrounds and people of different privilege status. So whether you are from the low-density suburbs, from the informal settlements, from the student circles or tertiary institutions, from the arts sector and others; it brings everyone into a space where what defines you, or what glues you, or what connects you is the need for a space to stimulate your activism ... There is no high-class profile or high-class lounge ... Everyone has a space.

Finally, some interviewees critiqued not the Book Café's outreach abilities, but whether topical discussions or art even translate into actionable change. One mini-summit participant greatly valued monthly poetry slams as a platform for people to voice their frustrations, but she comments:

But, I don't know how that quite translated into action. It's almost like you come and you share your experiences and your frustrations and we all get frustrated and we all get hyped up and angry and then we mellow down and we go back to the situations outside ... So how that then translates into real change in

your life and in your community life is something that I have not been able to quite gauge or monitor or see.

Tsitsi Dangarembga (2014) also questioned the ability of artists to reach and affect policy-makers, given the perceived stigma against artists in Zimbabwean society: "Who is going to listen to these artists? They are generally young people, so they don't have access to policy-makers". One anonymous interviewee longed for scenarios in which, after topical discussions, volunteers agreed to lobby particular policy-makers and the like, and report their progress to fellow participants. Vera Chisvo (2014) commented, "People can talk until the cows go home. Nothing happens. It's just talk".

The full reach of the Book Café's tentacles vis-à-vis civic engagement is near impossible to assess, even with an in-depth investigation such as this. In summary, the majority of survey respondents credited the Book Café with a robust collective impact on civic engagement – 61% rating it as very or extremely important for fostering civic engagement in Zimbabwe and 88% in Harare (Table 4). Interviewees expressed varied opinions as to the extent of the Book Café's civic engagement impacts. Some credited it with an immense ripple effect, while others critiqued it as an elitist venue that preaches to the converted and said that the activity that transpires there has limited potential to actually make discernible societal change.

Opportunities to Expand the Book Café's Impacts

Through our interviewees and mini-summit discussions, activists/artists suggested specific opportunities to expand the scope of the Book Café's civic engagement impact. These strategies specifically counter some of the limitations (perceived or real) described above. They longed to deepen and expand the scope of the Book Café's civic engagement impact through more touring of socially-conscious art outside the city of Harare, an imagined network of creative spaces across Zimbabwe, and more strategic use of traditional and social media. They also identified opportunities to make the Book Café more accessible to wider segments of the population than the Book Café's 'usual suspects'. By strategically offering some programmes free of charge and making an effort to curb homophobic hate speech, they hoped that the Book Café could attract greater participation from low-income people and begin to foster a more

tolerant culture towards LGBT individuals. Activists and artists made these constructive criticisms out of a strong desire to see the Book Café make even greater impacts.

Decentralise activities and a national network of creative spaces

Numerous interviewees and summit participants saw an opportunity to expand the Book Café's civic engagement impact by decentralising activities. They proposed touring productions and fostering a national network of creative space.

Three anonymous interviewees proposed that the Book Café intentionally deploy socially-grounded artworks to outlying communities, particularly the surrounding townships and high-density suburbs. One interviewee imagined touring productions created in partnerships with civic groups and NGOs on issues ranging from breast cancer awareness to HIV prevention to domestic violence. Another saw this as a strategy that would specifically make the Book Café's offerings more accessible to marginalised, low-income populations. He said, "Minorities should be encouraged to participate and this can happen effectively if the model is taken to the marginalised groups in the townships".

Other interviewees saw fostering a network of sister spaces or, as mini-summit participants put it, "cascading the creative spaces to other parts of Zimbabwe", as the most important avenue to deepening the Book Café's civic engagement impacts. An anonymous activist said:

It does carry a range of issues – disabled people's rights to issues relating to corruption and mining to issues relating to genetically-modified organisms and small-scale agriculture, as well as the human rights issues of violence and torture or democratisation or constitutions. The range is very wide. My question would be ... What is the multiplier effect? ... My sense is that its limitation comes from being located in one space in a particular location ... What hasn't really happened is to help foster other similar hubs in other centres ... One could imagine say a network of ten hubs in different urban locations around the country. That would be a better way to create such opportunities for networking, for exposure, for learning in different locations around the country.

Although the charge to foster a national network of sister creative hub spaces is probably too great a mantle of responsibility for the Book Café, it is well worth considering ways of advancing the idea, at least for partners such as Hivos, which are interested in seeding and maximising civic engagement in repressive regimes through the use of art.

More effective use of media

Interviewees and mini-summit participants also saw media (both traditional and social) as another opportunity to expand the Book Café's scope of impact. Some stakeholders saw an opportunity to expand the use of social media to grow audiences and facilitate dialogue through an online platform. The Book Café could build on its current effective use of Facebook and email. Speaking from personal experience, an anonymous summit participant said:

I follow the Book Café every day on Facebook. I get information on listserv from Pamberi Trust. I get the annual report as part of the listserv ... You can't use the physical space to measure its [the Book Café's] impact because it goes beyond. We get the content. We discuss elsewhere. Then it goes on.

Others saw potential to livestream performances and try to intentionally engage radio, TV and newspapers in order to, as a mini-summit participant phrased it, "get the work down to the people".

When we look at the statistics, ZBC 'casts to almost about 32% of the entire population of the country and the most-watched programme is the news. The most-listened-to radio station is Radio Zimbabwe, which 'casts to almost at 78% ... For mobile, they say there almost between 4.8-5.3 million people that have 3G connectivity. So we see we have a major courier that we are not making use of (Guzha, 2014).

By more effectively using traditional and social media, the hope is that the Book Café's civic engagement offerings can reach a much wider segment of the Zimbabwean population.

Reduce barriers to access

Lastly, interviewees and mini-summit participants offered some common-sense solutions to make the Book Café more accessible and welcoming to specific populations, notably low-income groups and LGBT individuals.

To counter the Book Café's elitist reputation and increase utilisation by low-income people, solutions boiled down to dollars and sense. "To make sure that people from all backgrounds can be free to walk in and listen to the dialogues that are going ... as well as the performances that are there", Daniel Maposa (2014) suggested strategically choosing to make some performances free. He noted, "Our economic situation does not allow people to pay sometimes on certain aspects of the arts". Dr Nhamo Mhiripiri (2014) echoed this sentiment, noting that high pricing at the Book Café makes it "difficult to bring friends and relatives from townships to entertain them there".

Secondly, although some feel that the Book Café's reputation is that of a space that is relatively welcoming to the LGBT community (as discussed in the *Empowers Marginalised Groups* section) it has not yet provided LGBT individuals with the levels of support offered to women and youth. Some interviewees report that in the Zimbabwean context, the political costs of providing equivalent levels of support for the LGBT population would be too high. For instance, an anonymous interviewee cautions that even holding an LGBT-community specific event "once ever and having it be publicly known" would not justify the risks. Participants who may currently be 'hiding in plain sight' would be at risk of violence and severe stigmatisation. In addition, the interviewee predicts that policy-makers would curtail future involvement with the Book Café because of the political costs of being identified with a gay-friendly space.

There are, however, more modest measures that could be taken as the Book Café works to influence a culture of tolerance in Zimbabwe. An anonymous interviewee notes that the Book Café's staunch commitment to free speech translates to artists, particularly reggae musicians, and some patrons freely expressing homophobic views. As in any democratic society, the Book Café must strive to find the right balance between freedom of speech and unrestrained expression of views that threaten, intimidate, and marginalise vulnerable populations. An anonymous summit participant said:

Reminding people that they are homophobic is not censorship. We should sharpen our political correctness and not say, "We open to everybody" ... We want

something that builds our humanity, so the values that are contained in the space and what we bring in space became quite critical.

As one critical first step towards incrementally empowering the LGBT community, the Book Café staff could engage artists and patrons who express homophobic views in constructive discussions. They could point out how their remarks harm others and run counter to fostering a culture of tolerance.

By way of recap: some interviewees and summit participants identified ways to transform perceived limitations into opportunities to deepen and expand impact. To expand the sphere of impact, they suggested that the Book Café tour socially-engaged artistic productions outside the city of Harare, use media more effectively, and create a network of national creative spaces. By reducing barriers to access, they argued that the Book Café could broaden participation beyond 'the usual suspects'. Through these opportunities, the Book Café's already-prominent civic engagement functions might be magnified. In the subsequent section, we explore the larger lessons that the Book Café offers to others interested in cultivating creative spaces to foster civic engagement in repressive contexts.

*I'm not sure what it is ...
Something that has drawn
me to that space and let
me feel comfortable, on
my own or with friends.
You never feel alone. It's a
place where I can go, if I
just want a place to go.*

LESSONS LEARNED

What lessons learned does the Book Café, as a model, offer to others interested in cultivating creative spaces to foster civic engagement in repressive contexts? What works, and why? Cultivating a sense of 'belonging' for participants; an eclectic mix of activity; a staunch commitment to freedom of expression; integrity, persistence, and savvy in the face of political repression, and; funding streams and physical space with relative autonomy: these are the values and offerings that interviewees saw as instrumental to deepening the Book Café's stewardship of civic engagement and activism. However, nothing is simple. Each principle is fraught with gnarly issues to navigate and questions to keep in mind.

Cultivate a Sense of "Home"

The following quotes point to one of the Book Café's most unique and important qualities in terms of fostering civic engagement – it has successfully cultivated a sense of belonging and ownership by artists and activists.

I'm not sure what it is ... Something that has drawn me to that space and let me feel comfortable, on my own or with friends. You never feel alone. It's a place where I can go, if I just want a place to go (Anonymous activist, 2014).

I decided to have the workshop at Book Café because of the environment. It is the place where artists have ownership (Jenje Makwenda, 2014).

I am an NGO activist. I want public dialogue ... I also consider this to be my space (Anonymous mini-summit participant, 2014).

The essence of why it [Sistaz Open Mic] is so successful is that the artists themselves take ownership of

the platform. It could actually run without a Pamberi Trust behind it, because artists own the platform. It is theirs (Brickhill, 2014).

Participants feel that they can be themselves. As an anonymous interviewee explains, it feels like home. Vera Chisvo (2014) characterises the Book Café as "a bubble", one in which you don't care about the norms of society and "you can really, truly be yourself". Participants also feel that they can shape the Book Café's assets (be it the stage or a programme offering) to match their vision or needs, i.e. "ownership".

! **Tip: Flexible, 'can do' organisational culture.**

How does the Book Café cultivate activists' sense of belonging and ownership? By fostering a welcoming attitude and remaining flexible, open and responsive to artist/activist ideas and needs. For instance, Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) explains that whenever she goes to the Book Café, staff ranging from the person working the door to the manager all take the time to greet her personally, give her a hug and ask how she is. When she approached them with her idea of producing a hip hop event exploring gender-based violence, she was met with a 'can do' attitude. She said:

It wasn't difficult. It took me going in and having a conversation. They asked me what my project was and picked a date. I just paid a small sum and we had to buy drinks. Then I had publicity ... That's the biggest thing – why I'm always grateful to Book Café. And knowing that they've done that for me, I'm sure they've done it for other people.

! **Tension to navigate: Gathering space for like-minded activists vs. broader inclusivity.**

Interviewees and summit participants, however, also pointed out that an environment that feels like home

to some might actually end up alienating others. Dr Mhiripiri (2014) offers the following characterisation:

Once you are in the Book Café, you will have this sense of alienation, where as much as it is a multicultural environment, there's still something contrived where you think people are trying to put too much effort in trying to look free and liberated at the expense of being themselves. It can be a feeling that you get or it can simply be how you view a group seated interacting at a corner ... When you have visitors or foreigners attending a conference, you can easily take them to the Book Café. But the problem with the Book Café is you cannot really take someone from the township there, lest they will be embarrassed in that space.

An anonymous summit participant offers a similar view, which he describes as “a quiet tension”. He offered the example of when Stella Chiweshe launched the Chivanhu Trust and invited participants from rural areas. The rural attendees waited to be ushered into the space. In contrast, he said, “a certain class of young people” walked right in. “They are confident, like they own the place.”

While fostering an inclusive culture that welcomes people from outside the city of Harare and from a range of income strata is a very worthwhile goal, there are some pros and cons to be considered. For instance, the Book Café's relative tolerance towards LGBT individuals was cited as one factor why both “people from the townships” and ZANUPF politicians may feel alienated. Although we know that in a polarised society this balancing act can sometimes be very difficult to achieve, we ask whether people should be less welcoming to gays and lesbians in an attempt to avoid pushing the homophobic majority outside its comfort zone?

In a similar vein, there can be arguments made for a space that fosters a sense of belonging, but primarily for a particular set of “like-minded” artists/activists. Stephen Matinanga (2014) pointed out that activists censor themselves in many other environments, “because you wouldn't know the person you would be talking to”. Anonymous summit participants also spoke powerfully for the need for spaces in Zimbabwe where activists can find inspiration and solidarity by connecting with others staunchly committed to social change:

I think preaching to the converted isn't necessarily meaningless. I think it is important that you keep on preaching to the converted, you keep them mobilised, oriented.

It's always a few people who act on behalf of the community or society ... so those select group of people need to interact among each other ... to strategise ... The idea that we can all be in a space and we are all going to engage and then we are all going to go back to where we came from and change things in a big substantive way is not true or feasible.

Being converted is not static. So it's not like when you are converted today, then you stay like that. You need to continue to re-engage.

In summary, one reason why the Book Café successfully fosters civic engagement is its ability to cultivate a sense of belonging and ownership. Artists and activists predominantly experience this culture of “home”, which is rife with trade-offs. Others working to foster civic engagement via creative spaces in other contexts should hold these pros and cons in the balance and strive to make mindful and appropriate decisions, given their unique needs.

Provide an Eclectic Mix of Activity

Many interviewees described a sense that there was always something going on at the Book Café – pure “entertainment” or socially-concerned art, civil society discussions, a place to eat and drink or hang out and get online, a spot to peruse hard-to-find pan-African social justice literature. These different offerings worked together to attract varied patrons and cross-fertilise ideas. As one anonymous mini-summit participant described:

[The Book Café] is a way of keeping in touch with what's going on ... concerts, a book launch, a bookshop, a debate, a film, have a drink at the bar, meet people (and I can do that on the Internet, but the Internet doesn't live and breathe ...). It's a very physical thing, the Book Café, and it will be a problem if I didn't have a point of access to all of these things.

As part of our research, which tried to determine which of the Book Café's programmes and offerings were most important to fostering civic engagement – a platform for socially-engaged art, a space for networking, a space for debate, the bookshop, the

Wi-Fi access, or the bar and restaurant. Mini-summit participants made a strong case for the importance of uncensored artistic presenting space, a space for networking and a space for debate, but were unable to reach a consensus about whether one offering was pre-eminent. Most importantly, they explained that the different offerings worked together; that the whole was larger than the sum of its parts. As Stephen Matinanga (2014) explains:

Other than it being a space for artistic expression, people can just walk in, sit and chat, even if there is no artistic event happening there. So for me, I keep looking at the Book Café as a space where people can just engage and discuss matters.

Even offerings that summit participants deemed relatively less important – Internet access and the bookshop – have played an important role, historically, and contribute to a critical mass of eclectic activity that draws and inspires diverse audiences. For instance, slightly more than a third of survey respondents agreed that the Book Café had helped them pursue activism by providing free or discounted Internet access.

What is it that you're going to throw out to get an ordinary person to come in? At what point do you infuse it with the civic without frightening them away?

However, in earlier years Zimbabweans had fewer Internet access points and the Book Café, which at the time provided free Internet, was an important way to access ideas from the outside world and connect and organise with other activists. Similarly,

literature played a critical role in the Book Café's early history (it was founded as Grassroots Books). Interviewees argued for the importance of the bookshop, even today. "I have access to books that I wouldn't find anywhere else in Zimbabwe", said one summit participant.

! Tension to navigate: Commercial and civic-oriented offerings working at cross-purposes.

Despite the benefits of offering diverse programming, different offerings sometimes work at cross-purposes, rather than cross-pollinating. Both John Stewart and an anonymous interviewee, for instance, find that commercial activity undercuts the Book Café's civil engagement functions:

The tension between being a civil society organisation, a kind of a cultural activist organisation, and being ... a commercial venue, that tension still confuses many people. They see Pamberi Trust also as a place where you to pay to get in, where you make money by having a rather noisy bar that interferes with people's ability to hear things happening during interesting meetings (Stewart, 2014).

It's quite busy. It sort of irritates me...It's more like a pub sometimes...If it's work, then I'm there. If it's not work, then I won't go. If I'm invited for a workshop, I would go (Anonymous interviewee, 2014).

Even though bar noise and entertainment-focused art may detract from some activists' experiences, others pointed out that these offerings can be a way to expand people's critical consciousness, sometimes without them even seeking out such an experience. Two mini-summit participants said:

If we are having an audience of people who are drinking beer at the bar, I think they will be only interested in a message, which is coming from music, for example. They will not be interested in someone lecturing them (Anonymous mini-summit participant, 2014).

Civic engagement on its own can be really boring. Art actually makes it exciting. You can imagine just sitting here from 8 o'clock up to 5 o'clock without all this sort of entertainment and everything and just sitting ... But then if you engage some artists, some paintings, some drawings, some singers, it becomes colourful and exciting (Maturure, 2014).

Again, the larger lesson is to try to infuse creative spaces with a critical mass of eclectic activity, which then cross-pollinates to attract and inspire diverse audiences for civic engagement ends. Those wishing to foster creative spaces must be mindful of functions that may impede visitors' civic engagement experience and must strive to make accommodations as necessary, while recognising the potential to awaken the political sensibilities of those who are not intentionally seeking discussions or art grounded in social themes. When the Book Café was in the Fife Avenue space, for instance, Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) explains that the "entertainment" happened in a separate part of the space (the Mannenberg) and at a later time slot. She saw it as a one-stop-shop in which she could float back and forth, but there was less noise transference from the bar/stage to the discussion area. On the challenges of striving to reach the right balance, she says:

It's a very difficult thing. There needs to be clear thinking around it. You need to deliberately look for entertainment that can go either way ... There are certain types of creative arts that allow for that kind of engagement – protest poetry, hip hop. There are genres of entertainment that have been born out of movements wanting to build a consciousness within societies ... What is it that you're going to throw out to get an ordinary person to come in? At what point do you infuse it with the civic without frightening them away?

Maintain Commitment to Freedom of Expression

One of the Book Café's clearest civic engagement functions is the ability to provide a space for freedom of expression, particularly in a context where few other such outlets exist. By giving citizens a voice, these platforms for freedom of expression directly empower participants and increase their sense of agency. As one mini-summit participant explained, "the people are the drivers of the content that is expressed artistically here". The ideas and art expressed also serve to inspire others, instilling them with the courage to speak out and helping them to recognise injustices around them. For instance Vera Chisvo (2014) described going to a Magamba Network performance at the Book Café. She recalls, "There were police everywhere. I was so afraid to even be there. After it, I was less afraid to speak up. So many times people just tolerate the situation". Because the Magamba Network performers were brave enough

to bluntly critique injustices, it inspired Vera Chisvo "and other artists to speak out".

⚠ **Tension to navigate: free speech vs. tolerance for minorities.**

However, commitments to freedom of expression don't come without risks, and challenges to navigate. As previously described in the *Reduce Barriers to Access* section, zero censorship means that some people may voice intolerant (in this case, homophobic) views. The managers of creative spaces must negotiate how to avoid impeding freedom of speech while still fostering a culture of tolerance and respect for vulnerable minorities.

⚠ **Tension to navigate: Risk of retaliation.**

In addition, in repressive regimes speaking out can place individuals – and the platform for the freedom of expression itself – at risk of political retaliation and violence. In the case of the Book Café this is not a hypothetical scenario, but one of past reality. For instance, one interviewee recalled a discussion on "national healing" at the Book Café in 2008/2009. A poet in attendance aired his views, even though others had noticed new faces (suspected to be secret police) in the audience, and the participation of a politician who was seen as responsible for many of the killings and rapes of the crisis had had a general silencing affect. The poet was severely beaten after leaving the event and had to play dead in order to survive the attack.

During the same period, Paul Brickhill wrote:

During the recent staging of a play about the end of a regime, actors were visited at their homes by police; this was deeply sinister intimidation. Yet the entire cast and crew said that the show must go on, and during the performances everyone, audience included, felt tension and fear – would "they" end the performance and arrest us all?

The audience was afraid but still packed the venue. Such are the small miracles we see daily in the arts. The performances passed without incident, but it adds to our sense of saturation – with torture, beatings and maiming, trauma to children, and barely an ability to escape, it is the poet, the writer, the musician who gently reminds that we have a future, a life to be lived (Brickhill, 2008).

In today's period of relative stability the risk of violence is less, and yet at the mini-summit, Book Café management described recent political stonewalling and efforts at repression. On the Book Café's loss of the Fife Avenue space, for instance, Brickhill (2014) said, "The eviction was clear from our point of view. It was an attempt to stop Book Café from operating". It took approximately 30 months, over 80 visits to city offices, and "hundreds and hundreds of pages of documentation of every conceivable type and regulation we have never yet seen..." to become fully licensed for operations in the new space.

The previous quotes attest to the level and types of political repression and violence that face the participants and organisers of creative spaces operating in repressive regimes. Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) explains, "The moment that you build consciousness, you will be politicised, especially in an African context. You will be a space that is noticed by the powers that be".

Integrity, Persistence, and Savvy in the Face of Political Repression

Interviewees and mini-summit participants reflect on the challenges of, as Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) puts it, figuring out "how to walk that line—being political without being politicised". They suggested a range of inventive strategies: from trying to achieve safety in numbers (a wide base of support would strengthen standing) to the importance of maintaining strategic relationships with national institutions. They said that organisers of creative spaces should strive to avoid being partisan or swayed by groups fighting against each other outside the artistic world. One interviewee even went so far as to suggest bribing government officials with favours, such as paid positions on the Board of Directors and nice dinners, in order to attempt to guarantee the introduction of legislation stating that any viewpoints expressed within the Book Café walls would be protected from government repression. At the level of the individual, multiple interviewees and mini-summit participants spoke to the powerful role that art can play to mask critiques, just enough to avoid running the risk of retaliation. For instance, Tsitsi Mhlanga (2014) recalls satirical 'news shows' presented through the Magamba Network:

It would be laced with all these things – on first sight, it's comedians talking about the state of things in general. Actually, then you realise it's more than

comedians. Activists that have sat down and crafted messages in a way that has allowed them to stay just on the right side. That has been brilliant.

What was Paul Brickhill's answer to the challenges of the appropriate response towards political repression? "In Zimbabwe we push back against the culture of fear by saying, at the Book Café, that you can think, create, feel and search for our best selves – indeed, you must" (Brickhill, 2008). Interviewees and summit participants recognise and respect the Book Café's commitment to integrity. Vera Chisvo (2014) said, "It's one of the few organisations with no corruption behind it. They say what they do". At the mini-summit, however, an anonymous summit participant took issue with the Book Café management personally flouting posted non-smoking signs.

While there are no hard and fast rules on how best to mitigate the risk of political repression, those wishing to foster creative spaces should apply integrity, persistence and context-specific savvy to carry their civic engagement work forward.

Obtain Relative Autonomy of Funding and Space

Lastly, in very concrete terms, the degree of control over revenue streams and assets (such as physical space) very much dictates whether or not creative spaces are free to pursue their own (or their participants') agendas. As the old adage goes, "he who pays the piper chooses the tune".

When asked to reflect on the worst (and, by extension, best) possible sources of funding for creative spaces wishing to remain free and democratic, mini-summit participants pointed out the ills of government funding in the context of repressive regimes:

Ideally, we expect the government to be the guarantee of freedoms, democratic spaces and so forth. Now you then have a situation where there is total failure in the government in doing that simply because if we look at ... our situation here ... the government actually becomes a tool to further the interests of a particular political party and then, at the end of the day, it then oppresses people, closes the democratic spaces ... Then you expect that same government to come in and give a hand to fight itself? ... I have seen that being very much impossible to achieve (Anonymous mini-summit participant, 2014).

Another summit participant cautioned that government funding was the most risky, because “they have the monopoly on violence”. He said, “It can make you disappear. It can arrest you. It can beat you up, and when the government beats you up, you may not find recourse, particularly in thug regimes”.

Most summit participants, however, saw potential problems with nearly all funding sources. Even donor funding (often from international development organisations in the context of repressive regimes) comes with a specific agenda. An anonymous summit participant explains the risks:

I feel that sometimes NGOs ... are the worst sources of funding, in the sense that, one, when donors come in, they have got an agenda that has been set already. They are reporting to somewhere else ... They don't just give money out freely or willy-nilly but they set certain parameters which must be met. And then the second thing is that, especially when times are tight, there is this tendency to create over-dependency on the donor when donors become too generous through the partners.

In general, summit participants viewed earned income or commercial revenue as the least problematic. Cont Mhlanga (2014) said, “To remain free and democratic ... you only get that from subscriptions ... If you want to do activism, you subscribe; you pay for it. Therefore ... you are not going to dance to anyone”. Some interviewees, however, cautioned that an over-dependence on money-making “entertainment” programming can dilute a creative space’s civic engagement focus. The challenge remains to cultivate earned income in ways that still promote social change – be it by sneaking in progressive content to unsuspecting bar-goers or through partner-

ships with socially-responsible entrepreneurs. The Book Café, for instance, hosts events to celebrate 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence.

Along similar lines, the more that the operators of creative spaces can maintain control over their spaces – through ownership or long-term leases – the less risk they face that the space may be shut down due to political repression, as Paul Brickhill (2014) characterised the Book Café’s loss of its previous space on Fife Avenue. Operators of creative space, however, must strategically weigh the pros and cons of potentially increased overhead and loss of future flexibility with autonomy and the potential for long-term stability and control.

To recap, interviewees and summit participants drew out five critical lessons learned from the Book Café model: cultivate a sense of “home” for participants; offer an eclectic mix of activities; maintain a staunch commitment to freedom of expression; integrity, persistence, and savvy in the face of political repression, and; relatively autonomous funding streams and spaces. Others seeking to cultivate creative spaces to foster civic engagement in repressive regimes can draw from these principles, as well as from the related tensions the Book Café continually holds in the balance – from balancing freedom of speech and tolerance for persecuted minorities to trade-offs between gathering spaces for like-minded activists vs. broader inclusivity.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study examined the Book Café's role in fostering civic engagement and activism in Zimbabwe. It asks what lessons this model of creative space offers to others wishing to advance civic engagement in repressive regimes.

We learned that stakeholders link four main Book Café offerings to civic engagement functions. The Book Café provides vital platforms for freedom of expression and debate. It empowers marginalised groups, specifically women and youth. As a meeting ground, it helps to foster connections and collaborations for activists, artists and organisations. Lastly, it nurtures social-change-oriented artists and art forms.

We found evidence that the Book Café fosters individual artists' development through a number of interconnected mechanisms. Artists and activists expand their thinking and awareness through exposure to art, discussions and ideas. Informal interaction and inspiring art lessen their sense of isolation and fuel their courage to take action. Not only is their commitment to social change deepened, but new skills and collaborations expand their capacity to make a difference.

We also probed the extent of collective civic engagement impact. The majority of survey respondents rated the Book Café as very or extremely important to fostering civic engagement in Zimbabwe and Harare – 61% and 88% respectively. Interviewees, however, expressed varied views on the extent of the Book Café's civic engagement impacts. Where some credited it with an immense ripple effect, others saw a much more modest impact. They characterised it as an elitist venue that mostly preaches to the converted. They questioned the potential for art and discourse taking place within to lead to discernible societal change.

Interviewees and summit participants also identified opportunities to deepen and expand the Book Café's civic engagement impacts. They suggested touring socially-engaged artistic productions, more effective use of media, developing a national network of creative spaces, and reducing barriers to access.

What can others interested in cultivating creative spaces to foster civic engagement in repressive regimes learn from the Book Café as a model? We synthesised five key values and offerings that interviewees saw as being key to the ability of creative spaces to steward civic engagement and activism: cultivate a sense of belonging in participants; an eclectic mix of activity; a staunch commitment to freedom of expression; integrity, persistence and savvy in the face of political repression, and; relatively autonomous funding streams and spaces.

This case study lends support to Hivos's assumption that space for cultural/artistic expression increases citizens' critical consciousness. Perhaps more importantly, the lessons learned could potentially become universally applicable strategies for cultivating creative space in order to foster civic engagement in repressive contexts. By broadening this line of inquiry to two or three other repressive contexts, Hivos and other creative space advocates and practitioners could gain additional insights and determine the extent to which the Book Café's findings are context-dependent. With an estimated 2.5 billion people living under the rule of dictators (Gen Next Foundation, 2014), the stakes are high and there is a great need to better understand and advance this tool for civic engagement.

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APPENDIX

A. Interviews

People Interviewed

Five anonymous activists: 6 June 2014, 10 June 2014 (3 interviews), 26 July 2014
Paul Brickhill, Book Café, 28 May 2014
Batsirai Chigama, Book Café, 17 June 2014
Vera Chisvo, Project Ithemba, 24 July 2014
Tsitsi Dangarembga, Institute of Creative Arts for Progress in Africa (ICAPA) Trust, 11 June 2014
Daves Guzha, Theatre in the Park and Rooftop Promotions, 9 July 2014
Daniel Maposa, Savanna Trust, 24 June 2014
Steven Matinanga, Hivos Harare, 14 July 2014
Samuel Matsikure, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), 10 June 2014
Dr. Nhamo Mhiripiri, Midlands State University, 30 June 2014
Cont Mhlanga, Amakhosi Performing Arts, 9 June 2014
Tsitsi Mhlanga, Women in Politics Support Unit, 25 July 2014
Samm Farai Monro (aka Comrade Fatso), Magamba Cultural Activist Network, 3 June 2014
Mthokozisi Mthokozisi, National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations, 10 June 2014
Nhlanhla Ngwenya, Media Institute of Southern Africa Zimbabwe Chapter, 6 June 2014
Joshua Nyapimbi, Nhimbe Trust, 9 June 2014
John Stewart, Action Programme for Civil Society Organizations, 26 June 2014
Tanja Vranic, Hivos, 26 June 2014
Ian White, Book Café, 28 May 2014 and 25 June 2014
Takura Zhangazha, independent activist, 6 June 2014

Interview Questionnaires

Book Café Evaluation – Activist Interview

Name:

Title:

Company/Organisation:

Date:

Intro

- Consent form, confidential. Recording interview.
- We're talking with a range of activists to explore whether and how the Book Café has fostered activism and civic engagement in Zimbabwe. We're interested in diverse perspectives. You may not have an answer to every question, that's fine. Feel free to pass.
- Any questions for me?

1. Confirm name, and title and organisational affiliation (if any).
2. Do you consider yourself an activist?
3. Can you tell me a little bit about your work in the civic realm? (Any organisations, specific causes, number of years?)
4. How would you describe your familiarity with the Book Café?

Probes:

- First involvement? What were your reasons for participating?
- What roles have you had, over time?

5. Thinking back over your personal experiences, can you share any specific stories of how the Book Café has (or has not) fostered civic engagement or activism?

Probes: Has the Book Café...

- Influenced your decision to become/remain an activist?
- Fostered networking/collaborations/partnerships with other activists, artists or activist organisations?
- Presented art that persuaded you or others to act?
- Presented art that sparked debate/provided a platform for dialogue?
- Helped draw in individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues?
- Offered opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage one another?

6. Next, I'd like to ask you to reflect on cultural hubs and activism, in general. Should cultural hubs foster civic engagement and activism? What would be the best or most important ways?
7. How would you rate the Book Café according to your criteria? What, if anything, would need to change or have been done differently to better meet your criteria?
8. Consider other people trying to promote civic engagement and activism in repressive regimes. Thinking about the Book Café, what are the most important lessons learned that you would want to communicate? Is there anything that should have been done differently with the benefit of hindsight?

9. Are there any questions I should have asked, but didn't? Any final comments?
10. Is there anyone else we should speak with whose perspective would really help us understand connections between the Book Café and activism and civic engagement?

THANK YOU!

Book Café Evaluation – Organisational Background Interview

Name:

Title:

Company/Organisation:

Date:

Intro

- Consent form, confidential. Recording interview
- Larger study: through interviews with activists, surveys, facilitated group discussions – trying to understand whether and how the Book Café has fostered activism and civic engagement in Zimbabwe. In our interview today, I'm also hoping that you can help provide critical background into the Book Café as an organisation, and its relationship with Hivos. We're interested in diverse perspectives. You may not have an answer to every question, that's fine. Feel free to pass.
- Any questions for me?

1. Confirm name, title, and organisational affiliation.
2. First, I'm hoping that you can help me get a better feel for the Book Café, in general. What's important for an outsider to understand?

Probes:

- a. When established?
- b. Missions/main objectives? Evolution over time?
- c. Insights on management/governance (staff, board)?
- d. Main stakeholders?
- e. Geographic sphere of influence? (Harare, Mashonaland, the whole of Zimbabwe)?
- f. Important funders (beyond Hivos)?

3. Next, let's talk about the Book Café's relationship with Hivos, in particular

Probes:

- a. Would you characterise it as a 'partnership'?
- b. Activities/projects supported?
- c. Why? Hivos's objectives for supporting the Book Café?
- d. Life span? When first identified and important changes in relationship over time?

4. As you know, this study explores whether and how the Book Café has fostered activism and civic engagement in Zimbabwe. Can you help me, as an outsider, to understand the necessary background?

Probes:

- a. Relevant programmes/activities?
- b. Key relationships with organisations? Individual activists? (Now and in the past)

5. Thinking back, can you share any specific stories of how the Book Café has fostered civic engagement or activism?

6. Next, I'd like to ask you to reflect on cultural hubs and activism, in general. Should cultural hubs foster civic engagement and activism? What would be the best or most important ways?

7. How would you rate the Book Café according to your criteria? What, if anything, would need to change or have been done differently to better meet your criteria?

Probes:

- Anything specific to the relationship between the Book Café and Hivos?

8. Consider other people trying to promote civic engagement and activism in repressive regimes. Thinking about the Book Café or its relationship to Hivos, what are the most important lessons learned that you would want to communicate? Is there anything that should have been done differently with the benefit of hindsight?

9. Are there any questions I should have asked, but didn't? Any final comments?

10. Is there anyone else we should speak with whose perspective would really help us to understand connections between the Book Café and activism and civic engagement?

THANK YOU!

B. Survey Results

Survey Dates: 19 June-10 July 2014

Mode: Internet survey delivered online via SurveyMonkey and supplemental phone surveys.

We emailed invitations to complete the survey to Zimbabwean activists and other Book Café participants (414 individuals), from targeted lists compiled by Hivos Harare and the Book Café. We also administered phone surveys to five respondents known to have limited computer and/or Internet access. To encourage participation, we sent two email reminders. The final response rate was 17% (53 complete, 14 partials) out of 391 valid email addresses.

The 'convenience sample' represented a substantial reduction in the number of potential respondents from the original research design, which specified administering the survey to broad distribution lists of Zimbabwean activists (the Kubatana listserv, etc.) and the full Book Café mailing list (an estimated 33,000 people in total). We made this change out of respect for strong concerns from the Book Café staff and Board that survey's focus on activism might result in misconceptions that the Book Café is "a regime change organisation", causing related negative political ramifications.

Both the response rate and absolute number of respondents were far lower than we desired. To put the response rate into context, in a meta-study of response rates used in organisational-level research, Baruch and Holton found an average response rate of 52.7% with a standard deviation of 20.4 (N=490 surveys, administered in 2000 and 2005) (2008). We were unable to find comparative statistics specifically for the Zimbabwean context. As Cook argues, how-

ever, response representativeness may be more important than response rate in survey research (2000).

Because the sample of convenience introduces selection bias, survey findings may not be representative of the entire population of civically engaged Zimbabwean residents and/or Book Café participants. Respondents may be among those more content or dissatisfied with the Book Café and its connection to civic engagement and activism.

Although we are unable to compare our distribution with the 'true' population, descriptive statistics indicate that our survey did capture a wide range of types of activists as well as people who were familiar with all stages of the Book Café's organisational history. Eight-five percent of respondents were moderately or extremely familiar with the Book Café. The survey captured response data from people familiar with all phases of the Book Café's development, though more respondents indicated that they had been involved in recent years (41% in 2005-2008 and 83% from 2009-present). Respondents indicated that they were involved in the following areas and causes: human rights (81%), gender (52%), media (48%), cultural rights (32%), LGBTI (10%), and students' rights (10%), among others (13%). Over half of respondents considered themselves activists (53%), whereas 42% did not identify as activists, but did indicate that they were civically engaged, and 5% were not civically active. For those who identified as activists, respondents included both seasoned activists (63% for more than 10 years) and those less experienced (19% for 6-10 years, 19% for 3-5 years). No respondents with two years or less experience as activists completed the survey. Men were over-represented in our survey: 61% vs. 39% women.

Table 1: Full Survey results

Q1. Please rate your familiarity with the Book Café.

	Not at all familiar	Slightly familiar	Moderately familiar	Very familiar	Extremely familiar	Rating Average	Response Count	
#	1	8	9	25	18	3,8	61	
%	1,6	13,1	14,8	41,0	29,5			
							answered question	61
							skipped question	6

Q2. In what period(s) were you involved in the Book Café. Please select all that apply:

	Response (%)	Response Count
1995-2000	15,2	10
2001-2004	25,8	17
2005-2008	40,9	27
2009-present	83,3	55
Not applicable	9,1	6
	answered question	66
	skipped question	1

Q3: Has the Book Café fostered civic engagement? (Civic engagement is defined as individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.) Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café has

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree	Don't know	Rating Average	Response Count
...fostered freedom of expression.									
#	0	0	2	6	15	23	1	5,3	47
%	0,0	0,0	4,3	12,8	31,9	48,9	2,1		
...presented art that persuades people to take action.									
#	1	0	4	10	18	14	1	4,8	48
%	2,1	0,0	8,3	20,8	37,5	29,2	2,1		
...presented art that sparks debate.									
#	1	0	0	10	10	22	1	5,2	44
%	2,3	0,0	0,0	22,7	22,7	50,0	2,3		
...provided a platform for dialogue.									
#	0	0	0	5	10	31	3	5,6	49
%	0,0	0,0	0,0	10,2	20,4	63,3	6,1		
...drawn in individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues.									
#	0	1	5	5	15	20	3	5,0	49
%	0,0	2,0	10,2	10,2	30,6	40,8	6,1		
...offered opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage one another.									
#	0	1	2	2	16	24	3	5,3	48
%	0,0	2,1	4,2	4,2	33,3	50,0	6,3		
...helped activists network with one another.									
#	0	0	3	6	9	27	1	5,3	46
%	0,0	0,0	6,5	13,0	19,6	58,7	2,2		
...helped connect individuals to activist organizations.									
#	0	0	4	9	13	20	2	5,1	48
%	0,0	0,0	8,3	18,8	27,1	41,7	4,2		

...helped connect activist organizations to each other.									
#	1	0	4	10	7	23	2	5,0	47
%	2,1	0,0	8,5	21,3	14,9	48,9	4,3		
...helped people and/or organizations take collective action on issues affecting civil society.									
#	2	3	4	13	10	17	2	4,6	51
%	3,9	5,9	7,8	25,5	19,6	33,3	3,9		
...fostered collaborations between activists and artists.									
#	1	1	2	7	13	24	2	5,1	50
%	2,0	2,0	4,0	14,0	26,0	48,0	4,0		
...fostered partnerships between civil society NGOs.									
#	0	2	3	13	14	19	5	4,9	56
%	0,0	3,6	5,4	23,2	25,0	33,9	8,9		
								answered question	61
								skipped question	6

Q4: Please rate the overall importance of the Book Café for fostering civic engagement

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	Don't know	Rating Average	Response Count	
In Zimbabwe									
#	2	6	12	18	16	2	3,7	56	
%	3,6	10,7	21,4	32,1	28,6	3,6			
In Harare									
#	0	0	4	19	30	1	4,5	54	
%	0,0	0,0	7,1	33,9	53,6	1,8			
								answered question	60
								skipped question	7

Q5: Which of the following best describes you?

	Response (%)	Response Count
I consider myself an activist.	53,3	32
I'm not an activist, but I'm civically engaged. (I have taken individual and/or collective action to identify and address issues of public concern.)	41,7	25
I am not civically engaged.	5,0	3
	answered question	60
	skipped question	7

Q6: Has the Book Café fostered your own activism? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree	Rating Average	Response Count
... influenced my decision to become an activist.									
#	7	2	0	4	5	6	6	4,3	30
%	23,3	6,7	0,0	13,3	16,7	20,0	20,0		
...helped me commit to remaining an activist.									
#	3	4	0	4	5	8	8	4,9	32
%	9,4	12,5	0,0	12,5	15,6	25,0	25,0		

...exposed me to art that persuaded me to take action.									
#	2	1	0	5	7	13	4	5,2	32
%	6,3	3,1	0,0	15,6	21,9	40,6	12,5		
...helped me pursue activism by providing free/discounted internet access.									
#	5	3	1	11	4	6	1	3,9	31
%	16,1	9,7	3,2	35,5	12,9	19,4	3,2		
...provided me with training relevant to my activism.									
#	6	5	3	8	3	6	1	3,6	32
%	18,8	15,6	9,4	25,0	9,4	18,8	3,1		
...helped me network with other activists.									
#	2	0	0	3	9	8	10	5,5	32
%	6,3	0,0	0,0	9,4	28,1	25,0	31,3		
...helped me connect to activist organizations.									
#	2	1	0	2	12	4	10	5,4	31
%	6,5	3,2	0,0	6,5	38,7	12,9	32,3		
...helped me take collective action on issues affecting civil society.									
#	4	1	1	3	5	10	7	5,0	31
%	12,9	3,2	3,2	9,7	16,1	32,3	22,6		
								answered question	32
								skipped question	35

Q7: For about how long have you been an activist?

	Response (%)	Response Count
Less than a year	0,0	0
1-2 years	0,0	0
3-5 years	18,8	6
6-10 years	18,8	6
More than 10 years	62,5	20
	answered question	32
	skipped question	35

Q8: In what areas or causes are you involved? Check all that apply.

	Response (%)	Response Count
Cultural rights	32,3	10
Gender	51,6	16
Human rights	80,6	25
LGBTI	9,7	3
Media	48,4	15
Students' rights	9,7	3
Other (please specify)	4	4
	answered question	31
	skipped question	36

Q9: Do you pursue your civic engagement independently, as part of an organization, or both?

	Response (%)	Response Count	Response Count
Independently	10,5	6	
As part of an organization	22,8	13	
Both	66,7	38	
	answered question	57	
	skipped question	10	

Q10: Has the Book Café fostered the civic engagement work of the organization with which you are affiliated? Please rank the following possible ways. The Book Café

	Com- pletely disagree	Disagree	Some- what disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Some- what agree	Agree	Com- pletely agree	Don't know	Rating Average	
...provided a venue for our organization's civic engagement programs.										
#	2	4	2	4	5	7	12	1	5,1	37
%	5,4	10,8	5,4	10,8	13,5	18,9	32,4	2,7		
...helped our organization's efforts to promote freedom of expression.										
#	2	3	1	3	5	12	10	1	5,3	37
%	5,4	8,1	2,7	8,1	13,5	32,4	27,0	2,7		
...helped our organization's efforts to use art to persuade people to take action.										
#	0	4	1	9	5	9	7	1	5,0	36
%	0,0	11,1	2,8	25,0	13,9	25,0	19,4	2,8		
...helped our organization's efforts to use art to spark debate.										
#	0	4	3	8	7	10	6	3	4,9	41
%	0,0	9,8	7,3	19,5	17,1	24,4	14,6	7,3		
...helped our organization connect with new people.										
#	0	3	0	2	7	6	15	3	5,8	36
%	0,0	8,3	0,0	5,6	19,4	16,7	41,7	8,3		
...helped our organization connect with individuals and groups who have been historically excluded from public dialogues.										
#	1	2	1	4	3	10	13	4	5,6	38
%	2,6	5,3	2,6	10,5	7,9	26,3	34,2	10,5		
...helped our organization engage people of different backgrounds.										
#	1	1	0	3	3	11	15	2	5,9	36
%	2,8	2,8	0,0	8,3	8,3	30,6	41,7	5,6		
...helped our organization connect with activists.										
#	1	1	0	4	4	11	13	3	5,8	37
%	2,7	2,7	0,0	10,8	10,8	29,7	35,1	8,1		
...helped our organization connect with policymakers.										
#	1	6	0	6	6	9	6	1	4,8	35
%	2,9	17,1	0,0	17,1	17,1	25,7	17,1	2,9		
...helped our organization connect with other activist organizations.										
#	1	4	0	4	5	8	11	2	5,3	35
%	2,9	11,4	0,0	11,4	14,3	22,9	31,4	5,7		
...helped our organization collaborate with others on issues affecting civil society.										
#	0	4	1	2	6	9	10	1	5,4	33
%	0,0	12,1	3,0	6,1	18,2	27,3	30,3	3,0		
...fostered partnerships between our organization and other civil society NGOs.										
#	1	3	0	5	5	9	11	1	5,4	35
%	2,9	8,6	0,0	14,3	14,3	25,7	31,4	2,9		

...provided our organization with access to social media platforms to promote our civic engagement work.										
#	3	8	1	5	3	11	8	1	4,6	40
%	7,5	20,0	2,5	12,5	7,5	27,5	20,0	2,5		
									answered question	45
									skipped question	22

Q11: Please rate the overall importance of the Book Café for fostering the civic engagement work of the organization with which you are affiliated.

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	Don't know	Rating Average	Response Count	
#	1	3	7	21	13	2	3,9	47	
%	2,1	6,4	14,9	44,7	27,7	4,3			
								answered question	47
								skipped question	20

Q12: You indicated that you do not consider yourself civically engaged. What are the reasons? Check all that apply.

	Response (%)	Response Count	
Work, family, or other commitments don't leave enough time.	50,0	1	
I don't know enough about issues in civil society.	0,0	0	
I'm informed, but don't care enough about the issues.	50,0	1	
My friends and family discourage me.	0,0	0	
The risk is too great. I fear repercussions from government.	0,0	0	
I'd like to be civically engaged, but I have had trouble connecting with other people or organizations interested in collective action.	0,0	0	
Other (please specify)		0	
		answered question	2
		skipped question	65

Q13: What, if anything, could the Book Café provide or do to increase your civic engagement?

	Response Count		
	1		
		answered question	1
		skipped question	66

Q14: To help us better interpret survey responses, please indicate your age and gender:

Age	18-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-64	65 and over	Response Count	
#	0	10	18	9	16	0	53	
%	0,0	18,9	34,0	17,0	30,2	0,0		
Gender	Male	Female	Response Count					
#	33	21	54					
%	61,1	38,9						
							answered question	54
							skipped question	13

Q15: Would you like to participate further in this study? Check all that apply.

	Response (%)	Response Count
Please consider me as a potential interviewee. I'd like to share lessons learned or a story about how the Book Café has, or has not, fostered civic engagement and activism.	47,9	23
Please notify me when the study is published. I'd like to read it.	91,7	44
	answered question	48
	skipped question	19

Q16: Please provide your contact information, if you'd like to participate further in this study. We will not share your information.

	Response Percent	Response Count
Name:	100,0	35
Email Address:	97,1	34
Phone Number:	91,4	32
	answered question	35
	skipped question	32

