

# The Slawson Award

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Advancing geography  
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## David Mandiyanike

### Education

- BSc (Hons) in Politics and Administration, University of Zimbabwe
- MA in Development Studies (specialised in Public Policy and Administration), Institute of Social Studies, The Hague (2000)
- PhD in Development Geography/Public Administration, Royal Holloway University of London (2006)

### Current position

Teaching Assistant at Royal Holloway University of London.



### Slawson Award

David received the Slawson Award in August 2003 for his doctoral field work to Zimbabwe entitled *In search of capacity: The case of Zimbabwe's rural local authorities*. The study examined critically the performance of rural local authorities in Zimbabwe over a period of ten years (from 1993 to 2003) that had been progressively declining. Although money, equipment and other resources were made available through the Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programme (RDCCBP) and other donor funded programmes to salvage the RDCs, the downward trend still persists. The study questioned whether there was 'capacity building' or 'capacity erosion'? Was there a willingness to build lasting capacity or it was being driven by donor conditionality (for the liberalisation and democratisation drive or mere grantsmanship)? The research was designed to unravel issues in capacity building, decentralisation and governance through a mixture of theoretical reflection and more empirically focused case studies in eight Rural District Councils in Zimbabwe. The fieldwork was undertaken for a period of six months. The initial analysis revealed some gaps that needed to be filled to get a holistic picture of the findings, so David made another short visit to Zimbabwe.

Although the study concludes that capacity building efforts in Zimbabwe's RDCs were largely unsuccessful in their highly held aim of 'developing the capacity of all RDCs to plan, implement and manage on a sustainable basis their own development programmes', this does not mean that capacity building efforts had totally failed. Some RDCs had negative capacity. RDCCBP was too rigid, derailed by the central government's half-hearted attempts towards decentralisation and failed to allow RDCs to learn-by-doing. Because of Zimbabwe's crisis, national level politicians were peremptory in their demands for RDC better results and an opportunity to learn was lost. The plethora of other rural development projects coupled with the projectised nature of RDCCBP condemned capacity building efforts to the rigidities of projects and programmes, yet capacity building is a continuous process with supplantive learning.

### Since the Slawson Award

During the research analysis, David was able to attend the Britain-Zimbabwe Society Research day at St Anthony's College, Oxford University and presented a paper 'The Historicity of Zimbabwe's rural local government'. He also presented a paper 'Local government in Zimbabwe – lessons of experience' at the Royal Holloway University of London Postgraduate Symposium.

Following the PhD, David spent six months as a visiting lecturer at Reading University and University College of London teaching third year undergraduates on Post-colonial Africa and Tropical Africa courses respectively. Since then he has returned to Royal Holloway as a Teaching Assistant.

For David, the Slawson Award was a timely intervention. Given that the tuition fees rate for overseas students was (and still is) very exorbitant, he had to channel all his meagre resources towards paying the tuition fees. Furthermore, the current crisis in Zimbabwe and the collapse of the value of the Zimbabwe dollar substantially reduced the value of his savings. David is forever indebted to Paul and Mary's generosity; the achievement of the PhD degree was his life long dream and the Slawsons have an indelible part in that dream.