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A Case for Decentralization in Zimbabwe's Local Government System: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The issue of decentralization in Zimbabwe's local government system has been topical since the colonial era. In the post-independence epoch the expectation was that the new majority government would address the centralization of governance which was motivated by racial imbalances. However, decentralization was not achieved as local government was not recognized in the Lancaster House Constitution adopted at independence in 1980. For years this allowed the central government to control all the local government structures in the country. The relationship between local governments and the central government became bitter and tense after the formation of a formidable opposition, MDC, which has been controlling most urban local authorities since its formation. The 2013 Constitution has not improved things either as the central government has not been willing to implement the new law to its latter and spirit. In all this it is the citizens who have been bearing the brunt as there has been poor service delivery owing to the bad relationship between the center and local structures. The study found out that if decentralization is fully implemented in Zimbabwe it has the potential of bringing efficient and effective service delivery, citizen participation, democracy and accountability in the local government system. The paper also makes recommendations on what needs to be done to achieve decentralization in the country's local government system.

Keywords: Decentralization, local government, service delivery, accountability, democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of decentralizing power, responsibilities and resources to lower levels of government has been the secret behind the rise of most developing economies around the globe. The presumption is that lower levels of government, for example, a local government, is better placed at perceiving the desires and demands of its constituents for public services than a distant centralized government [1]. By placing government closer to the people, decentralization fosters greater responsiveness of policy-makers to the will of the citizenry and results in a closer congruence between public preferences and public policy. This is not only because decision-makers in decentralized units are likely to be more knowledgeable about and attuned to the needs of their area than are centralized national-government decision-makers, but also because

decentralization permits these decision-makers to be held directly accountable to the local citizenry through local election [2].

Internationally local governments have been recognized as lower levels of government whose functions critically impact the wellbeing of citizens. Various international instruments and guidelines have been crafted to articulate the importance of giving the lower levels of government some semblance of autonomy in order to deliver public goods and services to their citizens in an effective and efficient manner. However, in some countries like Zimbabwe, the role of local government is underrated even though it is the level of government that often has the most significant contact with citizens.

Zimbabwe has a two tier system of governance, that is, the central government and local governments at the lower level. Local governments are mandated by the constitution to stimulate good governance, development and provision of quality services to the citizens within their respective jurisdictions. The assigned functions and responsibilities of the local authorities in Zimbabwe mainly involve the collection of local taxes, the regulation of business activities within their respective territorial jurisdictions, the collection of waste collection, the provision and maintenance of public cemeteries, public markets and retail homes [3]. However local governments in Zimbabwe have been arguing that the interference of the central government in areas such as appointment of bureaucrats, budget making, tender process and making of by-laws has been affecting them in their operations. Decentralization has also been aggravated by poorly trained local staff, poorly designed local institutions and limited financial resources [4].

The Paper seeks to make a case about the rationality of having a decentralised system of governance in Zimbabwe's Urban Councils and Rural District Councils. The Paper will present a conceptual framework which basically introduces the key concepts around the study as well as the theory that anchors the same. Following is a historical context of the challenges which have been hindering the decentralization in Zimbabwe, capturing the period of the Lancaster House Constitution which existed from independence in 1980 to 2018 and the period after the new 2013 Constitution.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Local Government

Local government can be defined as a decentralised level of government, democratically established, charged with a service delivery mandate, comprised of legal entities with defined powers, charged with jurisdiction over a particular area within the limits set by national legislation and largely self-financing [5]. Local government refers to the provision and maintenance of public services and infrastructure at local levels utilizing funds generated from the local community, in addition to grants and loans from central Government, and other sources. In essence, local government refers to the establishment of participatory and democratically elected structures that can identify with the needs of the people at grassroots level and ensure the translation of those needs into the actual programs and projects and maintenance of essential services [6]. According to Ojofeitimi [7], the word "local" connotes that councils are meant for small communities and the word "government" means that they have certain attributes of government. The concept of Local Government may be seen as a segment of a constituent state or region of a nation state, established by law to provide public services and regulate public affairs within its area of jurisdiction [8].

Local government's relationship with the central government can either be premised on centralization or decentralization. Centralization sees urban governance as local administration that is an extension and integral part of a sovereign state. This implies that the state has "an obligation to supervise local government to ensure that powers delegated to the subnational units are not overstepped" [9]. The decentralist approach sees urban governance as enshrined in constitutional arrangements thereby enjoying autonomy. The extent and magnitude of decentralization differs. Political decentralization is the creation of local government through "devolution of powers to represent local councils, each with separate legal existence" [10].

In multi-party jurisdictions like Zimbabwe, there are different parties controlling local governments and the central government. This has been the case since 2000 when the main opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) entered the electoral field. This has resulted in a lot of confrontation and tension between the central government and urban local authorities which are mainly controlled by the MDC. Absence of central government representation at local level makes political players at central government level feel like they are on the verge of losing political support and on the road to political exit. The fear emanates from the perception of a rival in creation, and the problem ceases to be simply about the functions of local government, but political infighting and survival [11].

Decentralization:

Decentralization connotes generally the transfer of political power from central governments to sub-national governments. In principle, decentralization is perceived as a means of improving the efficiency and responsiveness of the public sectors [1]. Decentralization is defined as the transfer of legal and political authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions, from the central government and its agencies to field organizations of those agencies, subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public corporations or statutorily derived autonomous government units [12]. There are generally three types of decentralization namely political decentralization, administrative decentralization and fiscal decentralization. Political decentralization refers to the distribution of authority, responsibility and financial resources from central government to local regional governments or other decentralized units such as semi-autonomous public corporations, regional or functional authorities [13].

Fiscal decentralization focuses on maximizing social welfare by having a combination of economic stability, allocative efficiency and distributive equity [13]. Fiscal decentralization include organization and procedures for increasing citizen participation in selecting political representatives and in making public policy, devolution of powers and authority to local government and institutions and procedures allowing freedom of association and participation of civil society organizations in public decision-making, in providing socially beneficial service and in mobilizing social and financial resources to influence political decision making [14].

There are different forms of administrative decentralization, namely deconcentration, delegation and devolution. Deconcentration is a situation whereby central government undertakes some of its responsibilities through regional or local offices without transferring power or responsibilities to any other organization [15]. Delegations is where responsibility for decision-making and service delivery is transferred by central governments to semi-autonomous organizations not wholly controlled by it, but remained directly answerable to it for functions delegated to them

[1]. Devolution is where the local government is not directly accountable to central government although they have to work within statutes and rules set by it. Although these can severely constrain the actions of local government, in principle it remains primarily politically responsible to its electorate [15].

The most common theoretical argument for decentralization is that it improves the efficiency of resource allocation. One pillar of this argument is that because subnational governments are closer to the people than the central government, they are considered to have better information about the preferences of local populations than the central government [16]. In African countries, the failure of most central governments to provide adequate services to citizens has left local governments at the forefront of local public service delivery [17].

Public Service Delivery

Good quality public services are critical to the lives of citizens and ensuring their provision is an essential function of government. Effective service delivery is the provision of services to a buyer in such a way the buyer's expectations can be met or exceeded while, at the same time, the business remains viable to [18]. Effective service delivery is rendering services that correspond to the customers' desires, needs and expectations. This concept emanates from the perceived need to treat members of the public that require government services like a private-sector entrepreneur would treat their customers [19].

It is important to note that governments are not alone in this; experience and evidence built up over a number of decades has shown that citizens and civil society also have important roles to play in improving and delivering public service and achieving social outcomes. The services provided by local government authorities will only be perceived as addressing their needs, if they have value and provide satisfaction. Value is defined as a ratio between what the customer gets and what they give [20]. Relationship marketing aims to build a long term mutually satisfying relations with key partners, customers, suppliers, distributors, in order to maintain their long term preference and business [20]. And it therefore follows that local government authorities must establish and maintain sound relationships with the citizenry by providing high quality services. The local councils should allow for full participation of the community in these development plans.

Makanyeza et al [21] posit that, "strategies to improve service delivery include increasing citizen participation in the affairs of the local authority, partnerships with the community in service delivery, flexible response to service user complaints, value for money and ensuring that service users pay their bills on time, sound human resources policy, strategic public service planning, capacity building and employee motivation, managing change, dealing with corruption and improving accountability, segregation of duties between councillors and officials, partnering other players and outsourcing services." There has been a strong international trend towards improvement of local service delivery, both in terms of performance standards set and the mechanism for planning and implementing service improvements [22]. African cities cannot be ushered into the present century without systematic improvements in accountability and service delivery at local level.

Efficient service delivery theory

The theory talks about the core business of local governments which is to provide basic services to the people in its jurisdiction. This theory is relevant to this paper as it captures the objectives of the study. The central point of the efficiency-service model is that the primary purpose of the local government systems is to provide social services such as law and order, local roads, primary education, sanitation and others efficiently [23]. The core argument of the efficient-service delivery school is that local government exists to help to ensure efficient-service delivery [24]. William Machenzie, (1954), the leading advocate of the efficiency service school, quoted in Adeyemo [25] notes that service delivery to the local people is expected to pre-occupy the resources, power and time of the local government. Proponents of the efficient service school also argue that the core business of local government of ensuring efficient service delivery to grassroots people is so important that it should even override other functions like democratic participation in the governance process.

By nature of local government brings governance closer to the people, making translation of community preference into responsive policy and programs more likely [26]. Indeed, locally based decisions and development programs are often more practical and sustainable in that they acknowledge and accommodate local diversities and historical complexities that may exist within a particular locality [23]. In such circumstance, the provision of local public goods and services will reflect more, the local tastes and preferences. Again, in view of the fact that all problems are not central in nature, such problems that are not central in their incidence requires decision as to how to address them by the persons within the area where the incidence is most deeply felt [23].

Local government can harness the support of different players in the private and voluntary sectors in their locality to improve the provision of services [27]. It is, to a large extent, the zeal and need to reposition the local government for greater and more effective service delivery that perhaps provides the impetus and imperative for the various local government reforms in most political systems [23]. In Zimbabwe, the new constitution which was voted for in 2013 has provisions which seek to strengthen the capacity of the local governments to deliver services effectively and efficiently to the local and grassroots people.

CHALLENGES TO DECENTRALIZATION IN ZIMBABWE

Decentralization has been an elusive dream in post-colonial Zimbabwe's developmental agenda. An analysis the epoch of the independence constitution and that of the 2013 constitution shows that the central government still wants to have a stronghold on urban councils and rural district councils.

Post-independence Era

Zimbabwe was a British colony from around 1890 to 1980. The successive colonial governments designed a governance system and culture which favoured whites and discriminated black Africans. Upon achieving independence in 1980, the country inherited a racially based model of governance that served the interests of white Europeans and segregated white from black Africans [28]. Local governments served the interests of the white community and in the urban areas only the whites were allowed to participate in electoral processes, blacks were disenfranchised from the same. The urban and rural councils were administered to the advantage of the white colonialists while the blacks were relegated to the status of third rate citizens and the

blacks were confined in terms of living to what was called Tribal Trust Lands (Reserves) or Native Lands, African Councils and later changed to District Councils [29].

The colonial local government has been described as racist, exploitative and subservient in character. Ordinarily, the existence of Africans in urban areas was prohibited under colonial legislation unless they were providing cheap labour in mines and factories. This justifies the enactment of laws which required every African to possess a pass indicating their names and that of their employer where applicable [30]. It is for this reason that the new government in the post-independence era embarked on a mission to address the colonial system of governance which was premised on racial discrimination.

However, local government was not formally recognized in the new Lancaster House constitution which was adopted on the eve of the country's independence. Local government was regularized by a piece of legislation and this effectively meant that its existence and form was determined by the national government [31]. Classified into urban and rural local authorities, local government could only exercise those powers granted by ordinary legislation. The primary pieces of legislation were the Urban Councils Act and Rural District Councils Act. The urban councils and rural district councils were assigned powers and responsibilities which included municipal service delivery, taxation and welfare services. It is important to note that the aforementioned Acts provided the Minister of Local Government sweeping powers that allowed him to set policy parameters and to be involved in the day to day running of local authorities. The Minister had the power to approve by-laws, budgets and plans before they could become operational or binding and to rescind or alter decisions of the Councils (55, 56).

The government made an attempt at decentralization through the 1984 and 1985 Prime Minister's Directive which introduced development coordination agencies at village, ward, district, provincial and national levels with the aim of fostering bottom up planning [17]. The roles of these agencies included information supply, implementation, delegated planning, independent planning, policy making and review and coordinating and managing national development plans in areas of their jurisdiction [32]. However, these development coordination agencies were affected by lack of financial resources and human capital and interference from the central government. As a result, their core business of development planning became insignificant and fruitless as it became clear that the central government was not committed to the letter and spirit of making local government a distinct and autonomous sphere.

In the 1990s local government actors came up with the mantra 'local government we want' and it turned into a movement which articulated a vision of local government with security of tenure, stable resources for delivering services, active citizen participation and local government institutions with an elevated status vis-à-vis state institutions [33]. The 1996 adoption of the Thirteen Principles of Decentralization by the Cabinet signified a significant breakthrough in terms of the movement's efforts at carving a stable existence for local government and a substantive transfer of functions from national government [33]. However, the Cabinet Principles died a still birth as they lacked constitutional backing. The government did not make efforts to have constitutional provisions which defined the existence of local government structures in the country. The growth of opposition political party participation in local government from 1999

reflected efforts at growing good national governance from below, which triggered a recentralization of the Zimbabwean state [33].

1999 saw the formation of a formidable opposition party in the history of the country's body politik. The new party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), has been enjoying support in the urban areas. The MDC has been winning elections in most urban councils including the biggest 4 cities, that is, Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare. This created tension and acrimony between the opposition and the ruling Zimbabwe African National Unity Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) which up to now is still in charge of the central government. Centre-local relations are confrontational and contested due to divergences in local autonomy and central control. The challenge was compounded by the fact that local governments were just an appendage of the central governments as they existed through the pieces of legislation. In this instance, local government becomes "a creature of statute subject to the vagaries and predilections of central political administrations" [17].

Politics has affected the relationship between the central government and most local governments in Zimbabwe. The bad relations between MDC and ZANU PF have seen the local government Minister firing a number of MDC Mayors and Councilors over the last two decades. Absence of central government representation at local level makes political players at central government level feel they are losing political support and are on the road to political exit. The fear emanates from the perception of a rival in creation, and the "problem ceases to be simply about the functions of local government", but political infighting and survival [34]. There are cases like Harare, Chitungwiza and Gweru where the Minister of Local Government fired the Mayor and all the Councillors and replaced them with Commissions. He appointed the Commissioners himself. On a number of occasions, the Minister has reinstated council staff who, in the opinion of central government has been dismissed unfairly. Invariably, this has weakened individual Councils' control of their executives throughout the whole cycle from recruitment to retirement or dismissal [35].

Since then the central government has made various moves to wrestle powers from the local governments and put it in the hands of the Ministries of Local Government and its proxies. In 2005, the central government recentralized the water and sanitation functions and assigned them to a newly created parastatal, Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA). This was a failure, however, and the water and sanitation functions were restored to local government [31]. Allegations of the Minister using his supervisory powers over local government for political gain are widely documented [34]. Local autonomy was compromised in many ways. Some scholars trace the underperformance of local authorities to this excessive supervisory role of the Minister both in law and practice [36].

Some of the dismissed were mayors Mudzuri (Harare, 2004), Lionel De Necker (Gwanda 2012), Ivory Matanhire (Bindura 2011), Itai Masaka (Deputy Mayor Mutare 2010) and Brian James (Mutare 2012). All these mayors were replaced with pro ZANU PF Party individuals [37]. Councillors in a majority of these urban councils were also dismissed and replaced with what is called special interest councilors who are also ZANU PF Party supporters. From the year 2000 onwards, hyperinflation, dwindling of the national economy, shortage of foreign currency and high interest rates became some of the challenges facing urban councils [37].

Post 2013 Constitution

The need for decentralization and local government reforms was one of the issues which were advanced by the opposition, civil society and other actors in the call for a people driven national constitution. In the year 2000 the country rejected a constitution which was crafted by a government created Constitutional Commission. Since then calls for an inclusive crafting of a new constitution continued and it became one of the main tasks of the Inclusive Government which came into force in 2009. A new constitution was written following countrywide citizen and stakeholders consultations and in 2013 it received widespread support of 95% in a referendum. The 2013 constitution signaled a departure from the pre-2013 situation particularly in strengthening and enshrining citizen power; in constitutionally formalizing the sub-national spheres of government (provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities); in assigning a mandatory share of national resources and calling for realignment of laws governing local government [33].

Zimbabwe's new Constitution adopted in May 2013 states that governmental powers and responsibilities must be devolved between the national government, provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities which are expected to ensure good governance by being effective, transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of local people [38]. The Constitution states that political power, policy making decisions, resource raising and distribution, as well as administrative and governance responsibilities are meant to be devolved through three tiers of government namely the national government; provincial and metropolitan councils; and local authorities which include urban councils and rural councils [39]. The Constitution (2013) spells out the objectives of devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities as

> *"to give powers of local governance to the people and enhance their participation in the exercise of the powers of the State and in making decisions affecting them; to promote democratic, effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government in Zimbabwe as a whole; to preserve and foster the peace, national unity and indivisibility of Zimbabwe; to recognize the right of communities to manage their own affairs and to further their development; to ensure the equitable sharing of local and national resources; and to transfer responsibilities and resources from the national government in order to establish a sound financial base for each provincial and metropolitan council and local authority."*

The national elections which followed the constitutional referendum in 2013 saw ZANU PF defeating MDC and retaining state power signaling the end of the power sharing arrangement. Since then the ZANU PF government has not made efforts to implement provisions of the Constitution outlined in Chapter 14 which will guarantee decentralization in local governance. It is clear that the government still wants to control local governments through the Ministry of Local Government there by relegating Councils controlled by the opposition to the periphery. Wekwete [40] weighs is in on this point by noting that, "the biggest challenge since the constitution came into being in 2013 is the political will needed to craft all the necessary legislation to make the 'new' local government system work. This challenge has come about because the pressure of the power-sharing Inclusive Government which created the constitution

has receded, leaving the ruling party to take its time in implementing the various chapters of the new constitution." The main potential constraint on achieving a fully devolved unitary Zimbabwe state will be lack of or minimal political will for it by a ZANU-PF dominated government whose anti-devolution stance has been publicly articulated by its most senior officials [39].

The new Constitution still gives too much power to the central government. Section 264(1) states that, ""whenever appropriate, governmental powers and responsibilities must be devolved to provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities which are competent to carry out those responsibilities efficiently and effectively". This clause has far reaching consequences on the survival of provincial and metropolitan councils and local authorities in the country. Since the national government remains the supreme tier of government, it means that the Constitution guarantees it power to determine whether a particular province has the appropriate competence to efficiently and effectively govern local affairs and institute locally relevant socio-economic development interventions for the benefit of the majority of the local citizens [39].

The ZANU PF government clearly lacks political will to embrace devolution which is provided for in the 2013 Constitution. The late President Mugabe and now Mnangagwa have been appointing ZANU PF members as Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs in charge of the country's ten provinces. Maisiri [41] notes that, "the appointment of Ministers of State for Provincial Affairs has dashed hopes of decentralising power. These provincial ministers will report directly to the President, hence their interaction with provincial councils or mayors of respective areas will be superficial. They will override every programme set to be taken in their respective provinces." The presence of these Ministers is clearly the reason why the central government has not put in place Provincial Councils as provided for in the Constitution. The Office of the Minister of State for Provincial Affair is clearly meant to usurp the roles and responsibilities of Provincial Councils.

The Urban Councils Act, Rural District Councils Act and other sectoral pieces of legislation assign to local authorities the power impose user-charges, property tax, levies, licensing fees and the authority to sell or lease land or buildings (55, 56). However, they prohibit a local authority from raising user-charges without the permission of the Minister (Urban Councils Act and Rural District Councils Act). Not having the final say over the determination of tax rates means that local authorities are unable to vary rates in line with local economic developments to improve revenue mobilization [42]. The net effect is that local authorities will raise very little revenue for themselves. The economic hardships faced in the country have also made it difficult for individual and corporate ratepayers to pay for the services provided by the Councils. The failure by the Constitution to guarantee the financial autonomy of local authorities will perpetuate the marginalization of local authorities that have 'stunted local development since independence'. It is submitted that the constitutional objective to establish a sound financial base for each local authority must require the decentralization of taxes to local level [42].

Similarly to the period before the 2013 constitution, the new local government system still gives the central government powers to have a say in the appointment and removal of bureaucrats. Section 132 of the Urban Councils Act states that the Local Government Board must approve the appointment of a Town Clerk before they can assume office. "Section 135 of the same act says, (1) the Local Government Board shall interview every person whose name has been submitted to it by a council… and may (a) approve a person recommended by the council concerned; (b) refuse

to approve any person recommended by the council concerned" (55). In 2016 there was a case in which the Local Government Board successfully challenged the Harare City Council's appointment of Mr. James Mushore as its new town clerk on the basis that the city violated provisions of the Urban Councils Act [43]. This just shows that local authorities have no autonomy in the appointment of their personnel.

The 2013 Constitution confers sweeping supervisory powers to the Minister of Local Government. These powers are often used excessively, raising concerns among scholars about the abuse of supervision powers for political ends [17]. This is all the more pertinent in a local government environment that is politically charged and where the ruling party at national government level is different from the party that controls key local government institutions.

In 2013 before the general elections, the then Minister of Local Government cancelled all the debts that citizens were owing urban local governments. The effects of this move are still being felt today as the local governments were left with no source of revenue. This was worsened by the calls made by the Minister of Local Governance to scrap water and utility debts of the period between 2009 and 2013 for every Zimbabwean resident ahead of the 2013 Elections. Though the move was applauded by many defaulters, it undoubtedly prejudiced and incapacitated local authorities‟ efforts to repair, expand, and deliver water and effective refuse collection to urban residents. There are many instances where politicians use service delivery as patronage tools and take advantage of their positions to gain support. There are instances where there are mismatches between National and local government strategies and policy frameworks. When situations of this nature occur, they are referred to as common governance constraints because they are inherent to the political system and they seem to occur and repeat themselves in the same manner, in different sectors and countries [36].

Local authorities have also not done much in the implementation of the new Constitution. There are some provisions on socio-economic rights like citizen participation which they can operationalize without legislation or any interaction with the central government. This suggests that governance and service delivery deficits cannot only be explained by how national government has behaved but how individual local governments and the sector as a whole have conducted themselves including the nature of their relations with citizens [33].

RATIONALE FOR DECENTRALIZATION IN ZIMBABWE

The paper seeks to make a submission that decentralization is the solution to the problems being faced in the Urban Councils and Rural District Councils. Local governments possess better access to local preferences and, consequently, have an informational advantage over the central government in deciding which provision of goods and services would best satisfy citizens [44]. If implemented to its latter and spirit as stated in the 2013 Constitution, decentralization will see improved service delivery, citizen participation in local government affairs as. Decentralization being an important feature of democracy and it will see some accountability in local authorities.

Service Delivery

UN Habitat [45] defines services as the goods that are created, provided and managed to support productive and reproductive societal activities, contributing to human dignity, quality of life and sustainable livelihoods. Local governments play a pivotal role in the delivery of public services in their jurisdictions. The 2013 Constitution has elevated services to being rights that citizens

should be afforded. The rights stipulated in the 2013 Constitution include work (S24), education (S27 and S75), shelter (S28), social security and care (S30), legal aid (S31), sporting and recreational facilities (S32), agricultural land (S72), environmental rights (S73), right to healthcare (S76) and the right to food and water (section 77).

Residents in the various local authorities in Zimbabwe have had to contend with a plethora of problems which include uncollected refuse, bursting sewers, erratic water supplies, roads filled with potholes which have become a nightmare for motorists [46]. The argument that has been constantly submitted for decentralization of power and responsibilities to local authorities is that they are better placed to respond to the demands and needs of their constituencies as they are closer to them. Citizens will therefore be willing to pay for the services they receive from the local authorities which is critical in the service delivery matrix. Some citizens in Zimbabwe have been arguing that they do not feel motivated to pay for rates and taxes as they are not getting the services like water and garbage collection from the local authorities. In a decentralized set up services would be more demand responsive hence increasing the households' willingness to pay for services. In other words, households and their families are perceived to be more willing to pay for and maintain services that match their demand [1].

The assumption is that the transfer of power and responsibilities to local authorities may result in better services as councillors are elected and retained into office based on their performance on service delivery. In this case the citizens will retain those councillors who have been performing well in delivering public goods and services in their term of office. Those councillors who were not performing well in terms of people centred services will likely be voted out of office. Decentralization to locally elected governments will improve political incentives and service delivery outcomes if voters are better informed and likely to use information about local public goods in their voting decisions for electing local governments, if there is greater social homogeneity and coordination of preferences for local public goods, and if political promises are more credible at local levels [47]. It is against this background that councillors will work hard in satisfying the citizens as they want to be voted back into office when election time comes. The central government has no incentive to deliver services as compared to the local government which is directly elected into office by the citizens within that locality.

Local governments have the potential to produce and deliver public goods and services to the local population at a lower cost than a distant central government. The usual 'middle-men syndrome' and bureaucracy involving contract procedures would be reduced [1]. Furthermore, more functions will now be performed at the local level, thereby creating opportunities for locals with technical, managerial and leadership skills to remain in the region, thus reducing the rural/urban brain-drain, and enhancing local capacity to manage local affairs and spearhead local development [48].

Decentralization facilitates a better division of labour in the management of public affairs. The creation of strong local governments with the capacity to effectively manage local affairs enables central government to concentrate on national and international issues. This both improves efficiency and creates more effective checks and balances. The central government can concentrate on macroeconomic policies for the entire economy rather than be pre-occupied with delivering services to all the communities [1].

Citizen Participation

Decentralization is a huge step towards the achievement of democracy as it will see the participation of citizens in the governance of their local authority. Decentralization can empower and enable the poor, permitting greater choice and stricter control over their rights [49]. Citizen participation in local affairs creates a virtuous circle that "ensures that majority needs are heard" and "helps increase the voice of poor people in local affairs" [50].

This popular citizen participation ideology and "political wave" is also closely tied to the spread of multi-party political systems in many sub-Saharan African countries [49]. The whole idea is to increase the number of local voices in the decision matrix. This local voice which is considered a hallmark of good governance is imagined or seen to be one of the main drivers of locally relevant service delivery and local development. It is also seen as one of the vehicles that "enables the public to participate effectively in the management of public affairs and is thus conducive to local democracy" [51].

However, it has been argued that although in some local authorities citizens are afforded the opportunity to participate in local affairs, their recommendations have not always been implemented. The politicians and bureaucrats usually ignore or disregard citizens' views when they are making decisions. This suggests that for people's participation to be real and effective in a decentralized system, their local government and provincial or county government must be accountable to locals. It is only through such local accountability and transparency that decentralization can realistically be seen as providing a platform for local citizens to effectively influence decision making in local affairs [39].

Accountability

Decentralizing responsibility for public services to lower tier of government implies that the politician who is responsible is now locally elected one making him now more accountable to the citizens [1]. Elected officials at local government level will strive to do better during their term of office knowing that their re-election into office will depend on their performance. However, in the Zimbabwean context, this might not be entirely true as the electorate vote for the Councilors along party lines. In urban councils the electorate mostly votes for MDC councilors and in the rural district councils the electorate usually goes for the ruling ZANU PF councilors. These voting trends have carried on since 2000 despite widespread complains about poor service delivery.

Decentralization of powers and responsibility to local governments will allow residents associations and watchdog groups the opportunity to push for accountability, transparency and integrity and the easy flow of information between the local authorities and the citizens. They will be able to push for local public officials to respond periodically to questions concerning how they use their authority, how they used the resources and what was achieved with them. Strengthening local government accountability is necessary in the context of enhancing initiatives for greater decentralization and for local government managerial autonomy. New checks and balances may be required to assure that access to local government services and the quality of public services is not compromised, especially for the poorer segments of the population [52].

Democracy

Decentralization provides a process at the local level through which diverse interests can be heard and negotiated and resource allocation decisions can be made based on public discussions [53]. The presence of such a local process subscribes to the ideals of democratic local governance since it observes and respects pluralism in policy making, and policy choices, and emphasizes greater active citizen participation in decision making which is a sign of respect for their political rights and civil liberties [39]. Furthermore, a devolved system "emphasizes the presence of mechanisms for fair local political competition, transparency, and accountability, government processes that are open to the public, responsible to the public, and governed by the rule of law" [53]. In this case decentralization becomes a key enabler in the democratization agenda.

Decentralization represents the most effective means of curbing excessive concentration of power at the centre, which is a distinctive feature of the existing governance model, and which is inimical to several basic tenets of good governance, for example, openness, transparency, fairness and probity. It reduces the amount of resources or aspects of national life that are directly controlled and influenced by central authorities and hence reduces the extent to which central government is able to exercise dominance over all aspects of public affairs [1].

RECOMMENDATIONS

The realignment of the Urban Councils Act and the Rural District Councils Act with the 2013 Constitution is paramount to the achievement of decentralization in the country's local government system. Local government legislation must ensure that citizens have a platform to participate in the affairs of their local authority and also give them power to hold their elected officials accountable. Citizens should be afforded the opportunity to participate in meetings to do with such critical issues as budget, waste, housing and water management. The input of citizens is important in ensuring that the local authority officials are in touch with how they are performing in terms of services they are delivering. Councilors should have regular report back meetings with residents to bridge the communication gap and enhance accountability, transparency and participation of residents.

It is important for various Associations which represent residents to be active in raising consciousness on local government issues among the citizenry. In some cases the citizens do not know their rights and roles and responsibilities on issues that affect them. The Associations must, therefore, play a key role in disseminating information on what is happening at local authorities and educating the citizens on their rights enshrined in the laws of the land. The local authorities must also make use of these Associations in reaching out to the citizens in their jurisdiction. In cases where city fathers fail to implement agreed issues and perform below par, Residents Associations should take advantage of the 2013 Constitution which clearly includes socio-economic rights, to mobilize residents to advocate for services. The Constitution also guarantees the right to information in Section 62 which states that; "Every Zimbabwean citizen or permanent resident, including juristic persons and the Zimbabwean media, has the right of access to any information held by the State or by any institution or agency of government at every level, in so far as the information is required in the interests of public accountability."

The Minister of Local Government should respect the autonomy of local authorities as prescribed in the 2013 constitution. History has shown that the interference of the Minister has everything to do with political mileage as opposed to safeguarding the interests of the citizens. On the other

hand, political parties must also take stern measures to stop corruption and bad corporate governance that has been reported in my local authorities around the country. In extreme cases the law allows for Mayors and Councilors to be recalled by the Parties which sponsored them into office. This will go a long way in ensuring that councilors and Mayors concentrate on deliveries public services in an effective and efficient manner.

Local authorities should be given the powers to hire and fire their employees. At the moment human capital affairs of local authorities is handled by the Local Government Board which is an appendage of the Ministry of Local Government. As a result the senior management in local authorities becomes more loyal to the Ministry as the appointing authority when in actual fact they should be loyal to the elected officials who represent the residents. Local authorities should be given the powers to manage their own human resources according to their needs. This will enable them to supervise, monitor and evaluate the performance of their staff in an effective way.

The success of local governments also lies in the capacitation of both rural and urban local authorities so that they can deliver effective and efficient public services. Capacity refers to the ability, competency, and efficiency of local governments to plan, implement, manage, and evaluate policies, strategies, or programs designed to impact on social conditions in the jurisdiction [54]. The quality of human capital at local authorities is the key dimension of capacity. They have to be equipped with the knowledge, technology and equipment to carry out their work in an effective and efficient manner.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that lack of political will is standing in the way of decentralization of the country's local government system. In the post-independence era local government was not formally recognized in the Constitution, it was only provided for in a piece of legislation. The 2013 Constitution corrected this situation by including and clearly defining decentralization of local government structures. Again, decentralization has not been achieved up to now as the government has not done much to align existing legislation with the new Constitution. The idea of decentralization is being threatened by the bad politics between the ruling party which controls the central government and the opposition which is in charge of most Urban Councils. The research concluded that the rationale for decentralization of Urban Councils and Rural District Councils is that it will improve service delivery and citizen participation in local government affairs. It will also ensure that there is accountability and democracy at the local level.

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