Administrative Decentralization by Devolution in Local Government at Ward Level: A Case of Choma District, Southern Province

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to analyze administrative decentralization by devolution in Local Government at ward level in Choma District, Southern Province using a qualitative approach in order to obtain in- depth explanation of the phenomenon. The study was informed by the public participation in governance theory.

The study's population consisted of officers from the Local Authority and Ward Development Committees. The sample size consisted of a total number of twelve participants and two focus group discussions (FGDs) from Wards Development committees (WDCs) which constituted of six members from each WDC in Choma Central Constituency. This study employed a non-probability sampling technique such as purposive sampling technique to select the respondents to participate in the study. Interview guides and focus group discussions were used to collect data. The study established the roles of WDCs; and that WDC members had little or no knowledge of the roles of WDCs. A number of challenges faced by WDCs affecting decentralisation were established such as lack of motivation for WDC members; inadequate provision of stationery, lack of transport for movements. Furthermore, the study established that WDCs had the capability of driving decentralization. The study concluded that WDCs are capable of driving decentralization. However, there is need to enhance decentralization through capacity building WDCs and equipping WDCs for an effective and efficient service delivery through dealing with challenges that are affecting the pace of driving decentralization.

Key words: decentralization, Ward Development Committees, participation

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Every government has a quest to provide effective governance through enactment and implementation of public policies such as decentralization policy. This is what many governments including Zambia are considering decentralization to enhance participation of the citizenry and improved service delivery.

Global Perspective on Decentralization

Decentralization is one mechanism that has been globally implemented. Decentralization is, nowadays, a popular process worldwide (Brosio, 2000). Many countries around the world have been attempting—for several reasons and with varying degrees of intention and success—to create or strengthen sub-national governments in recent years (Smoke, 2003). Decentralization has been pointed to have been driven by population growth. In 1989, there were sixty nine democratic countries, which grew to one hundred twenty-five by 2014. In 1989, 2.28 billion people lived in democratic countries, and by 2014, it has increased to 4.18 billion (Piccone, 2016, p. 2). Such drastic increases led to decentralization becoming widely recognized

as an essential process for strengthening democratic practices in many countries around the world (Karmel, 2017, p. 1). In order to manager the population better, countries across the globe have opted for a decentralized policy.

Therefore, various governments around the world have started decentralization based on the principle of self-governance (Mudalige, 2019). Most governments have decided to use decentralization to empower the local population for political, economic, social, management, administration, and technology. As a result, local people can participate in the planning and management of development processes and decision-making (ibid).

Decentralization in Africa

Decentralization in Africa has not been left behind. Africa is no exception to either the decentralization trend or the reality of its complexity and diversity (Smoke, 2003); it has been a recurrent theme in African countries since independence (World Bank, 2003). According to Brosio (2000 p.2), "Decentralization is transforming the structure of governance in Africa. Since the middle of the l980s most African countries have started a transfer of power, resources and responsibilities to their subnational governments. The pace of transformation is very uneven across countries. A few countries – namely, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda – are proceeding fast. A number of countries have just started the process and are presently creating new units and/or transferring responsibilities and revenues to them. A large group has only adopted legal texts that engage the central government to proceed towards a more decentralized system."

Decentralization reforms have been pursued throughout Africa over the last 30 years with the aims of improving governance efficiency and making policy more responsive to the needs of local people, particularly the poor (Cabral, 2011). But behind these vocalized aims, political motivations are a major driving force as decentralization has often been used to expand the power of the ruling elite to local levels or to neutralize challenging forces emerging from below (ibid). It has also been stated that the need for decentralization in Africa has been attributed to the spread of multi-party-political systems that have created demand for greater citizen voice and representation in decision-making (Chaunga, 2018). Major development donors have also pushed decentralization as a pathway to improving governance and service delivery in developing countries (World Bank, 2003).

Though there are several reasons that have led to African countries to embrace decentralization, challenges of actualizing decentralization especially by devolution remain vivid in many countries. It has been argued by some proponents that decentralization in Africa has not had a fair trial as few countries have experienced true devolution of powers and resources to local governments (Cabral, 2011).

Decentralization in Zambia

In Zambia, decentralization dates back to the post-independence era. According to Mufuzi (2019), Zambia's decentralization process started as far back as 1964 when it had just gained its political independence. Zambia's effort to decentralize its structures can be traced as far back as independence. To counter the historically centralized nature of Zambian institutions and of political power being confined to narrow elite in Zambian society, the government has made decentralization a key plank of its governance strategy (World Bank, 2019).

In Zambia, one of the key policies is decentralization. To achieve decentralization specifically in Zambia, a number of actions have been carried out through different phases and by various successive governments. Decentralization policy is one long standing example of an incremental policy. Thus, it is one policy that has never been dropped by governments that have been formed in Zambia and keeps on being improved from one government to the other. Decentralization in Zambia is supported by several key legislations, circulars

and other supportive decentralization documents. The Secretariat was established in 2003 under the Cabinet Office which was made responsible for coordinating all decentralization reforms and efforts. In 2016, Zambia adopted a new Constitution which, among other matters, provides for a decentralized system of local government based on democratically elected councils; through the cabinet as a decentralization secretariat; the Decentralization Policy 2013 guides the transference of authority, functions and responsibilities to lower levels of governance; Decentralization Policy provided the principles of implementation of Seventh National Development Plan which is a critical condition to the success of the 7NDP; and the 2018 National Budget showed government commitment to decentralization (Kaunda, 2018); and currently is the 8NDP which is implemented through the integrated development manner to enhance the realization of decentralization. The focus of the 8NDP is on actualizing decentralization by devolution (Ministry of Finance, p.19).

Through the National Decentralization Policy, the government's vision is to achieve a fully decentralized system of government that will implement the process of public service delivery and community participation in decision making while maintaining sufficient linkages between central local governments. The Local Government Act also provides for an integrated local government system; give effect to the decentralization of functions, responsibilities and services at all levels of local government; ensure democratic participation in, and control of, decision making by the people at the local level (Local Government Act, 2019). Similarly, it has been stated that the key regulation such as the Local Government Act was amended aimed at improving the accountability and effectiveness of local service delivery (World Bank, 2019). Kaunda further states that systems to ensure effective national wide and co-ordination programme to facilitate the decentralization process was developed and issued in cabinet circular No. 10 of 2014. Cabinet Office circular No. 10 of December, 2014, provided guidelines on the implementation of the Revised National Decentralization Policy (Committee on Local Governance, Housing and Chiefs Affairs, 2017).

Concept of Decentralization

Decentralization is the transfer of authority and responsibility for public functions from the Central Government to subordinate or quasi-independent government organizations or private sector (Rondinelli, 1992: 2). It has also be defined as the transfer of responsibilities, functions and authority as well as powers and appropriate resources to Provincial, District and Sub-District Levels. Decentralization according to Ozmen (2014) is the transfer of responsibilities and authority from higher levels of government.

There are various forms of decentralization which include administrative decentralization, political, fiscal and economic decentralization. Administrative decentralization is a way of redistributing authority, responsibility and financial resources from central to lower levels of governance. According to Canare (2020), administrative decentralization is the transfer of power, responsibility, and accountability to provide public goods and services from the central government to the lower levels of government. Other forms of decentralization include political/democratic and fiscal decentralization. Political decentralization is the transfer of powers and resources to authorities at lower levels who are accountable to the local population or communities. This is done through the transfer of decision making power at the local level. Accountability is also said to be strengthened due to the closer proximity with the local communities. Fiscal decentralization is this form of decentralization relates to power sharing for decision relating to fiscal resources and revenue generating power. Fiscal decentralization is the distribution of revenue collection and expenditure to subordinate governments (Sima, et al. 2023). Fiscal decentralization for Local Government is cardinal for effective functioning. Economic decentralization or market decentralization refers to the transfer of function from public to private sector, in other words, tasks which could have been handled by the government are now left to private enterprise cooperatives, interest groups, volunteer organizations and other non-governmental organizations (SDC-Decentralization Team 2001:7)

This study concentrated on forms of decentralization aligned to administrative decentralization. According to Canare (2020), administrative decentralization has three forms which include deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Deconcentration is the transfer of power from central to lower organs of governance. Canare (2020) defined deconcentration as the transfer of functions across different levels of a national government agency, for example, from its central office to its region, provincial, or municipal office. Delegation is the transfer of functions and resources from a higher authority to a subordinate authority with the capacity to act on behalf of the superior authority without a formal transfer of authority through the same structure. Delegation is shifting responsibilities from central government to other levels of government that are semi-independent from the centre but are accountable to it and these may be Local Government, school districts, transportation authorities, and public corporations (Canare, 2020). Under this form of decentralization, the lower governing body is in consultation with the higher governing body.

However, this study was biased towards administrative decentralization by devolution. Administrative decentralization by devolution has been conceived as power and responsibilities redistributed to the ward level communities to chat their own development (Canare, 2020).

Aims of Decentralization

The aims of decentralization in Zambia stems from the need for enhanced efficiency and accountability; improved service delivery at lower levels; and the need for citizenry to exercise control over its local affairs and foster meaningful development which requires that some degree of authority is decentralized to provincial, district and sub-district levels. It has further been stated that community participation in democratic governance can be promoted in democratic governance at grassroots level (Constitution of Zambia, 2016).

Decentralization Through Ward Development Committee Sub-Structures

Therefore, one of the avenues for achieving a decentralized system of governance was through the establishment of Ward Development Committees (WDCs). Ward Committees are the formal channel of communication between the local communities and the council (Khuzwayo, 2009). WDCs are established under Article 148(1) of the Zambian Constitution. Constitutional provision gives the WDCs highest legal support. This is further supported by the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019 (under sections 36, 37, 38 and 39), which prescribes details relating to WDCs. Decentralisation Policy also emphasises the importance of community participation in the development process. The general aim of WDCs is to try and bring developmental initiatives in communities themselves, with full linkage to and participation of village and traditional Councils where appropriate (GRZ, 2002).

The WDCs are formally established structures that facilitate community participation in Zambia. They are based on the rationale that development can best be sustained if managed in a decentralized government. WDCs are legal platforms for people's participation in the development process at Sub-district level. Communities need to participate in local governance through sub-district structures (WDCs) to ensure sustainable development. Communities need to participate by identifying their problems and coming up with solutions to solve their own problems. WDCs stem from the need for communities to exercise control over their affairs and foster meaningful development which requires some degree of authority to be taken to local councils as well as the community (Hanangama, 2016). The WDC is a legal structure with a mandate through which development has to take place; works with local communities in helping them attain development. However, with all government efforts to decentralize the system of governance, there still remains a challenge of achieving decentralization.

Public Participation in Governance Theory

The study was informed by the public participation in governance which had become prominent in the

1960s and a routine and expected feature of public policy-making in the 2000s. According to this theory, public participation in governance involves the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders in decision-making about policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest (Quick & Bryson 2016). The choice of this theoretical framework is very appropriate to the study as aided in the interpretation of decentralization as a process that facilitates engagement of communities in governance being implemented through the sub-structure WDCs.

Many studies have found participation by the communities or public a challenge due to several reasons such as inadequate resources, consultation, transparency and consultation. Quick & Bryson (2016: 2) has further submitted that "Ensuring the accountability and transparency of government is a common motivation for public participation." Therefore, legitimacy will be the theoretical yardstick which will appropriately inform this study. When public participation is not seen as legitimate, it can alienate the public from government and disrupt the implementation of policy decisions (Ozawa, 2012).

To start with, WDCs consists elected members of the community, councilor and other ex-officio. These elected members of the community always engage with their respective communities to come up with developmental plans that they wish to have in their communities. Communities suggest a number of projects which are subjected to scrutiny within themselves before submitting to the Local Authority for Council resolutions. Procedural rationality involves collecting, analyzing and using information that is relevant to the decision (Dean and Sharfman 1993).

The ex-officio members are there to simply offer the technical advisory role pertaining to the chosen developmental projects in respective wards and not to make decisions for the communities. According to Quick & Bryson (2016), many concerns center on the nature and proper place of expertise in governance. Giving the public influence over choices traditionally left to those with specialized expertise may produce poor outcomes. It is important to acknowledge that the empathetic, experiential understandings that are expressed through public participation introduce important knowledge and values into decision-making processes (Feldman et al. 2006) and can provide a vehicle for important civic learning (Ansell 2011). Leaving decision making in the hands of the local communities and the principles of governance (as mentioned above) in the decentralization process are very important in enhancing public participation. WDCs structure is a platform that enhances communities to own their projects.

In explaining the effectiveness of the implementation of decentralization, which is participation of the public governance through WDCs, the theoretical lenses that was applied was legitimacy which related to quality of the process. Procedurally just and procedurally rational processes are likely to be high in quality. Procedural justice refers to whether, or the extent to which, the process embodies democratic values such as fairness, transparency, attentiveness to stakeholders' concerns and openness to public input. Trust is one other important aspect in decentralization. Trust is problematic in any process involving people with diverse interests and levels of power (Huxham and Vangen 2005), but, when diverse voices are included and power is managed so that potentially marginalized groups do influence outcomes, there are strong payoffs for the legitimacy of the process, the quality of decisions and effective decision implementation. Implementation of decentralization is embedded in the aforementioned tenets of procedural justice, rationale and trust without which, it becomes it becomes a challenge. These particular variables will be applied to interpret the effectiveness of implementing decentralization through WDCs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participation in Development Process

Hanangana (2016) conducted a study on an evaluation of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) of Zambia's Keembe Constituency in enhancing community participation employing a mixed method. The

Main findings indicated that WDCs had fair knowledge about committees while the local community had little knowledge about WDCs. There could be an element of these communities failing to participate effectively if the local communities have little knowledge about WDCs. Nienbuys (1990) observed that the major deficiencies in the development of appropriate approaches for the delivery of developmental projects to low-income communities is the lack of information flow among developing 34 countries and the regions. Hanangana's study showed that there was low participation due to inadequate resources, consultation, transparency and consultation. Most community members acknowledged not to have participated in WDCs activities due to lack of knowledge. That being the case, decentralization and ultimately development is very difficult to be realized without the participation of communities in their development. This leads to misplaced priorities, projects taken to the people not favored by the majority as well as not achieving sustainable development.

The gap here is contextual as it was done in Keembe Ward of Central Province while this study is going to be conducted in Choma District of Southern Province. The other gap is methodological as the study was a mixed method. The current study will be a qualitative case study to enhance in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as respondents' air out their multiple realities.

Similarly, other studies have also found that regardless of implementing the decentralization policies and processes, there was lack of community participation. Mataka and Ngulube (2020) conducted a study which was aimed at assessing the impact of community participation on community Development in Zambia in general and Nsanjika area of Nsingo Ward in Luangeni constituency of the Eastern province in particular. Questionnaires and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and content analysis. The study revealed that even though citizens were aware of the institutions and structures that promoted community development, there was lack of citizen involvement in decision making and participation in the implementation of community projects. Development is rendered difficult to be achieved without the participation of communities in their development. This leads to misplaced priorities, projects taken to the people not favored by the majority as well as not achieving sustainable development.

Participation is vital to the realization of true decentralization without which, no meaningful decentralization and development can be attained. It has been opined that participation and inclusion are basic tenets for any decentralization to take place Mushemeza (2019). Recognizing the importance of participation, the Zambian government besides releasing a number of documents including pieces of legislature, Resnik (2019) has echoed that the devolution process was formally announced and also stipulated the creation of Ward Development Committees to facilitate citizen participation. Most studies focus on community participation with little knowledge on how the Constituency Development Fund guidelines influence participation. This study will fill up the gap by exploring participation in the light of constituency development fund guidelines as most studies have concentrated generally on community participation or participation enhanced by Ward Development Committees. This may help to come up with effective recommendation to policymakers to come up with effective measures towards enhancing community participation which is a very critical variable in the decentralization process.

Capacity of Local Government in Driving Decentralization

The question for capacities for Local Government to handle and realize decentralization is one important aspect. Without appropriately designed and implemented structures and processes as well as adequate local capacity to manage the political and fiscal functions of sub-national governments, decentralization will fail (Smoke, 2003). Andrews and Schroeder also considered appropriate arrangements for two major service sectors while Ribot focused on institutional arrangements for environmental management and pays particular attention to the high-profile issue of capacity (ibid). Parker (1995 p.36) offers a practical interpretation on capacity: "As we are primarily concerned with the delivery of goods and services,

it is possible to adopt a specific interpretation of institutional capacity that focuses on the degree of resource mobilization, cost-effectiveness in service provision, and performance with respect to meeting minimum standards of service provision."

It has been noted that most of the Local Authorities in Zambia struggle with the resource base as they are unable to garner enough revenues that may enhance effective local service delivery. Lack of institutional capacity may be reflected in one or more of the following: inadequate funding to meet minimum standards of service and provision; inability to mobilize fully all resources available from tax bases, revenue-sharing arrangements and/or matching grant programs (Parker, 1995). Lack of capacities has been noted in the human resource in Local Authorities from both the technical and political sides. On the technocrats' part, high turnover in Local Authorities is inconsistent with efficiency and accountability. The Zambian scenario is that the Local Government Service Commission transfers officers from one Local Authority to another within a short period of time. Resnick, 'et al' (2019), pointed out that organizational setting in which councils operate undermines the continuity of service provision. In particular, transfers of staff by the Local Government Service Commission (LGSC), partially driven by the growth in the number of councils in recent years, increases pressure on the wage bill of local authorities, creates uncertainty for civil servants, and undermines institutional memory.

The non-capacity for Local Authority to manage huge sum of money has previously also contributed to delay in attaining real decentralization. For instance, Local Authorities could only award contracts or buy equipment up to five hundred thousand kwacha and could not go beyond this threshold. Going beyond the threshold, could be cited for acting beyond their jurisdiction and face charges for acting ultra vires. Therefore, all the contracts above that threshold were to be handled by the Provincial Administration. This used to be difficult for Local Authorities as instead of handling their own procurement, as long as it was above five hundred-thousand-kwacha, Local Authorities could send to the province, and this came with a challenge in delayment of implementation of the projects.

The capacity for Local Authorities to efficiently and effectively improve service delivery among the people is not there as most of the Councils in Zambia lack equipment to do so. The lack of equipment has led to Councils depending on sub-contracting contractors who are often contracted at exorbitant sums of money to do most of the work for service provision. The costly contracts deprive other services (meant to improve the lives of locals) where some money would have been channeled to instead one service is provided.

Pasi (2014) evaluated the impact of reducing central government grants on solid waste management at Kabwe Municipal Council. The overall purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the reduction of government grants to Kabwe Municipal Council (KMC) on its capacity to provide solid waste management services. The study was descriptive and both qualitative and quantitative research approaches were used. The sample size of the study was 150 respondents drawn from the Council, Local residents and the manufacturing companies within Kabwe. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used to select the respondents. Primary data was collected using both questionnaires and interview guides. Key findings were established to be among the factors affecting effective solid waste management in the Municipality were dumping sites and non-provision of disposal bins. Air pollution and outbreaks of communicable diseases as a result of accumulation of solid waste and inadequate resources for KMC to effectively collect waste generated.

Khuzwayo (2009) conducted a study to determine the role of Ward Committees in facilitating community participation in municipal planning in South Africa. A qualitative approach was adopted and data was gathered through focus group discussions and interviews. The findings indicated that one of the key impediments to Ward Committees having an influence on council decision making appears to be limited power that most Ward Councilors have within the deliberation processes of municipal councils. This study found that the role of Ward Committee members in the Integrated Development Planning process was

unsatisfactory. The findings further indicated that the Ward Committees had limited knowledge of the Integrated Development Plan process despite the fact that they were expected to facilitate and take part in decision making. A steering committee such as a Ward Committee not having knowledge on what they are supposed to drive is of great concern. The lack of knowledge entails that it would be a challenge for the Ward Committee to influence the community to participate in their community welfare. The knowledge gap here is that the study determined the influence of Ward Development Committees in community participation. The current study will explore the influence of Constituency Development Fund on participation in the decentralization process.

Siachisa et al. (2023) examined the effectiveness of Ward Development Committees (WDCs) in the implementation of the decentralization policy in Zambia from 2016-2021 employing a case study in Keembe and Katuba Constituencies of Chibombo District. The study used multi-stage random sampling and purposive sampling techniques in selection of the sample. The study revealed that only one study ward was functional during the period under review and enhanced community participation. Operationalization of most WDCs was poor and could not enhance popular participation. Constraints hindering the work of WDCs were identified which included lack of financial resources, financial irregularities, lack of adherence to guidelines, political affiliation and ethnic considerations, and lack of coordination between the Council and WDCs in the implementation of the decentralisation policy. Recommendations were proffered to government to provide financial support to WDCs intervention programmes to enhance community participation in governance issues and strengthen accountability and transparency mechanisms in Local Authorities.

The above reviewed literature on the capacity of local government in driving decentralization described mainly the capacity within the institution of Local Authorities which included variables such as capacity to handle resources, human resource, capacity to handle solid waste management, and service delivery. This study will endeavor to focus on the capacity Ward Development Committees as a sub structure of local government in driving decentralization especially currently when the Constituency Development Fund has been increased with new guidelines.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach. The use of qualitative tradition was to facilitate for the obtaining in- depth explanation of the phenomenon which was under investigation and generated information on administrative decentralization by devolution in Local Government at ward level. In order to understand the foregoing, qualitative approach enhanced that as they are all more on the side of giving social constructs around the phenomenon. This study employed. This design enhanced the generation of in-depth understanding of the issue, event, or phenomenon of interest under investigation in its natural real-life context (Crowe, "et al," 2011). It enabled the study to capture information in a more explanatory manner bringing out in-depth narratives.

The study population consisted of officers from the Local Authority and Ward Development Committees and traditional leaders. The sample size for the key informants in this study consisted of ten respondents drawn from the Local Authority; and two members from the Constituency Development Fund Committee. Therefore, a sample size consisted of a total number of twelve key informants and two focus group discussions (FGDs) from Wards Development Committees which constituted of six members from each Ward Development Committee in Choma Central Constituency.

This study employed a non-probability sampling technique such as purposive sampling technique to select the respondents to participate in the study. The participants were selected on the basis of them being implementers or directly involved in the decentralization process in order to get the information that is

needed in this study. Data was collected from administrative and technocrat officers from the Local Authority- Choma Municipal Council and from Ward Development Committees. This study employed interviews guides and focus group discussions to collect data. Crowe (2011) has submitted that in order to develop a thorough understanding of the case, the case study design usually involves the collection of multiple sources of evidence, using a range of qualitative techniques such as interviews, focus group discussion and observation. This study employed interviews and focus group discussions.

The study employed interviews such as the semi-structured interviews to collect data from the key informants (KI) who were officers from Choma Municipal Council. Furthermore, data was also collected from the selected Ward Development Committees through focus group discussions. According to Guest, Namey and Mckenna (2016), their analysis revealed that more than 80% of all themes were discoverable within two or three focus groups, and 90% were discoverable within three to six focus groups. Tw focus groups were also enough to identify all of the most prevalent themes within the data set. This study employed thematic analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to answer the research question on participation; challenges faced by Ward Development Committees and the capacity of Ward Development Committees in driving decentralization in Choma District?

Participation at Ward Level

In analysing the capacity of Ward Development of Committee in driving decentralization, the study established a number of themes. The study started by looking at the roles of the WDCs. It was found that WDCs had so many responsibilities to perform such as taking the leading role in the implementation process of Constituency Development Fund such as developing ward development plans; investment and developmental project identification; revenue collection or resource mobilization; and many others.

Participation is one reason that can enhance or hinder decentralization from taking place. Low or no participation has been noted by many scholars from different African countries including Zambia contributing to real decentralization not being enhanced or achieved. The study further went on to determine if the WDCs had knowledge of their functions. This study found that WDCs had little or no knowledge of their responsibilities. "*The WCDs have no knowledge. They have zero knowledge because you find the people from their wards are not consulting them. The community members are coming straight to the offices to find out even about the bursaries sponsorship and skills, the people in the community do not know.*" Another respondent said "*All they know is the WDCs are supposed to work on CDF issues like distribute forms, collect and bring to the Council. They are not aware of their duties. It is not only CDF issues even other issues in the community.*" Another respondent reported that WDCs did not have enough knowledge on their functions, what they had was just a piece of information. For the decentralization process to be driven, democratic values which are very pertinent to public participation in governance needs to be upheld. It is difficult for WDCs to uphold these tenets when they have little or no knowledge and this has adverse impact on decentralization process and attainment.

Similarly to the findings of the study, in Ghana, citizen participation in monitoring government program was noted to be limited due to lack of appropriate information and being encouraged to participate appropriately (Mushemeza, 2019). In South Africa, Khuzwayo (2009) found that Ward Committees had limited knowledge of the Integrated Development Plan process despite the fact that they were expected to facilitate and take part in decision making. A steering committee such as a Ward Committee not having knowledge on what they are supposed to drive is of great concern. The lack of knowledge entails that it

would be a challenge for the Ward Committee to influence the community to participate in their community welfare.

Contrary to the findings of this study and of the two studies from Ghana and South Africa, Hanangana's (2016) study found that Ward Development Committees (WDCs) had fair knowledge about committees while the local community had little knowledge about WDCs. There was need for this study to explain what kind of knowledge the WDCs had. There could be an element of these communities failing to participate effectively if the local communities have little knowledge about WDCs. Nienbuys (1990) observed that the major deficiencies in the development of appropriate approaches for the delivery of developmental projects to low-income communities is the lack of information flow among developing countries and the regions. According to Hanangana, low participation was exacerbated by inadequate resources, consultation, transparency and consultation. Mataka and Ngulube (2020) also noted that even though citizens were aware of the institutions and structures that promoted community development, there was lack of citizen involvement in decision making and participation in the implementation of community projects.

The study also established that WDCs were marred with illiteracy which led to some of the WDCs fail to discharge their functions as some would even shun meetings for fear of being asked what they may not fail to express themselves. It has been echoed that though not every individual in the society is literate enough to contribute to national development, strong literacy skills are necessary to function in today's contemporary society (Zua, 2021). The lack of literacy is correlated to poverty and the lack of human and social development (UNESCO, 2006; ASPBAE, 2012).

Among the many respondents, KI 1 said that *"The challenge with the WDCs is that most of them do not know how to read and write and they do not understand the concept."* This was even evident during data collection especially in focus group discussions as some of them would keep quiet. When diplomatically asked to contribute or say something, they would just mummer by acknowledging that they would contribute later. One respondent after a long discussion just broke his silence and said I can only express myself in Tonga. The researcher positively encouraged the discussant to go on and give his views. Literacy is a pathway to development and for a nation to develop; it thrives on an educated human capital. UNESCO (2006: 15) has stated that *"research shows that literacy is an indispensable tool for alleviating poverty, contributing to human development and for effective social and economic participation.*

These aspects aforementioned- ill-knowledge of the roles of WDCs by the WDC members and illiteracy were affecting participation of both the WDCs and the local community in developmental programs to enhance the well-being of people. As earlier indicated, it is difficult for a WDC who does not know his/her responsibilities to be fully functional and to ensure that participation is enhanced among the members of the community. The community is affected in such a way that they may not fully participate when their leaders are ignorant. Subsequently, driving decentralization becomes a challenge.

Challenges Faced by WDCs in Driving Decentralization Process

One other cardinal aspect was to look at the challenges that the WDCs were facing as they discharged their duties. Numerous challenges were established starting with lack of motivation. All the respondents in the study including the focus group discussions explicitly highlighted the issue of lack of motivation for WDCs. It was reported that despite WDCs having a lot of work to perform, they were doing all the work as a voluntary service. KI 1 said that *"Their work is too much. They are supposed to put on payroll because the wards they cover are too big, they are vast. The movements they make, also other expenses they make on stationery all those things. In fact, they are saying they do more work than all Council workers who are getting a salary."* The WDCs were found to be the going round identifying the vulnerable that needed CDF empowerment; conducting meetings and sensitizing communities; helping communities to fill in application forms; distributing CDF application forms; approving the submitted application forms; submitting

application form to the Local Authority regardless of the distance. Despite all this work, they were not given anything not even transport refund. This is the greatest challenge in realizing decentralization. It is difficult for one to work so much on voluntary basis and this can even lead to ineffectiveness.

The study also established that all the WDCs had no offices to operate from and because of this; all of them were operating from their homes a situation that was perceived to have not settled well with all the respondents. KI 2 said that "*WDCs are nowhere to be found. They have no offices even the people in the community do not know where to find them. Even us as council, we do know where to direct the people. People will come here and ask about where they can find WDCs like for Simucheche Ward. Even me I cannot tell where they can find them. We just give numbers and say they will advise where you can find them.*" This situation poses a serious risk to both the WDCs especially those in the executive who have to deal with the public direct as well as things like CDF application forms other related works.

It was also established that there was inadequacy in the provision of stationery to WDCs which they needed to use during the meetings and in other issues. The majority of the key informants and from focus discussion reported that WDCs were not given stationery. It was found that WDCs usually in their meetings and other related activities were using their own resources so that work could just move. KI 1 said that *"We are supposed to provide for them stationery for their meetings but that one is a challenge that we the Council have, and we are working towards resolving the stationery issues."* Siachisa's et al (2023) study found a similar situation as Councillors were using their resources to mobilize people for meetings to discuss developmental issues in the respective wards.

Another challenge the study found was that there was no transport for WDCs to use as they carried out their works. This really affected the delivery of services as WDCs were found to be failing to cover long distance walking their wards. Other respondents have also faced challenges working with WDCs. Respondents reported that "*The challenges that I have faced working with them is most of them say the Council is not helping them financially and this is true the Council has not been funding them. Even when you call for a meeting only a few would come and when you ask why most of them have not come, they would say how you expect us to come when there is nothing for us.*" Another respondent said that "*There are WDCs that are covering long distances to come to the Council or to their central meeting places. They walk to collect data which they submit to the Council. This is also a hindrance to district in collecting correct information on what why we need to have an account for the WDCs for such duties because the Council is supposed to return about 5 or 10% of what is collected in each ward but the WDCs do not have this information.*"

The challenges the study established were found to be negatively affecting the attainment of decentralization. It was found that WDCs were the conduit between the Local Authority and communities they were saving as a municipal. However, with demoted WDCs, it also meant that they would not put in their best as they did the work. Due to the challenges experienced, it was found that WDCs would even influence the people in the community not to be receptive to programmes that the Local Authority may take to the people. KI 9 brought out a very important point that "*How would you expect decentralization to be effected when the people that are supposed to collect data for you to know exactly what is happening are not doing it because the WDC are a sub-structure of the Council and what they are supposed to do is to collect information and feed into the Council program?*" Lack of information from the ground which is supposed to be collected by WDCs is a huge hindrance to the realization of decentralization.

Capacity of WDCs in Driving Decentralization

The study further went to determine the capacity of WDCs in driving decentralization. There was unanimous agreement among all the respondents that WDCs were capable of driving decentralization. However, for WDCs to be capable of driving decentralization, the respondents said there was need to capacity build the WDCs in order for them to have full knowledge on their responsibilities; do away with

whatever directives and allow WDCs to chat their own development; WDCs to make their own decision without other people or politicians to direct them what to do. For instance, one key informant said *"WDCs make decisions and submit applications. There is another body that makes decision and makes recommendations and again there is another body that sits and makes decisions and recommendation from the ministry. Yes, today those functions have been delegated to the Provincial Local Government Officer, but it is still the same problem where presidential directives come with instructions for decisions to be made in a particular direction which has a certain level of influence. If it was their way if full decentralization was supposed to happen in my thinking is the little that they sit as their own village and say that we want like fifteen boreholes and our problems are sorted for this year. That is the way it is supposed to be, that so, not that we have again sittings to tell them that know this can happen that cannot happen. Those are the issues that they are facing."* (KI 13)

The study further established that with the current state of affairs, it was not possible to attain decentralization. Respondents said the attainment of decentralization would only be possible if challenges identifies were adequately dealt with. The respondents felt that decentralization would not be attained with lack of full participation from communities; without balanced development as what is currently prevailing where some wards with Councillors sitting on the Constituency Development Fund Committee (CDFC) were experiencing more development than others.

Generally, WDCs have the capacity to drive decentralization process because they are the closest to the very last person in the community. However, the challenges such as lack of motivation, transport, offices, and trainings affect the decentralization process. Without appropriately designed and implemented structures and processes as well as adequate local capacity to manage the political and fiscal functions of sub-national governments, decentralization will fail (Smoke, 2003). Once the mentioned challenges are resolved, decentralization will be a success.

From the above findings, it was imperative for the study to go a step further by establishing how effective decentralization could be enhanced. Respondents suggested a number of ways that could be employed in order to enhance effective decentralization. The respondents suggested that there was need to for a representation of WDCs, women and youths in the CDFC for them to defend their interest or the interest of the community in CDFC meetings.

Furthermore, the respondents suggested on the need for conducting capacity building, trainings and orientations and re-orientations of WDCs for enhance effective discharge of responsibilities. WDCs and other respondents suggested the need to put WDCs on an allowance of any kind which will also act as a motivation to their work; consider giving them enough stationery that they can be using during their meetings and in other WDCs related matters. It was further suggested that WDCs should be given transport even just bicycles to enhance easy mobility for them as they do the work. Respondents also suggested electing WDCs who had some level of education for effective discharge of WDCs' duties. *(CDFC 2)* said that "G*oing forward when it comes to electing the WDCs, people need to be told exactly what they need to do; they need to choose people who are knowledgeable, who can explain and understand things at a better level."*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings obtained in this study, it was concluded that WDCs are capable of driving decentralization. However, the lack of motivation for WDC members; lack of transport to carry out the duties of WDCs; illiteracy and little knowledge on WDCs roles, lack of stationery to use and lack of offices were hindering them from driving decentralization. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made to;

1. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development through the Local Authorities to consider building offices for WDCs;
2. Policymakers to consider simplifying and to write WDCs guidelines in local languages to enhance understanding of WDC roles.
3. The Ministry of Local Government and policymakers to consider revising the CDF guidelines and CDF Act to also have an inclusion of giving allowances to WDCs when they perform CDF works.
4. The Local Authorities to equip WDCs with stationery for an effective and efficient service delivery.
5. The Local Authorities to invest more in capacity building/training and sensitizations to enhanced WDCs for service in their respective communities; and
6. The Local Authorities to be encouraging people who can read and write to stand during WDC elections to avoid having people in the WDCs who cannot read and write.

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