CHAPTER 3: TRACKING THE DECENTRALISATION PROCESS IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe was colonised in 1890 by the British South Africa Company of Cecil John Rhodes, through a Royal Charter (Ranger 2010). Upon their arrival, white settlers established institutions of local governance in their new settlements (Matikiti and Hlabangane 2020). The Town Management Ordinance of 1894 was the first statute promulgated which led to the establishment of Sanitary Boards to manage the new settlements (Muzorewa et al., 2018). Through the Municipal Ordinance of 1897 present day Harare, then called Salisbury, and Bulawayo, become municipalities with wholly elected councillors unlike sanitary boards which had both elected and appointed members (Chitofiri 2015). In the African Areas, the 1923 Constitution provided for the establishment of Native Boards with some management and advisory role in Native Reserves (Musemwa 2012). The 1937 Native Council Act led to the establishment of Native Councils whose membership included traditional leaders but falling under the white Native Commissioner (Bhatasara 2021). Further changes in African Areas come in 1957 with the passing of the African Councils Act (Koke and Ncube 2023). The African Councils established through this piece of legislation were formed around each chieftainship area with the District Commissioner of the district as President and the Chief of the area as Vice President (Tshuma 1995). There were also a few elected members. This was the situation in African areas up to independence in 1980. By then 241 African councils had been established. In the white areas however more and more municipalities were being established to run the growing towns (Mlambo 2023). Smaller towns had Town Management Boards later upgraded to Town Councils; Municipalities had Mayors and Town clecks while Town Councils and Local Boards had chairpersons and secretaries respectively (Mutsindikwa 2020). This chapter is critical and central to the study as it tracks the decentralisation of service delivery in Zimbabwe.

The dual system developed had a devolved system in white areas and deconcentrated system in African areas (Ranger 2010). The white District Commissioner (the title was changed from Native Commissioner to District Commissioner in 1953) was the ultimate authority (Musemwa 2012). District commissioners were civil servants under the Ministry of Internal Affairs while urban councils were under the Ministry of Local Government and Housing (Manganga 2014). Urban councils were largely autonomous and self-financing while African councils had to rely on central subventions (Mutsindikwa 2020). This was the scenario at independence in 1980. Africans could not vote or become councillors or mayors in urban councils prior to independence in 1980 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). In short Africans had no say or role in urban governance. In commercial farms and mining areas, a separate council, the Road Council later changed to Rural Council in 1966 was established. Again, Africans could not vote and had no role in the affairs of Rural Councils (Mutekwa and Gambiza 2017). Given the above background, the post-independence reforms focused on establishing a non-racial decentralised system. From 1980 Africans in urban area became part of urban governance and could vote and get elected as councillors or mayors. The Urban Councils Act Chapter 214 had to be amended to incorporate these provisions.

In African Areas the District Councils Act of 1980 amalgamated the 242 African Councils into 55 District councils and the 1988 Rural District Council Act combined the separate Rural Councils for largely white commercial farmers and the district councils into one Rural District Council (Kurebwa 2015). The District Councils from 1981 had a central government employee the District Administrator who had replaced the District commissioner as Chief Executive Officer with District councils electing their own chairperson (Muringa and Zvaita 2022). The role of the District Administrator ended in 1993 when the amalgamation process was finalised (Koke and Ncube 2023). The resistance to combine the two councils from white commercial farmers stalled the process from 1988 when the Act was passed to 1993 (Gaidzanwa 2020).

Despite the challenges, the new government of Zimbabwe had started the process of decentralisation in rural areas from 1980 (Muchadenyika and Williams, 2016). The point which does not quite come out in the literature on Zimbabwe is that the decentralisation thrust had a rural focus. This so because from 1897 urban councils had become largely autonomous with devolved power, functions and financing responsibilities (Wekwete 1989). The African areas in particular only started to enjoy some degree of autonomy post 1980.

The Prime Minister directive of 1984 established Ward and Village Development Communities which became planning units at that level (Macheka and Masuku 2019). This was a paradigm shift from the top-down planning of the colonial period to a bottom-up planning process. The 1985 Provincial Councils and Administration Act established the office of Provincial Governors and Provincial Councils the same Act also establishes the Provincial Development Committees chaired by Provincial Administrator (Zinyama and Chimanikire 2019). The focus of these policy changes was on development planning with village plans feeding in toward plans, and wards plans consolidated into District plans (Kurebwa 2015). These would then be forwarded to the Provincial Development Committee made up of Provincial Heads of Ministries to prepare a Provincial Development Plan to be submitted to the Provincial Council (Chirisa *et al.*, 2019). All chairpersons of Rural and Urban councils including mayors were members of the Provincial Council. The Provincial Plan so adopted would then be forwarded to central government for funding (Wekwete 1989). This process was a complete departure from colonial times (Chatiza, 2010; Mushamba, 2010; Chagweta 2014; Conyers 2004).

Whereas these efforts were a process of decentralising powers and functions the actual policy on decentralisation in Zimbabwe was only adopted by Cabinet in 1996. Cabinet adopted 13 Principles on Decentralisation to guide the process and provide the necessary institutional framework and focus. The principles were meant to provide a common platform and understanding for all players in the decentralisation process. Key among the principles were that decentralisation is necessary and desirable based on the clear understanding that it promotes and strengthens democracy and civic responsibility as citizens participate in their governance and development. It also helps in minimising bureaucracy by reducing levels of decision-making and thereby achieving greater efficiency of operations.

The illustration below shows the decentralisation programme in Zimbabwe in 1997.

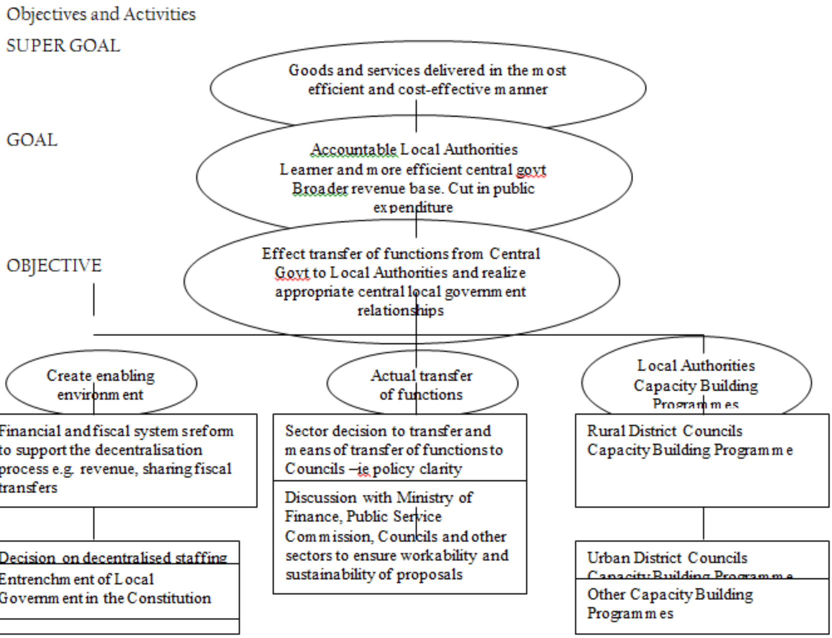

Figure 3.1: The Decentralisation Programme (Government of Zimbabwe 1997)

Some Notes

- MOF – Ministry of Finance ;
- PSC – Public Service Commission ;
- Political will is central to the successful implementation decentralisation. The setting up of the:
- Ministerial Committee on decentralisation;
- The working Party of Permanent secretaries;
- Capacity Building Coordinating Committee ;
- Provincial Support Teams indicated commitment to decentralisation at the highest level of government.

Capacity Building Programmes and decentralisation received significant funding from external support agencies and donors. About US$100 million was budgeted for the programmes for 5 years up to 2000 in Rural District Council (PlanAfric 2000). The government has constantly reaffirmed its commitment to decentralisation and is signatory to such protocols as the Victoria Falls Declaration of 1999 which reaffirmed the region's commitment to decentralisation (Makuvaza 2012). This recognition of decentralisation is crucial for effective local government can only bear fruit if there is commitment by not only the political leadership but the bureaucracy in various sector ministries. Protection of turf by the bureaucrats can be a major stumbling block and has tended to slow down decentralisation efforts even when funding support is available. To support decentralisation, Government of Zimbabwe with support from cooperating partners instituted capacity building programmes in both the urban and rural district councils.

The Rural District Council Capacity Building programme. Embarked on in 1996 was a response to the newly created Rural District Council which becomes operational 1993.

The RDC brought together Rural Councils which were largely white dominated and District Council in black areas. The programme followed a "learning by doing" approach, aimed at enhancing the capacity of RDCs to plan, implement and manage their own development on a sustainable basis.

It had three main components.

1. Institutional Development funded by DFID up 2001
2. Capital Development funded by SIDA, Netherlands and World Bank up 2002,
3. Human Resources Development funded by SIDA up to 2003.

The thrust of the programme drew synergy from its three main components.

Capital funding exposes whatever challenge RDCs were facing in planning managing and implementing their development. Challenges exposed would be addressed through facilitation by teams of District facilitators in each of the 8 non-metropolitan provinces.

Training for both appointed and elected officials would ensure sustainability. The programme generated many interest and exposed major challenges in RDCs regards planning, under costing of projects and implementation slippages among others. Significant gains were made through increases in infrastructure stock, institution building, computerisation and preparation of council's accounts. All councils also got reliable vehicles to carry out their task.

Government of Zimbabwe and the World Bank had put in place a Local Government Capital Development Programme to commence in January2003 as a successor programme. This was meant to ensure gains made would not be lost. Unfortunately, the Rural District Council Building Programme ended prematurely. Challenges on the political landscapes arising mainly from the land reform programme resulted in the withdrawal of financial support from Zimbabwe by most external support agencies including the World Bank. The envisaged Local Government Capital Development Programme that would have taken decentralisation to a higher level, was still born; it never took off.

It should be noted that the decentralisation policy and strategy had a rural focus. In urban areas the government thrust was to strengthen their capacity to deliver services. Many programs to achieve this objective were rolled out. As already indicated above decentralisation in urban areas in Zimbabwe has a long history. From 1980 onwards through collaboration with the World Bank, significant efforts were made to strengthen the operations of urban governments. The Urban I project co-funded by the World Bank under Loan No. 2445-ZIM was implemented between 1984 and 1989. The programme covered four towns: Harare, Masvingo, Marondera and Mutare. The programme focussed on the provision of serviced residential stands to allow for construction of low-cost houses. In all 18185 stands were delivered against a target of 11349. This programme was succeeded by the Urban II project co-funded by the World Bank and Nordic Development Fund. The timeline for Urban II was from 1992 to 1999 and covered twenty-one urban councils. It focused on:

- Primary Infrastructure (offsite services);
    - (Sewage, water works and roads);
- Housing infrastructures;

- Urban services;
- Institutional Development;
- Housing Finance;
- Electricity ;
- Regional Development Programme.

The programme raised urban councils to a higher level. The provision of much needed equipment including refuse trucks, dozers, excavators, *et cetera*, resulted in an increase in infrastructural stock and enhanced maintenance of the same. Many houses were constructed, roads surfaced, waterworks upgraded and sewerage systems modernized. Provision of offices equipment including computers and the relevant software resulted in speedier processing of bills. A project management unit in the Ministry was responsible for overseeing the project.

The project helped strengthen financial management systems through timeous production of final and audited accounts. Some council went on to have themselves credit rated to qualify for loans from financial institutions beyond the ordinary government loans. The project had set the stage where councils could go out and borrow money to execute their mandate further strengthening the decentralisation thrust. A successor programmes the Local Government Capital Development Programme was to commence in 2000 to 2002 at a cost of US 85 million. The project was to be funded by the World Bank, Government of Zimbabwe and bilateral assistance. The arrearage of government to the World Bank coupled with withdrawal of external support since 2000 put paid to the programme, slowing down decentralisation in Zimbabwe. As funds local dwindled, inflation escalated, interest rates hiked, many of the gains Zimbabwe had made were threatened. The challenges the country has faced since 2000 have been many and varied. Local authorities have not been spared. Decentralisation efforts since then have been largely internally driven. The Central Bank, Government, Pension Funds, the private sector and council's own resources have sustained decentralised functions to date. Expectations are high that with the constitutionalisation of local government and new dispensation now in place solutions to major challenges faced by local authorities may be forthcoming to harness declining services provisions.