

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and recommendations

1. An assessment

Zimbabwe was not left out of the wave of decentralization which swept developing countries in the 1980s. After attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe introduced various legislative and institutional reforms to correct the racist, biased and undemocratic decentralized units which favored whites and disregarded the majority black population. The decentralization project was introduced in 1984 by the Prime Minister's Directives on Decentralization and Development (PMDDs), and created various hierarchal participatory structures. Among other structures, the position of a provincial governor was introduced to coordinate development planning, implementation and evaluation, as well as other activities of various central government agencies at the provincial level. However, the extent to which power and authority was dispersed to the provinces by the PMDDs is questionable given the fact that central government retained the power to appoint the influential positions of provincial governors (PGs) and provincial administrators (PAs). In addition, the PMDDs did not disperse real functional and resource raising powers to provincial governments.

An evaluation of decentralization at the provincial level showed how the decentralization programme in Zimbabwe is running short of important requisites. Such shortfalls in the provincial governance system undermine the promise of decentralization expressed in 1980. To begin with, PGs are appointed by the President to lead provincial decentralized governments. The PGs and the PAs, who are accountable to the central government, chair the main decision-making bodies of the province, the PC and Provincial Development Committee (PDC) respectively. By virtue of their appointment, PGs represent, promote and extend central government control in the provinces. The appointment of PGs and PAs by the central government is a reflection of centralization tendencies which are undermining the decentralization programme. Local people in the province do not have the opportunity to elect their own leaders, who can account directly to them. This also hinders the emergence of local politics based on localized issues that are not dictated by the strong party politics played out at the national level

Secondly, decentralization at provincial level has largely been undermined by the ineffective role of the PCs. Provincial councilors lack knowledge and commitment to effectively represent the local people. From 1985 when PCs were established to the present, little has been done to strengthen PCs, as the centre prefers to strengthen central government institutions at the expense of local governments. The opportunity of the constitutional-review process is a good platform to search for ways to strengthen provincial governments.

Ideally, Provincial councilors must represent and protect the interests of their various constituencies at the provincial level. At present, the Zimbabwean system is operating very far from the ideal because of the divergent lines of accountability with the PG accountable to the President and Provincial councilors to the people. This makes it almost impossible for the proper reflection of local views in provincial development plans. The situation is made worse by the politicization of government work, where every corner of the policy-cycle is a battle ground for political supremacy between the dominant ZANU-PF and MDC political-parties.

Thirdly, the PC, which the PG chairs, does not have resource allocating powers and relies on central government for their operating budget and personnel. Assuming that, the PC is capable of drafting development plans which cater for the needs and preferences of the people in the province, the PC does not have the resources to implement such plans. After the consolidation of district plans by the PDC and subsequent approval by the PC, the provincial plan is sent to the National Planning Commission for inclusion in the national development plan. There is no evidence to suggest that provincial development plans are considered by the Commission or by the National Treasury when allocating funds.

The absence of resources to implement plans formulated by the PC has caused provincial plans to gather dust. The situation could have been different if provincial governments were allowed to raise revenue so as to enable them to implement their plans.¹⁵⁸ PGs have been of little or no assistance because they lead a government

¹⁵⁸ Meaningful fiscal decentralization largely determines, among other variables, the success of a decentralization programme.

which does not have resources and real functional authority. As a result provincial governments are had been rendered ineffective decentralized units and they merely act as agents of the centre.

Fourthly, PAs are largely responsible for coordinating the activities of central government agencies at the provincial level. PGs, on the other hand, are also charged with the same coordinative function. The result has been an unnecessary overlap of duties and functions which leads to duplication and resource wastage. Hence, Makumbe argues that, 'the creation of the post of PG was superfluous and unnecessarily costly to the Zimbabwean taxpayer'.¹⁵⁹ Besides performing a few ceremonial functions, there is little that a PG does which the PA is not mandated to do. This makes the position of PG unnecessary and only there to accommodate political party adherence.

Lastly, PGs play a general role in the supervision of local government, the 'unfettered' supervisory powers of the Minister of Local Government, notwithstanding. PGs are charged with the alignment of plans from Urban Councils (UCs) and Rural District Councils (RDCs) and the provincial development plan. As discussed in chapter 3 and four, the relationship between PGs and UCs over the past decade has not been fruitful. Most UCs are dominated and led by the MDC while PGs are appointed along ZANU-PF political-party structures. The result has been mistrust between PGs and UCs which disadvantage coordinated planning and service delivery. The Minister on the other hand, has used the supervisory powers over UCs and RDCs to dismiss and replace elected councils for so-called 'mismanagement'. At the end of the day ordinary citizens in the streets have been hit hard by the mistrust and enermity between the centre and local governments because at best service provision meet minimal standards and at worse, has been non-existent.¹⁶⁰ It is against these structural and legislative deficiencies of the Zimbabwean decentralization system that this paper recommends legislative and institutional reforms.

¹⁵⁹ Makumbe (1998: 32).

¹⁶⁰ RTI and Institute for Democratic Alternative in Zimbabwe (2010: 46-53).

2. Recommendations

2.1. Constitutionalization of decentralized entities

Provincial and local governments must receive constitutional recognition. The powers and functions of decentralized entities and also of the central government must be clearly spelt out in the Constitution for accountability purposes. The principle of subsidiarity can assist in the allocation of powers and functions among the three spheres of government. According to that principle, public responsibilities that can be exercised best at local level should be exercised by those elected authorities, which are closest to the citizens.¹⁶¹ It is crucially important to enshrine decentralization principles in the Constitution due to the fact that, 'the subsequent lack of commitment and major weaknesses in the legislative and policy frameworks usually emanate from the lack of constitutional commitment'.¹⁶²

The constitutionalization of decentralization principles has been adopted in neighboring South Africa and Zimbabwe can follow a similar direction. However, this does not mean that Zimbabwe must adopt the South African decentralization model in its entirety. South Africa is facing enormous challenges in implementing its complex decentralization system as witnessed by massive service delivery protests.¹⁶³ This calls for proper analysis of the South African decentralization model so that Zimbabwe can learn from the important lessons played out in the South African context.

2.2. Meaningful resource raising power

Provincial and local governments must be given adequate resource-raising powers clearly stated in the Constitution to enable sustainable service delivery and the stimulation of development. Availability of resources at provincial level will enable implementation of provincial development plans. It must be noted that, effective decentralization and local autonomy require appropriate financial autonomy. The following taxing powers can be allocated to provincial governments: liquor licensing,

¹⁶¹ United Nations Guidelines on Decentralization (2007: 4).

¹⁶² Proceedings from the UNCDF Participatory Symposium on Decentralization and Local Governance in Africa held at the University of the Western Cape (2001: 14).

¹⁶³ For more information on service delivery challenges in South Africa, see the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Coordinated Oversight on Service Delivery (2010).

provincial road tax, tourism and animal licensing, among others. However, not all provinces have resource raising capacity, a situation which can constrain effective governance in poor provinces such as Matebeleland South and Masvingo. A system of intergovernmental transfers of financial resources from central government to provinces, depending on need, can address such disparities.

2.3. Clarification of roles

It is also recommended that the role of PGs in relation to UCs and RDCs must be clarified and legislated. Such a move will go a long way in preventing the unnecessary meddling into the affairs of elected councils by PGs. The need to limit the supervisory powers of the Minister over UCs and RDCs cannot go without mentioning. The supervisory powers, which are prone to political manipulation, allow the Minister to dismiss and replace elected councils with administrators or commissions. Elected councils are politically legitimate and this requires central government to respect them as they represent the wishes and interests of the electorate. This is not to say that, mismanagement and corruption must be allowed to flourish in local government. A balance must be struck between the need to maintain central, supervisory and corrective powers, on one hand, and local autonomy and democracy on the other.

2.4. Promotion of local accountability

Accountability concerns which exist at the provincial level have been raised in this paper. To solve that problem, it is suggested that PGs must be elected. Provincial councilors should elect a leader from amongst themselves to be a PG. This indirect election of PGs does not only address accountability concerns, but goes a long way in fostering representative democracy. Furthermore, it addresses the current debate and the contentious political consultation surrounding the appointment of PGs between the President and the Prime Minister in respect of who should appoint PGs.

On the whole, the constitutional-review process must ultimately come up with a decentralization model that promotes local accountability, empowerment and representative democracy. The model must be capable of enhancing participatory development and able to foster bottom-up decision-making. Such a model must compel decision makers to act and respond to the needs and preferences of the people,

especially the most vulnerable members of society (the poor, women and children). It is only a decentralized system which is democratic, one that promotes good governance and sustainable development that is likely to benefit poor Zimbabweans who live in areas such as Dotito, Chipinge and Gwanda, corners of Zimbabwe where the gains of democracy and decentralization are yet to be seen.¹⁶⁴



¹⁶⁴ Some of the remote areas in Zimbabwe where poverty is rife.

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