CHAPTER THREE

DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EVOLUTION IN ZIMBABWE

INTRODUCTION

The need to decentralise political power and administration is an age-old political phenomenon. In this modern era, large and small states have some form of decentralisation, where local people are given some modicum of power to determine their destiny. All contemporary states should be seen to embrace the decentralisation imperative. In fact, the smooth operation of any state, whether small or large, requires it to have a locally based administration system with the capacity to provide tailor made services to the local people. Through this system, the local communities are given a chance to determine the mixture of goods and services that they need at a particular moment. Consequently, the state is expected to respond to these needs if resources allow it to do so. This approach has the capacity to cultivate a closer relationship between the state and a diversity of social groups within a given country.

While this points to the need for decentralization in modern states, a historical review of pre-colonial states in Africa and elsewhere indicates a similar view. Before the colonial era, most socio-cultural groups had their own elaborate governmental structures with recognizable politico-administrative leadership hierarchies of authority (Oyugi in Hofmeister and Scholz, 1996:89-90). However, other socio-cultural groups did not have this elaborate hierarchy. These could be

referred to as stateless societies. Significant, however, is the fact that in each case, the politico-administrative life of these people exhibited some form of decentralisation along kinship lines depending on the social formation of the groups and their survival strategies. Each social unit had some form of autonomy and could decide how it wanted to cultivate its land, how many cattle families could have, and how disputes within the group could be settled. Clear guidelines were provided on how the social group could communicate with higher authority up to the king or leader of the whole socio-cultural grouping.

This indicates that the history of humankind has, one way or the other, always entrenched some form of autonomy and self-determination. The rubric of decentralisation, as it is known today, follows these principles with the aim of limiting central government power as well as enhancing human freedom, the right to individual participation in issues of governance, and promoting a democratic culture cherished by all peace loving nations.

Despite these convenient values of good governance, it is common to find that central governments more often than not and, especially in Africa and the developing world, have a desire to involve themselves in matters of a local nature. Such tendencies are lamented the world over as they stifle local initiatives and create a culture of dependence within local communities. State involvement also means excessive central planning that, more often than not, is followed by inadequate implementation processes. Generally, it is a dilemma for Africa to find a state that is supposed to be developmental in orientation, usurping decision-making powers from local communities. This is an antithesis of the cherished notion of development. An awareness of these tendencies has led to vigorous calls for decentralisation and the need to strengthen local government institutions.

DECENTRALISATION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Decentralisation and local government are topical concepts where issues of democracy and good governance are discussed. These concepts are precursors to the formation of RDCs in Zimbabwe. Consequently, they form the conceptual schemata of this thesis. Scholars and government practitioners have defined the concept of decentralisation variously. These definitions reveal important distinctions and concentrations that help one to understand the complexity of the concept and the many forms it has. This means that it is difficult to standardize the concept. What it means, depends on its practical manifestation in different national settings albeit, of course, that some fundamental general notions will inevitably be the same.

Decentralisation

According to Mawhood (1983:18), decentralisation is 'the sharing of part of the governmental power by a central ruling group with other groups, each having authority within a specific area of the state.' The definition has connotations of power sharing in a territorially demarcated state. The reason being that the people in each area should have the latitude to make decisions on matters that affect them. This is not only expedient but also necessary. While the basic idea is to share decision power with other agencies or organizations, or within the organisation itself, it also refers to 'the unblocking of an inert central bureaucracy, curing managerial constipation, giving more direct access for the people to the government and the government to the people, and stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development plans (Reddy, 2000:16). Paramount here is the need to offload some administrative/managerial work from central government, build managerial capacity and empower communities to be able to determine their needs.

Olowu (1997:66) defines decentralisation as 'the process or processes designed to disperse power from the center to the periphery.' This means that decentralisation is about the transfer of authority, legislative, judicial, administrative, from a higher level of government to a lower level. In this case, the state decides to 'let go' or to free lower level structures so that they can become distinct local government units with not only administrative authority, but all the necessary powers needed to function as a governmental unit. This also means that central government decides to transfer some of its decision-making powers as well as some of its workload from the center to peripheral or field agencies, so that they can act on its behalf. To this end, Rondinelli and Cheema (1983:18) define this concept as:

> the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government and its agencies to:
>
> (a) field units of central government ministries and agencies;
> (b) subordinate units or levels of government;
> (c) semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations;
> (d) area-wide, regional or functional authorities; or
> (e) non-governmental, private or voluntary organisations.

This means that decentralisation is about 'moving away from the center' to enable those outside it to make decisions that directly impact on their lives. This suggests the creation of a strong periphery with a high degree of autonomy to govern itself. It entails empowering local communities and allowing them to participate in local level politics. This has the tendency to improve center/periphery relations and is acknowledged to be a recipe for democratic good governance. In this light, one can indicate that there are several reasons for decentralization. According to L'Oeil (1989:71-72), these reasons include the following:

a) The service provision imperative: The demand for services varies from place to place. It is only prudent to decentralize the provision of these services so that people in a particular setting can appropriately prioritise

their demands and come up with intelligible plans meet these demands through the assistance of central government.

b) The efficiency imperative: It indicates that locally financed and produced services are likely to cost less. Thus, rather than centralize the provision of such services, it is more efficient to use peripheral agencies to provide them.

c) The political imperative: Decentralising decision making powers is a recipe for cultivating democracy in any given country. Fundamentally, this is because of its participative approach where local level people are given the chance to exercise their right to express themselves and prioritise their needs.

d) The constitutional imperative: Constitutions of many countries have entrenched the notion of decentralisation in their constitutions as a way of enhancing the attainment of the three imperatives outlined above. Fulfilling this provision becomes the *raison d'etre* of governments.

There are four models that can be used to differentiate among the types of decentralisation. These are the privatization model; the delegation model; the deconcentration model and the devolution model (Meenakshisundaram (1994:11). The privatization model occurs when central government gives voluntary and/or private institutions power to perform some of its functions. This can also be described as government's voluntary withdrawal from providing certain services that it acknowledges can be provided better by these voluntary and private institutions (Henry, 2001:320). The rationale is to reduce state dominance in the economy, stimulate private initiative and support informal sector development, which is rife in local government areas. Privation should lead to higher economic productivity, the promotion of competitiveness and general economic diversification (Olowu, 1997:65). Privatisation takes many

different forms. These include selling off private assets to private companies, contracting with private providers and nonprofit organizations to deliver services, hiring consultants, distributing vouchers, selling franchises, granting subsidies and chartering government corporations (Henry, 2001:320). This is applicable to Zimbabwe where central government is faced with resource scarcity. Consequently, there is need to involve private actors to enhance national soicio-economic development.

The second model of decentralisation is delegation. This term denotes central government transfer of responsibilities to manage and perform certain activities to semi-autonomous institutions (parastatals) that government creates so that they can undertake certain socio-economic activities that government cannot perform directly. These organisations are given a high degree of operational autonomy. They are vested with powers to plan, manage and implement programmes and projects, which fall under their areas of jurisdiction, with very little interference or control from government. Other interesting definitions are that delegation is:

1. entrusting to another the execution of some power or duty vested in oneself. Such delegation implies in its very essence, the transfer to another of more than a mere executionary power; a discretion is also transferred (Meyer, 1978:104)
2. a transfer of power in terms of which one public authority authorises another to act in its stead (Baxter, 1984:432)
3. the transfer of broad authority to plan and implement decisions concerning specific activities to organisations such as local authorities that are technically and administratively capable of performing them (Rondinelli, 1989:74)

Delegation as highlighted by these definitions, indicates that although these institutions have a high discretion of operational power, the ultimate power of

decision and policy making lies with the delegating institution, which in this case, is central government. The delegatee exercises discretion in so far as policy directives of the delegator are concerned. Craythorne (1994:437-438), describes the general characteristics and legal implications of delegation as follows:

1. The delegator vests the delegatee with power to act in his stead; the delegatee acts instead of the delegator acting.

2. The delegatee is vested with administrative or legislative power and makes an independent decision on local issues.

3. The delegator parts with power but is not denuded of power, which means that the delegator retains concurrent power.

4. In certain circumstances, the decision of the delegatee also binds the delegator and renders him *functus officio*. If the delegatee exercises a quasi-judicial power both he and the delegator are *functus officio* after the decision has been given.

5. Delegation cannot be used as a device to escape responsibility for duties imposed by the legislator on the delegator, personally.

6. The need for delegation does not imply the need for uncontrolled and uncontrollable delegation.

7. As a general rule the delegator incurs no liability for the delegatee in the exercise of the delegated power.

What emerges from the analysis of the delegator and the delegatee is that the emphasis is on administrative convenience. It is about administrative power, to a large extent, rather than on the conferment of political power to the delegatee. In

addition, the interest here is to avoid administrative crisis at the center, as well as to increase state legitimacy. It is to create government institutions that can perform their delegated duties outside the cumbersome rules and regulations of central government. The interest of this kind of decentralization is to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

The third form or model of decentralisation is deconcentration. Livigan and Mfundu in Reddy (2000:239) express a similar view that:

> Deconcentration involves the dispersion or redistribution of administrative responsibilities from the central government ministries or departments to field offices without transferring also the political power. It is about the transfer of the workload from central government head offices to regional branches located outside of the capital. It may involve limited discretion for field staff to perform functions within central government guidelines. Effective control over major policy decisions normally resides with the central levels of power.

The Zimbabwean scenario provides a simple and clear form of deconcentration. There is the office of the Provincial Administrator that has been created to coordinate government activities at provincial level. Below is the office of the District Administrator created for similar functions at that level. Ministries also create offices at both these levels, for example, the provincial and district offices of education and health (Chikate, 1996:8). It is significant to note that these field offices have implementation power as well as to some extent, policy formulation power as they recommend policies to the head offices of their ministries where such recommendations may be ultimately adopted as ministry policy.

During the colonial era in Zimbabwe, this form of deconcentration received the greatest priority from the colonial masters. In fact, Native Commissioners, who were in charge of regions and later, District Commissioners, were given both administrative and political power to act as they saw fit. They were ordered not to trouble the centre with unnecessary peripheral governance issues except when the 'natives' exhibited rebellious attitudes and actions that needed to be halted

through military means. These powers allowed these peripheral functionaries to develop autocratic powers aimed at total control of the 'natives', without bothering about the latter's problems (Namusi, 1998:10).

There are basically three models of deconcentration: the functional model; the integrated prefectoral model; and the unintegrated prefectoral model (Reddy, 2000:239). The functional model is one in which each central government department decentralises functions to provinces and districts in order for them to take charge of the interests of central government at those lower levels (examples of the Zimbabwean scenario have been given above). The important thing to emphasize apart from the examples already given is that these numerous departments created at the periphery are not coordinated at that level. Each owes its allegiance to its parent ministry, and the human resources resourcing these offices are really central government human resources. As a result, it is not surprising to see these central government institutions retaining policy making powers. Field officers supply their central government counterparts with vital information for policy making.

In the integrated prefectoral model, there is a central administrator who coordinates all activities of a local nature. This prefect or principal administrator is an employee of central government whose task it is to ensure a viable and adequate communication network between the centre and the periphery. He/she is authorised to act on behalf of and oversee all ministries at the local level. This model, typically, defines the French system of local government (Ismael, Bayat and Meyer, 1997:102). The system is also practiced in several Francophone countries in Africa. The prefect is the Chief Executive Officer of government at that level. Even where elected officials exist, he/she becomes Chief Executive Officer of Council. Zimbabwe and other former British colonies like Tanzania and Zambia adopted this model at one time or another (Ismael, Bayat and Meyer, 1997:102). In Zimbabwe for example, the District Administrator was the Chief Executive Officer of African Councils and later, District Councils. However, it

should be emphasised that he/she did not have overall supervisory powers on other ministerial departments operating in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.

Finally, there is the unintegrated prefectoral model. In this hybrid model, the prefect was the central figure in the field but by no means as powerful as in the French system. Thus, the prefecture was only a channel of communication and each specialist functionary in the field was allowed to maintain independent links with his departmental headquarters. Although there were normally regular contacts between the prefect and field officers, the former had no overriding authority over their operations. Nor did the prefect occupy the position of Chief Executive in the local government system although he did supervise it (Ismael, Bayat and Meyer, 1997:103). This adequately explains the unintegrated prefectoral model. It touches on certain elements that applied to the Zimbabwean system before the introduction of the Amalgamation Act. In fact, all of it defines the Zimbabwean system during that time, except the last part that says: 'nor did the prefect occupy the position of chief executive in the local government system.'

In Zimbabwe, up to 1993, the District Administrator did not just supervise District Councils he/she was also the Chief Executive Officer. Thus, while the Zimbabwean system had and still has the functional model intact, it used parts of the other two models to produce its own form that, in spite of the differences in all defining characteristics, was chiefly a field administration form of decentralisation; a functional approach that exhibited elements of central control. Thus, as in field administration, localities were not 'let go' but were brought together under the ambit of central government such that the government's directives determined the only room for manoeuvre (Jordan, 1984:18). Within this argument however, it should be noted that the unintegrated type has elements of devolution, such that it can be described as a compromise approach between outright devolution and the exclusive control patterns of field administration. But still, whatever the argument, tendencies of centralisation in the system are noted,

and as such they lead one to view it with suspicion as an ineffective form of decentralisation. This analysis in fact, also draws one's attention into reviewing the current rural local government system vis-à-vis the three models. Consequently, one would argue that the current system seems to fit, perfectly, the unintegrated model because of the following:

- line ministries still have independent links with their departmental headquarters;

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- the District Administrator has no overriding authority over the operations of line ministries;

- the District Administrator does not occupy the position of Chief Executive in the local government system; and

- the District Administrator is only one line of communication with the province and the centre, a line of communication, which is provided by the Development Committee System from VIDCOs, WADCOs, DDCs, and PDCs (Provincial Development Committees).

The difference comes from the fact that the District Administrator in the new system does not supervise the local government system, although through his/her functional contact with it, he/she can note in reports on how the local government system is operating, issues that can lead to the formulation of policy initiatives designed to correct the problems observed. This difference also gives the current rural local government system its autonomy as a system structured under the decentralisation model known as devolution.

A closer analysis of deconcentration and delegation indicates that the two have similar characteristics that are superseded by that of administrative convenience. Thus, 'hiving off power' to delegated and deconcentrated institutions is not very

much about giving power to peripheral people, but to ease the administrative pressures of the center, while retaining overall decision making powers. The nature of these two forms has led scholars to refer to them as 'pseudo-decentralisation' concepts that are linked to functional decentralisation, a concept also coined to emphasise the managerial or administrative imperatives of 'hiving off' central government responsibilities. This administrative/managerial imperative was popular in British colonial Africa, especially during the early years of colonialism. The British, before granting independence to its colonies, had started a process of moving away from this system that was characterised by excessive control of the peripheral folks. However, independent Africa repopularised these systems (deconcentration and delegation) during their formative years of independence.

The fourth form of decentralisation is devolution. This is acknowledged to be the most acceptable and well-intentioned decentralisation. It is a form that is considered to be genuine in empowering local people to take part in the provision of social services of a local nature, while at the same time, teaching or orienting them to the mechanics of governance. Devolution is the transfer of power to sub-national units of government, which are autonomous and distinct from central government and only need indirect supervisory control of the center (Litvack and Seddon, 1999:3). It is about the conferment of rule-making and executive powers of a specified or residual nature on formally constituted sub-national units.

Devolution is also referred to as territorial decentralisation as it is concerned with the creation of sub-territories within a state and vesting political power to these smaller geographical units so that they can exercise some form of local authority discretion in making decisions that can expedite the provision of services to local communities (Onesmo in Hyden, Olowu and Ogendo, 2000:184). Devolution entails strengthening sub-territories financially, legally and administratively so that that they can perform their local tasks in an atmosphere of freedom from interference and control from central government. It entails greater autonomy and

the capacity to make policies, at that level, through local legislation and execution authority that is consistent with the needs of peripheral societies. Devolved local authorities should exhibit the following characteristics:
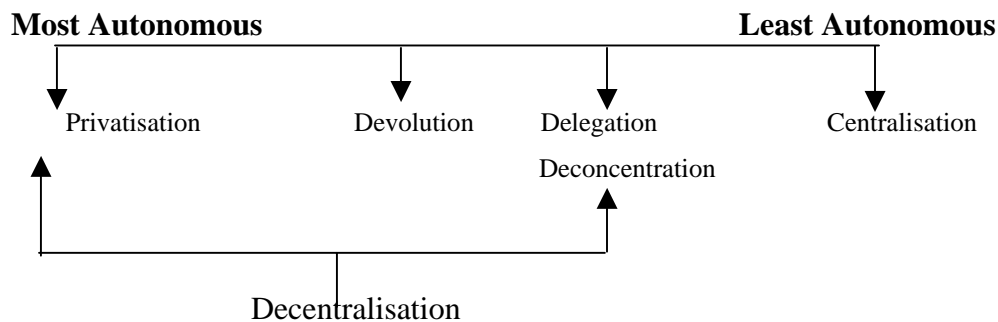
(a)   they should be constitutionally separate from central government and be responsible for a range of services;

(b)   they should have a legal status which gives them power to sue and be sued;

(c)   they should have their own treasury, separate budget and accounts;

(d)   local taxes should produce a substantial portion of local revenue;

(e)   local authorities should have their own personnel, with the right to hire and fire such staff;

(f)   local government policy should be largely decided by local councils, predominantly consisting of elected representatives; and

(g)   higher levels of government should only play an indirect advisory, supervisory and guidance role (Mawhood, 1993:9).

These characteristics, although they give local authorities greater local discretion, do not in anyway mean that these devolved units should function outside the confines of central government or constitutional provisions. The characteristics indicate that they should have both specified (as sanctioned by central government) and residual (making policies that are not contrary to central government policies) power that allows them to act independently of central government, with the ultimate aim of complementing central government development strategies. The two should not be viewed as institutions in competition but as mutually supportive institutions whose ultimate aim is excellence in service provision.

Devolved institutions should also realise their subordinate nature and as such, should function within the legislated directives of the mother body. It should also be noted that draconian legislation with too many provisions for central

government interference in local affairs through, for example, Presidential Directives or sweeping supervisory powers of the responsible Minister, actually erodes the viability of the institution and violates the very defining characteristics of devolution. This scenario has a tendency of centralising power and leaving local authorities without autonomy and the capacity to function effectively and efficiently in their efforts to meet the demands of the local communities. Viewed on a decentralisation – centralisation continuum, devolution lies at the extreme left, while delegation and deconcentration are in the middle, with centralisation at the extreme right. This study illustrates this relationship diagrammatically as indicated in Figure 3.1 below.

THE DECENTRALISATION ----- CENTRALISATION CONTINUUM

Most Autonomous   **Least Autonomous**

Privatisation   Devolution   Delegation   Centralisation
                                             Deconcentration

Decentralisation

Devolution provides the least centralised form. This is because it has elements of territorial separation while deconcentration and delegation are mainly about functional separation. Thus, the motives behind each of these forms of decentralisation provide a clear indication of the differences among them, and the ability of the state to control each form. Devolution also provides higher latitude of local participation since the local people decide who should be their leaders and determine a combination of services with which they want the decentralised body to provide them. Table 3.1 as provided by this study on page 116, distinguishes the four types of decentralisation by motive or rationale and provides examples of each of these forms.

Decentralisation is an attempt to move away from centralisation and its dysfunctions. However, a number of developing countries find it difficult to move

away from the tendency to centralize. Centralisation can be viewed as a tendency to concentrate administrative and political power in the upper echelons of an organisation's hierarchy (Blondel, 1995:230). It is movement towards the centre of power in any system of governance. It is an acknowledgment that those at the centre are better placed to formulate decisions for the whole society in a given polity. Thus, centralisation tendencies negate decentralisation. Viewed as factors along a continuum, they lie at the extreme ends of this continuum. Blondel (1995:231-233), advance several reasons to explain why states tend to favour centralisation, at the expense of decentralisation:

Table 3.1 Forms of decentralisation and their rationale

Type of Decentralisation	Rationale	Examples
Privatisation	-withdrawal from service provision -transferring responsibilities to parallel institutions	private sector involvement, special interest group involvement, e.g. professional associations, trade unions women and youth groups, voluntary orgs.
Delegation	-transfer of managerial and operational responsibility -creating institutions with power to plan and implement policies	semi- autonomous institutions, e.g. parastatals, regional development agencies and project units.
Deconcentration	-creation of field agents, -functional power 'hiving off' -managerial/administrative empowering -easing the administrative load of centre	creating provincial and district offices, e.g. the PA and DA's office, Development Committees, line ministry field agents. weak systems of local government with the DA as Chief Executive Officer.
Devolution	-territorial autonomy -operational autonomy -policy making autonomy -functional autonomy -enhanced local participation -interest group representation	creating provincial govt. (development from the middle). Creating district government (development from below).

1. Centralisation ensures an equitable distribution of resources to all corners of the state. Resource distribution and redistribution is said to be a major function of central government. Thus, government can effectively carry out

this function if it is in charge of all processes of distribution and redistribution. This is said to have the effect of making sure that people with similar life styles in different parts of the country (similar life style, meaning similarity in income, and so on) get similar treatment so as to avoid advantaging or disadvantaging the other, should their localities be tasked with carrying out the implementation of such policies. In addition, the argument is that if each local authority is allowed to carry out its redistributive policies, then localities that are richer than others will prosper, while the poor ones will remain poor.

Although this point has some elements of plausibility, it is not in keeping with the views espoused by this study fundamentally, because decentralising authority to make decisions at the local level does not mean that government should sit back and rely on these local institutions to carry out these redistributive policies without it having any input. The fact that certain localities are richer than others make, it easy for central government to realise which areas are weaker than others. It is after such a realization, that central government can come up with equalisation policies to uplift these disadvantaged areas. An umbrella entry by central government to all areas in pursuit of a policy to be felt in all corners of the state is likely to exacerbate a skewed phenomenon of resource distribution, as there is likely to be a tendency to give even to those who have. This scenario is evident in Zimbabwe where umbrella grants, given to local authorities between 1980 and 1993, have led to deep-rooted local authority disparities, rather than advancing the equity goal which is mentioned as a focus for the need to centralise. Thus, centralisation for distributive and redistributive purposes does not seem to concur with the focus of this study.

2. The second argument is that of controlling the allocation of resources. The argument is that central government is better placed to conduct macro

economic policies for the nation. Where local authorities are in charge of their own tax systems, or control large amounts of the tax bill, this creates a situation where central government is powerless and unable to influence economic growth and stability. A scenario in the United Kingdom is given as an example of local institutions whose fiscal behaviour runs contrary to national interests because of the fiscal powers, which the local institutions have.

This argument comes from situations where local government systems have not been properly rationalised in line with overall national interest. The idea of local government is not to create institutions that act in competition with the national government, but to create responsive institutions that give central government capacity to function effectively for national gain. It is to create institutions that complement the efforts of central government, rather than undermine such efforts. Thus, the need to control macro-economic policies is understood. However, if such control cannot be put into practice because of decentralization, it is an indication of failure to rationalise functions between the two systems. This makes it difficult to create operational policies that lead to the effectiveness of both systems.

3. Centralisation ensures accountability. The argument here is that central government cannot be influenced by local interest groups to act inconsistently with its overall mission of service provision and ensuring overall national development. Central government is, thus, better placed to respond favourably to the wishes of the people than is local government. Local institutions are more prone to corrupt tendencies, since pockets of influential people can sway these institutions to their own advantage, as those in office are mostly 'local boys' who can easily succumb to pressure.

This argument is difficult to justify in this study because practice in Africa

does not, in any way support this point. Secondly, the study argues, this point would only be justifiable where society is depoliticised in such a manner that only those who wield economic power are political. According to this study, practice, especially in Zimbabwe runs contrary to this argument. In fact, politicians at the local level can easily be controlled. For example, these officials can loose their posts if they do not respond to local communities. Local communities are likely to find it easy to control their officials since they know that they are the ones who give them power. However, it is difficult for locals to control field officers whose power lies at the centre. As a result, one would argue, these field officers are to a greater extent, more prone to corruption than local officers. In addition, central government also interferes with the deliberations of local authorities by influencing electorates to choose candidates who are supportive of their policies. In the final analysis, candidates are torn apart and fail to function, both to the satisfaction of central government or local communities. In the presence of this confusion, one cannot rule out looting. Indeed, decentralisation is not a panacea for good governance and development but is one of the factors that should make things happen. It is one of the factors that should lead to good governance, democracy and responsibility in rulership.

4. To enable the centre to know what is going on in the periphery so as to offer timely remedial action. Is it not in fact easier for central government to know exactly what the local situation is like from local people, rather than from its field officers, and secondly, who knows the local conditions better than the other, the local people or field officers?

5. To ensure a well planned development process for the whole country. Central planning has been accused of failing to take detailed local needs into cognizance. As a result, it has led to situations of allocating resources to areas that do not, in fact, need them. Thus, central planning tends to

lack a rational analysis of local conditions and, as such, it is not better placed to come up with prescriptions that can treat peripheral areas. Although central planning, as a concept of national development is not dismissed at this stage, the argument is that it can only be meaningful in a situation where the local communities determine what is good for them and when such decisions are incorporated in the overall national development strategy. Community involvement can only take place where there are local institutions to advance the cause of the local people. Central government field agencies, arguably in Zimbabwe, may not be as reliable as expected in forwarding the interests of the local people to government. In addition, the officers in these field agencies may recommend policy actions of their interest rather than that of the community. For example, funds may be allocated for schools when the local communities needed clinics. Dams may be built in areas where communities feel that such infrastructure is not suitable for that area. Consequently, communities may resist certain development projects that are centrally determined and implemented. This is inconsistent with the requirements of sustainable local development.

Arguments for centralisation tend to be oriented towards autocracy. They defy democratic practices and deny communities the chance for self-determination. Society is so complex and its problems even more so, that the few officials at the centre and their field officers cannot penetrate local areas and handle all the problems that these people face without suffering from political exhaustion that may ultimately negate any positive actions by the state in its attempt to rule effectively. In fact, democratic values indicate that government is best that governs least. Such government can only govern least if it entrenches a system of self-government that can be properly instituted through decentralisation.

According to Blondel (1995:233), the tendency to centralise governance originates from four fundamental factors: history, ideology, structure, and

efficiency. These factors are explained as follows:

History: Blondel (1995:231) indicates that the historical legacies of nations exhibit ongoing patterns of centralisation and decentralisation. The issue is highlighted further when the author says that:

> Some countries such as France or Japan are regarded as traditionally centralised. The same appears to be true of many Latin American countries if not all. On the other hand, countries such as the United States, Britain and Germany are regarded as inherently decentralised. Indeed although in Western Europe in recent years pressure for decentralisation has increased, long standing traditions persist and seem to continue to account for the fact that some states remain centralised while others are decentralized (Blondel, 1995:231)

The historical factor indicates that some states may find it difficult to modify their historical past. These tend to continue in their governing ways, be they centralised or decentralized, as they fail to move away from such historical legacies.

Ideology: National ideology fosters a kind of national outlook with which states want to be identified. Ideology is a philosophical orientation of the state that in turn, helps to shape its behavior. Once a state has an ideology which guides its actions, it can easily be predicted how it is likely to respond to certain societal demands. Liberalism and egalitarianism are the common ideologies that polarised the world into two: the East and the West, for a long time, until the fall of the Soviet Union. For example, countries that follow an egalitarian ideology are said to exhibit decentralisation tendencies, while those that follow egalitarianism are likely to have centralisation tendencies in line with the philosophy of democratic centralism that characterised Communist Europe, Cuba and all socialist states (Blondel, 1995:231).

Countries that lack a proper ideology find it difficult to identify themselves. As a result, they vacillate between the right (liberal democracy) and the left (egalitarian

democracy) in a manner that brings operational confusion to the state. This confusion is an African problem where most African countries find it difficult to say what ideology they are following. However, countries such as Tanzania during the time of President Nyerere and Zambia during the leadership of Kaunda, managed to define themselves as following African socialism and humanism respectively. When viewed on a continuum, these two fall somewhere between egalitarianism and liberalism. The question is, did they develop and follow policies that exhibited such ideological convictions or were these philosophical standpoints convenient means of keeping both the west and the east guessing as to whether they had the support of such countries or not.

Zimbabwe, on the other hand, has exhibited serious ideological problems. While at independence it pronounced that it was Marxist-Leninist, its practices were not purely egalitarian. Zimbabwe operated under a transitional Constitution that had entrenched clauses that could not be changed for periods of five and ten years. This Constitution was basically a western machination that protected the rights of minority groups (particularly the whites) for up to a period of ten years. Consequently, one would argue that Zimbabwe could not, because of these constitutional provisions apply its Marxist-Lininist ideology at the time. This would have meant the introduction of drastic redistributive policies that would have been in contravention of the Constitution to which central government was a signatory. Although the top hierarchy in the ruling party had interest in egalitarianism, the practice of it was never in place. At the beginning of the Third Republic in 1990, Zimbabwe was affected by IMF and World Bank prescriptions for development. These were encapsulated in the infamous ESAP (Chipika, 1998:8). This programme, as has already been explained in Chapter one, was designed in line with liberal philosophies and the free market economy. The implementation of this programme was supposed to lead to economic growth, improved social welfare and democratic good governance. As has been explained, these values were never attained. Of significance is the fact that while the government's chance to implement its Marxist-Leninist philosophies had

arrived in the Third Republic, because of the end of the transitional era under the Lancaster House Constitution, the realities of development at that moment, pushed Zimbabwe from implementing these communist ideas. This scenario created a lot of conflict and uncertainty as the President continued to utter words of Marxism and Leninism while the country was busy implementing 'western world' programmes. This confusion meant that the Marxist-Leninist philosophies remained at the level of rhetoric in Zimbabwe. One would argue that this confused state of affairs was of no benefit to the country's local government system as there were doses of egalitarianism and liberalism that were not properly synchronized to produce a viable state ideology.

Structure: This relates to issues of societal conflict, where an inherently conflictual society, for various reasons, such as those of ethnicity and racism, tends to have centralised systems, that the leaders argue, is intended to deal with issues of conflict, dissension and general societal contradictions that may threaten the very existence of a particular regime in power. On the other hand, a state that has a fairly stable society has greater chances of practicing decentralisation. Blondel (1995:231-232) notes that:

> A relationship exists between ideology, the degree to which a regime is accepted and centralisation. Liberal regimes that are well accepted will tend towards decentralisation. Authoritarian regimes are likely to promote centralisation except if they are so well accepted and so traditional that they do not propose to put a new mark on their polity. Most authoritarian systems and those liberal systems which are not well accepted are likely to veer towards centralisation, though to a varying degree and with greater or lesser consistency.

This indicates that the government in power and its ideological outlook tends to play a major role in cultivating or limiting decentralization.

Efficiency: Efficiency is about the attainment of results at the least cost. It is about the maximisation of net benefits in any given policy scenario. As such, regimes are said to deal with issues of centralisation in terms of cost saving or

the reduction of inefficiency. Centralisation is particularly associated with inefficiency while the opposite holds for decentralisation. All states cherish this economic factor from the obvious point of economic prudence brought about by the undeniable fact that all countries operate under conditions of scarcity of resources (Blondel, 1995:232-233).

The centralisation of power has led to much criticism by development scholars. They argue that a state with centralising tendencies develops a patronage-based civil service that, in its daily undertakings, functions to gain political compliance from members of civil society rather than concentrating on its fundamental goals of serving the community and facilitating local development. The civil service, in this case, becomes an extension of the reigning politics of the day as it endlessly engages itself in politicisation processes rather than administrative and executory functions. Leftwhich (1994:381) indicates that after gaining independence, most states in Africa failed to realise the importance of creating institutions of governance that adhered to the demands of proper policy making and implementation. The author adds that the post-colonial state in Africa is always busy consolidating its power. As a result, it tends to forget that the fundamentals of power consolidation actually lay in creating responsive institutions of governance.

The other problem with the state in Africa is that through its central tendencies, it has failed to develop administrative systems that are competent enough to handle local government institutions appropriately. There are several management and administrative failures in Africa. Consequently, poor development strategies and inappropriate implementation frames are employed, hence the perpetuation of underdevelopment. Another important factor that concerns proponents of development like Leftwhich is that those who define development processes did not give the state in Africa, sufficient preparatory ground to enable the state to appropriately define itself in developmental terms (Picard and Garrity in Fitzgerald, McLennan and Munslow, 1997:62-63). Thus, it

was one thing, on the part of the state, to term itself a developmental state and another to actually carry out developmental practices, as it was not aware of the characteristics it had to exhibit in order to function as such. This state of affairs affects many of Africa's development initiatives, such that, even in situations where funds for development are provided, the state still fails to 'take off' as it cannot fundamentally understand the characteristics it has to exhibit to undertake developmental tasks.

The state can define its development mission as a cherished goal for human advancement and progress, but fail to translate this definition into practical programmes that it can put into practice to achieve this goal. The fundamentals of such failure lie in its failure to mobilise and manage the very resource that needs development: the human resource. The practice, mostly in Africa, is to distance this resource from decision making and policy making in such a manner that it (the human resource) feels alienated from the programmes and projects being undertaken (Leftwhich, 1994:381). This erodes its (the human resource) spirit of commitment leading inevitably, to the failure of such programmes and projects. The contention here is that central government is too extensively involved in the process of development. One would argue that central government wants to become an engine room for the conception of development ideas, a factory for designing work processes, a finance house or treasury for providing and distributing development resources throughout the country, a police officer for monitoring the implementation process, and even a judge to determine the level of performance has been. One would also argue that this is not a plausible approach as it tends to be centralised, authoritarian and even to an extent, totalitarian, leading the state to suffer from 'development constipation' and an inability to create room to manoeuvre and remove itself from the mess it has created for itself and its people.

Within the parameters of these criticisms, this study further argues that where local governance is concerned, this approach also erodes local institutional

autonomy which compromises local decision making and the overall functional capacity of these institutions. Thus, the purpose of decentralising power is ultimately destroyed. It becomes a cost to central government and the localities themselves. Lack of development, corruption in the form of misuse of funds, and favoritism manifest themselves and lead any country involved in development endeavours towards the brink of collapse. Eventually, external donor institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) propose development strategies for such countries, strategies that have, in most cases, exacerbated poverty and suffering in the recipient countries. Although the nature and content of these strategies may be blamed for the development of such a scenario, recipient countries should also shoulder much of the blame. The reasons being that these countries, with no culture of development, receive a lot of external funds which they, in turn, use inefficiently, thereby extending the country's debt, poverty and lack of development.

Zimbabwe had a chance of reviewing the situation indicated above, for more than twenty years. Instead of avoiding similar problems, it has engulfed itself in this dilemma. Popular participation is still a far cry from being a reality. Government seems to have involved itself in a system where it relates more to its field officers than to the rest of the people and this situation has created a vacuum between the people and government, a situation that has affected development processes negatively as popular participation, programme coordination, planning and implementation become difficult to synchronise. Even where government has created local authorities, these have not brought any hope because significantly, no serious decision making takes place within these local authorities. The people, and even their representatives at local level are not used to choosing among alternatives, or deciding what the alternatives are. They are used to being told what is good for them, often in great detail, since central ministry guidelines specify uniform standards and methods to be used across the country (Mushauri in Hofmeister and Scholz, 1996:271).

Smith (1985:40) seems to provide a temporary answer to the whole scenario of overcentralisation, thereby exacerbating over-dependence and lack of local power for local authority people. Smith says that:

> … if people are to be shareholders in development, contributing their capital (savings, labour, knowledge), they must have a say too. They need institutions that allow them to have a direct say. This implies a shift in both resources and control over resources and decision making to the rural people. These are the consequences of adopting a bottom up approach [which, in this modern world is fundamental for development initiatives].

Criticisms of centralisation have strengthened ideas for decentralisation. Both authoritarian and liberal states agree that decentralisation is important. The only difference arises in the nature and extent of decentralisation that is permissible in their respective regimes. Blondel (1995:229), in the analysis of state centralisation and decentralisation begins by noting that:

> No government, even the most authoritarian, can ever take all public decisions at the centre. Some power has therefore to be given authorities below the national level to take the decisions that the centre cannot take. From this general remark, emerges the idea of decentralisation, an idea that can, of course, take many forms and vary markedly in extent.

Using the above citation, one can argue that African countries also found themselves in the same boat after independence. It was evident that the rapid expansion of government services after independence would put pressure on central governments to decentralise responsibilities to sub-national institutions. This would in turn allow local communities to participate in matters of government. It would also reduce central control and increase public accountability.

To further strengthen the need and in fact, indispensability of decentralisation in Africa, the Africities 2000 Summit held in Windhoek came up with ideas for an African Vision for Decentralisation. Mayors and Ministers of Local Government expressed these after a week of deliberation on this issue. The following views

were expressed:

1. We, the Ministers and Mayors gathered together in Windhoek agree to commit ourselves to promote and support the vision of decentralisation in our respective countries.

2. The purpose of decentralisation should be to devolve power and responsibility to lower tiers of government, promote local democracy and good governance, with the ultimate objective of improving the quality of life of the people.

3. Decentralisation should be to local government structures that are representative of and accountable to all sectors of the population, including marginalized and disadvantaged groups.

4. Decentralisation should be to levels of local government structures that enable effective community participation in local governance.

5. Decentralisation should involve the transfer to local government institutions those powers and functions necessary to enable them to:

    a) provide services for the local population efficiently and effectively;
    b) provide a conducive environment for local economic development;
    c) develop and manage local resources in a sustainable manner.

6. Decentralisation should include the provision of access to the resources needed to execute the above powers and functions efficiently and effectively, including financial and manpower resources.

7. Financial resources should be available to local authorities in a manner that is reliable, adequate, predictable, transparent, accountable,

sustainable and equitable.

8. The basic components of a decentralised system of local government should be enshrined in the constitution (AULA - Africities Communiqué, 2000:1-2).

These ideas encapsulate Africa's decentralisation spirit and act as a guide to any country on the continent that is keen on embracing this concept in restructuring its government system.

Local Government

The concept 'local government' is embedded in the umbrella concept of decentralisation. Its significance has been emphasized the world over as an important aspect of stable government, democracy and community empowerment. Simply defined, local government:

> … is a second or third level of governance created to ensure that government is brought to the grass-root population to give its members a sense of involvement in the political processes that control their lives (Reddy, 2000:1)

As can be seen from this definition, local government is about the political subdivision of a nation or state so that substantial control of local affairs is by the local leadership that should be democratically elected by the local people. The definition indicates that local government is a result of demarcating a nation's geographical area into smaller geographical units that can stand separately, according to laid down criteria. These geographical units are given the powers of self-determination by central government, either through constitutional provisions, or through parliamentary legislation. This legislative provision gives it a legal status that allows it to operate independently and where it has to be sued, such can be done and where it has to sue the legal provisions give it such authority. Reddy (2000:8) defines local government as the '…second or third

level of government deliberately created to bring government to the local populace as well as to give its members a sense of involvement in the political processes that control their daily lives.' Emphasis here is on the separateness of local government from central government, locality orientation, community participation, and self-determination. In like manner Meyer (1978:10) defines local government as:

> …local democratic units within the democratic system … which are subordinate members of the government vested with prescribed, controlled governmental powers and sources of income to render specific local services and to control and regulate the geographic, social and economic development of defined local areas.

An analysis of these definitions indicates that the basic features of local government have to do with:

- **Locality:** that its concentration is on a small area within a state. Locality entails nearness and ownership. This allows the local community to identify itself with this body and participate in all its development efforts.

- **Legal personality:** that local government units are a creation of the state as a constitutional requirement or legislative imperative. The enabling Act of Parliament allows it to be a juridical person capable of suing and being sued.

- **Autonomy:** once established, the local authorities operate independently from central government. They make binding decisions on the mixture of services they want to provide in their areas of jurisdiction.

- **Governmental power:** Other than doing what they want in terms of servicing their local communities, they complement government strategies of improving social welfare and making life good for all citizens. Thus, their actions are endowed with government power to carry out formal

government functions.

- **Participation:** communities are expected to participate in local decision making. This allows them to determine what they want at a particular time and to prioritise services. In addition, participation gives communities the chance to learn the tricks of the political game. It enhances their political consciousness and capacity to engage meaningfully in national politics.

- **Representation:** local authorities have the power to choose their own representatives through a local government electoral process. If the representatives do not perform according to standard, communities have the power to replace them. The representatives form the council's legislative body, which is in charge of locality decision making.

The purpose of local government units is to make decisions of a local nature based on their requisite power and authority and to raise revenue through local taxes and levies as they see fit. To carry out its functions, the local government unit operates through an elected councilor system, which establishes a body of councillors to carry out legislative functions of a local nature. Sometimes provisions for appointing councillors exist in different local government systems. The ideal situation, however, is for the majority of council members to be elected to council by vote.

However, it should be noted that during the colonial era in Zimbabwe, there were more appointments than elections, as it will be seen later in this chapter. As such, local government units, depending on the nature of government, can exhibit extreme forms of both centralisation and decentralisation. This means that the evolutionary process of local government in one country can vacillate between the two extremes, depending on the government in power. Internationally, there have been similar variances in the structures and functions of local governments (Reddy, 2000:1).

Local government should be dynamic to keep up with the changing nature of societies. Rural local government transformation in Zimbabwe should recognize the need for dynamism to reorient rural local government to the changing socio-economic and political demands of the country. With this in mind, local government should play a number of roles, such as the provision of services of a local nature; regulating locality processes; building external and internal relations; facilitating community participation and harmony; and assuming a leadership role as a representative, governor, and voice of the local communities.

These roles indicate the paramountcy of local government institutions as facilitators of local choice. Once local communities have selected what they want provided to them (such as water, housing, health, education, and roads), it is the duty of local authorities to organise and gear themselves for actions that lead to the efficient production and management of such services. Needless to say, the local people should feel duty bound to contribute to the production and management of such processes. Where local authorities have no internal capacity to undertake such services, there is need for these institutions to facilitate processes that would lead to entry by other institutions to partner it in producing these goods and services, hence the need to mobilise the private sector, NGOs, and central government involvement in local affairs, not as major policy makers, but as vital guests of the locality development process.

There is a constant need by local authorities to monitor or regulate locality processes of doing things and to keep the democratic flame burning by creating structures of community participation so as to constantly get feed back on their actions and whether or not they are providing the essential goods and services in an efficient and effective manner.

In order to undertake their duties effectively, local authorities also need a sound council, which is the management committee and decision box of the local community. The council should be community based and should consist of locally

elected leaders who derive their power from the local people, rather than some external source of power, such as central government persons or senior party ideologues who penetrate local authorities and influence locality dynamic to the detriment of local interests. This means that councillors should, in turn, put in place an administration which is composed of administrators with sound planning, policy making, financial, human resources and project management knowledge; administrators who are driven by professional values of excellence rather than personal interests that are inconsistent with the demands and nature of their duties.

Because of the multiplicity of roles they have to fulfill, local government institutions are faced with several challenges, which if overcome, would ensure their (local authorities) viability. These challenges include the challenge for the maintenance of democratic ideals; the challenge for functional fulfillment; and the challenge for managerial competence. These challenges are a basis for local government autonomy and functional capacity. Gauging the performance of local government demands that there be measurement of the extent to which the objectives of local government are achieved taking into account the resources available to the locality and the demands of the local communities. This means that deliberate central government initiatives to establish local government institutions should ensure that clear policy frameworks are set in place, to enable local institutions to meet these challenges.

- **The Democratic Participation Challenge**

It is generally accepted by several scholars of local government that these institutions exist to promote the values of liberty, participation, responsiveness, equity and development (Blair, 1977:4-8; and Chandler, 1996:6-9). The values, if internalized and acted upon, will ensure local democracy. Liberty is a fundamental value of democracy, as it is about the entrenchment of the fundamental rights of individuals to determine their own destiny. Local government ensures the attainment of this value as it facilitates local competition

for local government positions, local power and control of locality proceedings; gives local people the chance to relate easily with local centres of power as they are within easy reach; and limits rural local government influence on local proceedings, a situation that enhances individual freedom and eliminates excessive control of the periphery by the centre. The argument is that for local government to be effective, there should be a diffusion of power, which should enhance the liberty of communities and reduce the tendency of central government to centralize power. This leads to a more balanced power distribution between the state and civil society.

Although this argument is sustained by local government development in countries such as the United States of America, France and some African countries at independence, the argument is criticised for its inability to ensure local democracy. However, the counter argument to these negative sentiments is that in order to ensure local democracy, it is important for the whole country to exhibit a democratic culture of participation. It is indeed rational to provide for this democratic approach in constitutions and Acts of Parliament. But for this provision to be of useful, it should be followed by extensive processes of acculturation, to develop in people a culture of appreciation of democratic governance. This is fundamental as a national priority because a country which is not sure of its political values and uses dictatorial tendencies in its governing processes, is likely to find the same scenario spreading in its local institutions. This becomes a tradition of rule in that country.

The second value is that of participation, also referred to as the value of equality. The notion of participation is a call upon local government to mobilise communities to take part in issues of governance. It is a pluralist notion of enhancing the politics of involvement or inclusion. It is an attempt to put the people first. Participation stems from the realisation that human beings possess the power of reason and thus, it is only rational to create viable institutions, which can enable a wide network of human beings to engage in socio-economic and

political discourse aimed at their own upliftment. Local government has been identified as such an institution which can allow human beings to put into practice their powers of reason by debating locality issues for their own benefit. Involving people in governance is in fact, part of the democratisation process that empowers the people. It seeks to involve communities in decision making on what they want; involves them in the implementation and monitoring of development programmes; and allows them to evaluate all these programmes and projects that affect their lives. This enables communities to think and rethink development strategies. An analysis of the concept of participation also indicates that:

- people's participation in development is the engine for launching the process of economic transformation; it is the motor for accelerating the process of change and development;

- people's participation expands the areas of debate on national development issues, it diffuses power and subordinates state control to popular politics;

- self-reliant development requires that power be redistributed in favour of society rather than be concentrated in the hands of a few;

- the politics of consensus and consent, conviction and commitment, compassion and accountability are the practical corollary of a concern for a nation as a whole, not just for a particular group;

- there must be material incentives for people to make the fullest possible use of their skills and talents – that is, to participate meaningfully – and this calls for a development ethic which is not only informed by social justice, but the benefits which are sufficient to provide the basic needs of the individual and the family;

- to achieve and sustain meaningful development, it is necessary to ensure the education and training, health, well-being and vitality of the people so that they can participate fully and effectively in the development process;

- there is need for the creation of an enabling environment in terms of political freedoms – of speech, association, freedom from arbitrary arrest and molestation. It is in such an environment that high levels of productivity can be generated and sustained, and values of self reliance and self confidence can be developed; and

- within African countries, the initiative and vitality of the rural poor have for too long, been sapped by the rural rich and the government officials from the city (Marsden in Crook and Jerve, 1991:32-34).

Participation benefits all who are engaged in local government, which is inclusive of communities, councilors, the local bureaucracy and ultimately, central government. However, it should be realised that this participation is not an overnight affair. It is a process, which requires vigorous attempts by central government and local authorities to mobilise all forces of participation and gear them towards creating conducive environments to ensure the attainment of this value.

One of the roles of local government is to provide goods and services of a local nature. For these to be provided effectively, local government should be responsive to the needs of these local communities. Responsiveness is one of the fundamental values that local government should satisfy. Local government institutions are better placed to respond to a desirable mixture of goods and services needed by the local communities. This is mostly because it is closest to the people, whereas central government is rather remote (Chandler, 1996:9). The argument put forward by some scholars that central government is able to

feel the 'heart throbs' of the local communities through its field agencies can be true but not plausible as these 'heart throbs' cannot be coordinated by these functional specialist departments that may be interested in different 'pulse rates' that have nothing to do with the interests of the local communities. For a holistic approach, these different pulse rates need to be coordinated and a pulse rate curve drawn to exhibit a full picture of the ailment and thereby offer an appropriate 'drug punch' that is capable of dealing with the undesirable condition of the community. Local institutions provide these coordinative mechanisms. They can coordinate various community requests and provide, within the limited resources, the appropriate decisions and programmes to alleviate the problems that the community faces. Local government institutions, are indeed, better placed to perform the locality welfare function in an efficient manner.

Responsiveness is crucial for developing countries such as Zimbabwe, where local populations have several demands in basic social services that were denied them during the colonial era. Thus, the argument here is that local communities need local institutions that they can constantly monitor to make sure that they act in accordance with the needs of the former. Failure to do so should lead to representatives being replaced through the vote for a new breed of councillors who, through fear of treading the paths of their predecessors, are likely to 'tighten their belts' and deliver the goods these local communities need.

The fourth value is that of equity. This value has gained prominence through advocates of welfare economics. It is closely related to legal and social rationality and refers to the distribution of effects and effort among different groups in society (Dunn, 1994:286). Thus, the argument put forward concerning equity in this study, is that local government is well placed to ensure that a minimum standard of living exists throughout the community and country as a whole. Although the general argument is that equity (which is about income distribution) is better effected and controlled by central government, local authorities can also have an input as they are aware of the economic disparities of people in their

areas. Central government should, therefore, provide local authorities with grants aimed at equalizing such disparities by varying the expenditure needs of the localities to cater for the disadvantaged poor. However, it should be realized that the study notes that grants are somewhat problematic in that they have the effect of even advantaging the rich in situations where discrimination of service provision is not possible.

Finally, the value of development entails a multi faceted process, which is aimed at improving the quality of life and the world outlook of individuals (Fox and Meyer, 1995:36). It embraces socio-economic, political, environmental and cultural variables that lead to the sustainability of societies as well as promoting the advancement of their standards of living. This study argues that the notion of development as a condition that can be enhanced by local government stems from the realization that local government:

- is a mechanism for overcoming the problems of highly ineffective centrally controlled planning that has been used in many developing nations since independence;

- can reduce congestion at the centre. It can cut through the red tape and the highly structured hierarchy of central planning in developing nations due largely to the over-concentration of power, authority and resources at the national capital of the country; and could lead to the speedy completion of projects by giving locals greater decision making powers;

- can allow greater political and administrative penetration of national government policies into remote areas where central government plans are often ignored by or unknown to the local elite and where support for national development plans is often weak;

- aims at improving the standards of living of the poor; namely, the

amelioration of poverty, inequality and material deprivation. Thus for these to succeed, the local clientele should participate in the planning and implementation of relevant programmes designed to address these issues;

- has the effect of increasing the skill base of local communities and enable them to competently undertake development initiatives without foreign intervention; and

- can rationalise development processes and unite different interest groups who are aware of the need to act in unison in order to fulfill the needs of all in the locality.

The fulfillment of these values leads to a democratic culture among the locals; a culture that can be sustained by continued efforts to open up the governing system so that all feel obliged to take part in order to enhance their chances of development.

- **The Functional Challenge**

This is a challenge to allow local authorities to fulfill their functions both traditional and developmental. Local government institutions are established to perform functions of a local nature which central governments find difficult to perform because of their remoteness from local situations and, specifically, because of the local nature of certain services which make one area different from others. This scenario needs local attention from local people who, in fact, are to be the beneficiaries of such services. As such, since human beings are endowed with rationality, it becomes imperative that these local people determine the mixture of services they want and how they need these to be provided to them. Such decisions cannot emanate from central government without it being charged with being dictatorial. These functions of a local nature include:

1. the provision of essential services like education, health, housing, roads, water, sewerage and drainage systems;

2. carrying out development functions such as:
    (a)   promoting the development of local authority areas;
    (b)   formulating development policies;
    (c)   preparing development plans, both short term and long term plans;
    (d)   acquiring property as an investment initiative;
    (e)   engaging in income generating projects;
    (f)   engaging in cooperative arrangements with other local authorities, business persons, firms and even central government;

3. carrying out regulatory functions such as making regulatory by laws, registering, licensing and inspecting properties within the local authority area; and

4. collecting and expending revenue in line with the provisions of the enabling legislation (Seely, 1978:36-37).

The question to ask here is, did local authorities manage to perform their functions appropriately in the last eight years of their institution? What are the legal provisions that hinder or facilitate local authority functional capacity? What kind of resources are they allowed to collect? Are these resources adequate for local authority purposes and do these local authorities in fact, have the capacity to collect such revenues?

All these challenges hinder or facilitate local authorities in their bid to perform in accordance with their mandates. Meeting these challenges has the effect of popularising these institutions in the eyes of their clients. This has the positive effect of encouraging local involvement in council affairs, a situation that is much needed in Zimbabwe where rural local authorities have been institutions of

ridicule since the colonial days (Roe, 1992:5).

- **The Management Challenge**

To manage local affairs, local authorities create functional committees tasked with making sure that different duties of council are performed in a responsible manner. Apart from these committees, one would say that a local bureaucracy, composed of experts in administration and management is appointed, to provide the needed administrative and specific functional skills consistent with the needs of the locality.

The management scenario means that the challenges of local authorities lie in their ability to manage local affairs. This is an important function of local authorities that has been found wanting in Zimbabwe where local authorities lack decision making skills and consequently, are frequently accused of corruption, misuse of funds and general administrative incompetence (Hlatywayo, 1992:56).

The quality of management should be such that it has the necessary craft literacy and craft competence. Craft literacy is about the ability of management to produce viable plans such as corporate plans, strategic plans and project plans which are consistent with the abilities of council. Craft literacy also calls upon local authority managers to be able to make viable policy recommendations, which can assist local authorities in their decision-making (Moyo, 1992:62-63). Apart from craft literacy, local authority managers have to exhibit relevant competencies in implementing council programmes and projects. This competence should be accompanied by the ability of mangers to draft procedural policies that ensure local authority efficiency and effectiveness. It is significant to note that local authority resources are scarce and it is imperative that these management skills be geared to the maximisation of output with minimum cost. The whole scenario of management should thus encompass the economic question while rationally considering issues of equity.

The organisational frame of management calls upon local authorities to create

departments that can easily relate to committee functional areas. This scenario has the effect of creating the much needed rapport between committees and the local bureaucracy, who often accuse each other if the system is not well coordinated and besides, if the system is not coordinated properly, there is likely to be uncalled for duplication of services which defeats the whole purpose of resource rationalisation and efficiency. Other management challenges, which local authorities face include:

- the ability to look beyond the requirements of service provision to the needs and problems of the community;

- the ability to focus on the public as a customer and citizen, which is brought about both as a recognition of the changing demands of the public and as a response to legislation, challenges of the departmental model mentioned above and a professional culture which should be inputted in the local authority system of management;

- the ability to make strategic plans and define mission statements and objectives of organisations in behavioral terms so that they act as an achievable guide to all local authority actions as well as a response to the changing needs of societies;

- the ability to manage influence across the boundaries of the local authority and redirect such influences for the benefit of a particular local authority;

- the ability to articulate policy, both substantive and procedural, in order to lay a clear foundation for councillors in their policy deliberations;

- the ability to devolve management to lower echelons of the organisation and communities to increase community and council responsibility, responsiveness and initiative;

- the ability to encourage council to adopt an entrepreneurial approach to local authority business so as to exploit all developmental opportunities, programmes and projects in which councils can involve themselves to achieve the much needed council growth;

- the ability to input into the management system current staffing procedures aimed at realising potential for growth; and

- the ability to emphasize the importance of market forces in the workings of council as this has the effect of creating innovation and economic prudence in resource utilization (Leach and Stewart, 1982:182-185).

It remains to be seen if the Zimbabwean rural local government scenario measures up to these expectations. Before discussing the Zimbabwean scenario of rural local government, it is important to provide a brief discussion of traditional models of local government in general. This will enable one to understand the model with which Zimbabwe's local government system is associated, albeit with modifications.

Traditional systems of local government originate from the European systems of local government. The colonial process brought with it these European traditions, which have been influential in shaping local governance in these countries. However, a clear analysis of African local government indicates that these systems were not transplanted from Europe to Africa. Variations were introduced to create two systems, one for blacks and another for whites so as to entrench white supremacist policies and further subjugate the colonized black populations.

Although local government in Europe dates back to the Greek City States and the Roman Empire, constitutional local government manifested itself between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. The constitutionalisation of local government

was a major transformation of these institutions and government in general. The new local government dispensation enabled local government to become part of the acceptable national system of rule (Stoker, 1991:1-2; and Chandler, 1996:1-2). This ensured that local government was protected by constitutions. As a result, these local bodies could sue central government if it interfered with their duties.

Four traditional types or models of European local government systems can be isolated for comparison. These four European forms of local government have been influential in determining the path and development processes of local governance, particularly in Africa where they were imported during the colonial era. Not surprisingly, and for reasons indicated above, these systems were introduced with mixed characteristics in Africa. Colonialists especially the British introduced mixed systems to cater for blacks and whites. While the white local government institutions approximated the British local government system to a reasonable extent, the black institutions were basically modelled along a control-oriented system. The rationale here was to subjugate and control blacks that were viewed suspiciously. Blacks were taken as being rebellious by nature and needed close policing to make sure they 'towed the line' (Hlatshwayo, 1992:7). This scenario erased fundamental philosophical bases of local government in these countries. One may argue that the mixed tendencies have produced local government systems characterised by ambivalence, status uncertainty and a general intrusion into local affairs by central governments, contrary to policy positions announced by political leaders in these countries.

During the numerous struggles for independence, Africa came into contact with the Soviet System, which had raised the status of the political party, the Communist Party to overall supervisor of national affairs – hence the spirit of democratic centralism. This scenario was appealing to liberation movements. After all, it was partly through Soviet assistance that some of these countries emerged as victors in their struggles for independence. Thus, the Soviet

influence introduced some measure of Soviet local governance to Africa. The system was appealing and popular as it advocated for political party control. The model enabled the ruling parties to oversee all national activities, a situation that was politically plausible for the emerging states, as it would lead to the consolidation of power for those who occupied the seat of government. This mixed system of local governance in Africa has led many scholars to accuse African systems of lacking a philosophical base. Most systems are systems of convenience, whose fragility is exacerbated by a lack of a philosophy. This means that the lack of a guiding philosophy also indicates a weak political culture and hence, the failure to rationalise central/local relations. These issues are reflected in the Zimbabwean system and are revealed at each stage of the development of rural local government in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, one should emphasize that the current state of local government in Africa is a reflection of pragmatic developments geared toward redressing the socio-economic, and political imbalances found in these countries.

The major defining characteristics of the generic local government systems of Europe are encapsulated in the terms general subsidiarisation; dual subsidiarisation; dual subordination; and functional regulation. Humes and Martin (1969:5-6) give a general view of these characteristics. The views are summarized in Table 3.2 on page 146. Humes and Martin indicate the following:

- General subsidiarisartion defines the German system of local governance. It is a system in which the local executive is responsible to the council for most functions. However, this executive is also responsible to a higher authority for the implementation of specific central policies. In this system, a general ministry exists to oversee and coordinate local authority functions with those of functional ministries. These ministries communicate with this ministry to make sure that their programmes are implemented in accordance with their plans.

Table 3.2 Four European local government systems

	General Subsidiarisation (German)	*Dual subordination (Soviet)*	*Dual supervision (France)*	*Functional regulation (British)*
Political Culture: Philosophical tradition	Cameral	Marxist	Rational	Utilitarian
Local government role	Subsidiary	Integral	Agent	Partner
Relations: Central coordinating Agency (and role)	Ministry of interior (general oversight)	Party secretariat (strong coordination)	Ministry of interior (coordinating)	Department of Environment (Housekeeping)
Regional executive	*Regierungsbezirke* President	*Oblast* party bureau local and government executive committee	Prefecture	None
Local structure: Committees/board committee	Board/main includes key agency has strong role	Executive committee *(municipalite)* heads	Mayor and adjoints	Government by committee
Local chief executive	Local chief executive	Party first secretary/ board chairman	Mayor is political head	Relatively weak executive
Local Resources: Personnel	Common (framework) Pattern	Integrated	Uniform national corps	Separate
Principal fund sources	General revenues	Integrated	General fund and grants	Block grants and rates
Scope of local Services	Broad	Very broad including enterprises	Fairly broad but dependent	Not as broad

Source: Humes and Martin, 1969:10. European local government systems

- Dual subsidiarisation defines the former Soviet Union system. This is a system of subordination where the local executive is part of the central government hierarchy, that is, the hierarchy of the Communist Party, which assumes executive power over all institutions of governance. Thus, local government falls within the concept of democratic centralism where democracy is expressed through this vanguard party (the Communist Party). Strong coordination from a central agency is expected, as the centre is the seat of ultimate authority, composed of top members of the

party hierarchy.

- Dual supervision defines the French system of local government. This is a system in which the local executive is partially responsible to council and, as a designated agent of central authority or a member of a central hierarchy, is directly responsible to it and supervised by it. In this system deconcentration and delegation are intricately intertwined. Field agents of different service ministries control the provision of the specific services they are mandated to provide. There is also a general-purpose ministry whose function it is to supervise local government institutions and generally oversee and coordinate local affairs.

- Functional regulation defines the British system of local governance. In this system, the local executive is fully responsible to council and not directly to any higher authority. In this system, functional ministries directly provide specific services. A general-purpose ministry is established to carry out 'housekeeping' functions. This ministry has weak coordinating powers. This scenario gives functional ministries the leeway to provide their services as they please as they are assured of little or no interference at all from the housekeeping ministry.

A description of these systems allows one to slot in other types of local government systems both in Europe and Africa as these four prototypes have been adopted in one way or another by countries on these continents. 'One way or another' in the sense that variations exist to reflect the objective conditions of each country and the type of political culture that the country has developed or is developing. Humes and Martin (1969:11) summarize these sentiments by saying that:

> While each system has evolved from separate traditions there has always been a cross-cultural sharing of ideas and adaptation of institutions. No system of local government is a pure bred model; all represent a mixture of traditions. As the countries of the world have

become more inter-communicative and interdependent, such transnational sharing and adapting has become more frequent.

This is the view that is adopted by this study in analysing Zimbabwe's rural local government system The thrust allows one to consider the opportunities open to government during the time and make decisions as to whether the chosen transformation route was plausible.   A brief rendition of Zimbabwe's RLG is provided in the section that follows.

THE EVOLUTION OF RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ZIMBABWE

Hlatshwayo, Jerkins and Chisaka in Namusi (1998:13) indicate that the colonial legacy of extreme centralisation, which is dubbed "bambazonke" in Zimbabwean pidgin parlance, granted very restricted powers to the local population to participate in issues of governance. This centralisation process meant that colonial governance was neither based on consensus nor all the other democratic ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity. This colonial heritage saw Zimbabwe and other independent states in Africa developing, at least in the early years of independence, a strong bias against decentralising power to local communities. This tendency has led to extreme development pitfalls for several of these states on the African continent and, particularly Zimbabwe.

However, current democratisation changes indicate a willingness to part with the past and usher in a more community-focused approach that realises the limits central government has in championing local development. This is because such human progress needs a lot of flexibility and adaptation to local situations and the needs of the people at any particular time. This approach basically dismisses the notion of a strong central state as necessary for preserving unity among diverse ethnic and culturally heterogeneous groups of people that can be found within a given state. Centralisation of power has, instead, led to suppressive and oppressive governments; engendered resistance from society; social upheavals;

coups and counter-coups; and a general breakdown of peace and stability in these countries. Centralisation has led to poor performance by these institutions. Their record in promoting democratic ideals, providing social services, and ensuring managerial excellence, cannot be commended.

It is within this background that this study reviews rural local government in Zimbabwe. This will draw attention to the effects of previous systems on the current system. Four rural local government eras can be isolated and discussed. These are the pre-colonial era which is the period before 1890; the colonial era, 1890 to 1980; the transitional era begins in 1980 and ends in 1993; and the post-transitional era, which is the period from 1993 to 2002.

The Pre-colonial Era

This era covers the period before 1890 when Zimbabwe was colonised and occupied by the British through Cecil John Rhodes and his British South Africa Company (BSAC). This era exhibits a pre-colonial mode of local government (Namusi, 1998:2). In this era, different ethnic groups particularly the Shona groups that include tribes such as the Karanga, Khalanga, Zezuru, Manyika, and Korekore developed their own local government systems that were agricultural and pastoral based on the needs of peoples. These systems were reflective of the nature of livelihood of these people at the time. The Nguni ethnic groups included the Ndebele and the Shangani. These were militant groups. As a result, their local government system was reflective of the military organisation that was peculiar to these groups. All the same, local government manifested itself. Whether basically military or agricultural, the local government system reflected a highly decentralised structure. At the top was central government headed by the king (Mambo or Inkosi in the Shona and Ndebele traditions respectively). Below the king were several chiefs (Madzishe or Izinduna) who ran different groups of people located in a particular area. These undoubtedly, were the king's subjects. However, each chief ran his area (isigodi in Ndebele) the way he wanted without

unnecessary interference from the inkosi (Namusi, 1998:2). Thus, a lot of decision-making autonomy was left to the izinduna/chiefs who had local advisers. The indunas were well-trusted men and they had the capacity to perform their duties as per the requirements of their subjects and the king. The different chiefs were expected to pay taxes to the king and this guaranteed their loyalty to him. The payment of such taxes also ensured support from the king anytime the induna wanted it, especially when a war broke out. Although in certain cases coercion manifested itself, especially when additional ethnic groups were captured, there was a general air of peace and mutual support for one another. This situation guaranteed the prosperity of the people of the land, as a whole.

Rationality prevailed in setting up local government structures during the colonial era. Among others, kings were faced with two major options: either to integrate the conquered lands and its people with other communities, or to cater for the conquered group's development processes by allowing it to stay on its land, pay its taxes and be available to the king's services, especially the army. Apparently, the second option prevailed. The conquered ethnic groups were allowed to settle as a group with their own chief. This approach catered for ethnic differences and allowed the conquered people to lead their lives as long as they kept their obligations to the king in mind (Namusi, 1998:3). The payment of taxes and the freedom of each group to practise its culture enhanced the performance of each isigodi. This is because people were allowed to determine their own destiny, as long as their chief was not authoritarian himself.

The Colonial Era (1890 to 1980)

This era reflects ninety years of white rule in Zimbabwe (1890 - 1980). White rule brought with it British local government practices. The system fused with Dutch systems as a result of Anglo-Dutch relations at the Cape (Hlatshwayo, 1995:12). The colonial process subordinated pre-colonial local government systems to usher in a new era of local government that was alien to the indigenous people.

This was basically control oriented. The aim was to control blacks and force them accept the superiority of the whites. Rural local government in the colonial era evolved through four systems: the Native Commissioner system, Native Boards, Native Councils, and the African Councils.

- **The Native Commissioner System**

As indicated in Figure 1.1 page 18, the Native Commissioner (NC) rule heralded the first form of rural local government brought to Zimbabwe by whites. This came about through the oppressive nature of the BSAC. Contrary to the provisions of the Royal Charter, which instructed the BSAC to respect African laws and customs, they actually went on the rampage to subjugate the local people. They forced blacks to pay taxes and controlled their movements by issuing them with travel documents known as 'passes' (Namusi, 1998:5). This process of subjugation led to mass uprisings, which culminated in the murder of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, who up to now, are seen as symbols of African resistance and the guiding spirits of Zimbabwe's liberation war. These turbulent years led to the establishment of the so-called Native Reserves that were areas specially demarcated for blacks. The Native Reserves were to be supervised by officers known as Native Commissioners as provided for in the Order-in-Council Act of 1898 Section 79.

The Native Commissioners took charge of African Affairs. They were given powers to supervise Africans in their daily lives, as the conviction was that Africans could not easily determine their future without the inspirations of a superior power. The African, it was alleged, was accustomed to looking to the chief for personal guidance. As such, Africans required some form of personal government to guide their daily activities. This policy framework guided Native Commissioners in dealing with Africans. An interesting scenario is that, although it was considered important to provide guidance to the African, no special training in government was required as a qualification for this great job (Native Commissioner) of guiding Africans. Hlatshwayo (1995:10) indicates that:

> To secure a job as a Native Commissioner in early colonial Zimbabwe, no special training in government was required. However, preference was given to candidates with previous experience in "handling natives", knowledge of the "lingo" and common sense. Strength of character and rugged individuality, swift and decisive action in discharging the duty of "keeping peace" was added advantages.

As for a proper chronicle of duties, which the Native Commissioners had to perform, Hlatshwayo indicates that a Native Commissioner at the time, William Edwards known locally as "Wiri" in Mrewa where he was the Native Commissioner once commented that:

> There were no written instructions as to our duties. No weekly dispatch of circulars asking for reports of this, that and the next thing. All I was told was, "Get to know your district and your people. Keep an eye on them, collect tax if possible, but for God's sake don't worry headquarters if you can avoid it (1995:10).

These sentiments are reflective of the fact that what was important at the time was a situation where the Native Commissioner kept Africans under control and saw to it that they did not disturb the activities of central government. Thus, central government prepared what it considered a rational policy framework that was aimed at keeping Africans under check while they went about their "looting" activities without hindrance. The Native Commissioner was also not involved in drafting policies, but was granted sufficient autonomy to rule the Africans in such a manner that he preserved peace and order to ensure that white enterprise went on undisturbed by blacks. To an extent, Native Commissioners were effective in collecting taxes and keeping natives under check. Significant however, is the fact that the NC system was designed to pursue the interests of the BSAC. It was not responsive to the needs of local communities. Managerial excellence was defined by the ability of the NC to keep natives in fear and knowing that any rebellious tendencies would be dealt with ruthlessly. There were no democratic ideals to promote except those of the superiority of the colonial master.

- **The Native Boards**

Native Boards replaced the Native Commissioner rule in 1910. This came as a result of a piece of legislation, the High Commissioner's Proclamation No. 55 of 1910. These Native Boards were set up in each district and were directly under the control of the Native Affairs Department. Each Board was presided over by a Native Commissioner. The difference between these Native Commissioner systems was that in the previous system, the Native Commissioner acted independently and without advice from the local people. He was the ruler, adjudicator, legislator, and administrator with controls on his activities only coming directly from above, if at all. On the other hand, the Native Board was a kind of consultative forum, which allowed the Native Commissioner to work with the local chiefs and headmen as ex-officio members. In addition to chiefs and headmen, some ordinary citizens were elected by local people, in a scenario where the Native Commissioner would determine the qualification of the candidates for election from time to time (Namusi, 1998:7). However, as indicated above, this body was merely a consultative forum with no decision-making powers. It was practically dependent on the Native Commissioner as the chief decision maker in the locality as well as the decision systems of central government. The High Commissioner's Proclamation No. 55 of 1910 strengthened the powers of the Native Commissioner. This legislation allowed the Native Commissioner to formally assume magisterial powers that enabled him to preside over Native Affairs, both civil and criminal (Hlatshwayo, 1992:10; and Namusi, 1998:8). The activities of Native Commissioners were further strengthened by the 1923 National Constitution that confirmed the Native Department as a separate structural entity, headed by a Chief Native Commissioner who doubled up as Secretary for Native Affairs. This study notes that through this Constitutional Provision, the Division of Native Affairs became a 'government within a government' hence, a formal local government institution.

While the proclamation consolidated the position of the Native Commissioner, it led to the disintegration of tribal bonds between the chief and his subjects. This

was obviously a deliberate move by the colonialists to destroy African unity while at the same time making chiefs unpopular. Hlatshwayo in Namusi (1998:9) notes that the Chief Native Commissioner at the time, even commented on the success of this policy pronouncement when he noted that:

> Chiefs complain that they no longer controlled their followers as they did in the past and that the young people are gradually breaking away from tribal control ... The increased powers granted to Native Commissioners materially assisted in breaking up these tribal methods of control and I am glad to say that the results have so far proved satisfactory.

As indicated in the citation, it is important to note that the process of breaking apart indigenous local government structures and consolidating the colonial form of local government, involved assigning to chiefs and headmen, all the unpopular duties of reporting all criminal offences to the Native Commissioner, collecting taxes, and seeing to the maintenance of law and order as defined by the colonialists. These functions virtually turned chiefs and headmen into agents of the colonisers, thereby leading the African population to view their chiefs and headmen as informers and collaborators, who worked together with the coloniser in the process of subjugating them (Sithole, 1997:63). This process further entrenched the divide and rule approach that led Africans into fighting one another and resulted in the colonialists coming in as neutral arbiters and maintainers of peace and tranquillity. One should reiterate the fact that to the whites, the process of setting black against black was necessary. It was a rational process, motivated by the need to gain superiority over blacks. It was a strategy used to further control the local people expedites the collection of taxes and the mobilisation of labour for their farms and mines.

The issues discussed above indicate that Native Boards had no ultimate power to determine the pace of life of local communities. These boards were just a sounding forum, which was used by colonialists to learn more about the Africans and how they thought. An inclusive rulership was used as a deceptive strategy to enable Africans to expose themselves and render themselves more vulnerable to

further oppression. Native Boards like the Native Commissioner system were still a local government of control and marginalisation rather than one that ensured local development. It was rational in so far as the need to control Africans was high on the agenda. Its performance would be judged as acceptable by colonialists, while 'natives' would consider it unsatisfactory.

Native Boards can arguably be described as an imitation of the British local government system that was put in place through the Local Government Act of 1888. This Act created Local Government Boards that allowed a measure of central co-ordination and compelled authorities to use their public powers. In addition, certain administrative functions performed by judicial or government departments were transferred to elected local bodies. The Native Boards were without doubt modelled along these lines although they evidently had a strong racial bias, where the Native Commissioner assumed all decision making powers rather than decentralising them to the elected members. Another variation, was the lack of concern for local development by the chief decision makers of these boards unlike the way in which local government functions in the British scenario, where the intentions were to enhance local development through the participation of local communities.

- **The Native Councils**

The passing of yet another piece of legislation, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, led to yet another system of local government, the Native Councils. These councils were established through the Native Councils Act of 1937. The councils were established in areas that were designated as Native Reserves and Native Purchase Areas. The Native Councils Act of 1937 further legalised and entrenched separate structures for blacks and whites, a process of separation that only ended in 1993, thirteen years after independence in 1980. The Native Councils were composed of locally elected councillors whose election was closely monitored and controlled by central government. All the chiefs and headmen in an area were part of the membership of council. As was the case

with previous local government structures, the Native Commissioner was the Chief Executive Officer of the Native Council and as such, he chaired all council meetings. However, the centralisation tendencies still manifested themselves in these councils, since the Governor of the land retained the powers to abolish the council if it was seen to be acting outside its legal framework and was a threat to local peace and tranquility in its area of jurisdiction. The Governor could also unilaterally change the decisions of council in preference to those he considered viable for a given area. As far as duties and problems were concerned, Hlatshwayo in Namusi (1998:9) outlines these explicitly when he says that:

> Native Councils were entrusted with potential powers of environmental protection, construction and maintenance of roads, provision of education, and public health as well as powers to make their own by laws (which could be instantly repealed by the Governor). But all these statutory powers had little meaning in practice since Native Councils had no power to raise revenue. The only council revenue base was that of a grant received from central government plus some additional income from small fees and donations.

A few changes to the powers of taxing were made in 1943, when an amendment allowed Native Councils to collect poll tax, dog tax, bicycle tax, and animal drawn cart tax. These councils could collect such monies whose utilisation however, was to be approved by the Native Commissioner who could, as an individual, refuse authority for such funds to be utilised in an undertaking seen as fit by council but not worthwhile as far as the Native Commissioner was concerned. It should also be noted that while these councils could collect these monies, they were definitely not sufficient. As a result, central government had to come up with grants for these councils, a situation that entrenched the dependence of these institutions on central government and justified its control of them. In addition, councils were not allowed to apply for loans or invest so as to raise additional revenue. Truly speaking these local institutions were just extensions of the government's administrative structures. They could only perform their duties as per the wishes of central government rather than any local directives from the local people. As such the practices of these institutions effectively marginalised

them and virtually eliminated their viability, as they had no autonomy to act, nor any capacity to function outside the framework of government.

- **The African Councils**

In a bid to popularise the idea of self-governance among the Africans, the Federal Government transformed the unpopular Native Councils and established African Councils through the African Councils Act of 1957. The Act provided for a combination of traditional authority and elected representatives, as was the case with Native Councils. However, with this form of local authority, there was a shift of power from the traditional leadership to elected officials who numbered anything between six and twelve, depending on the size of the authority. Where an authority was established in African Purchase Areas, chiefs and headmen had no representatives, as these areas did not fall under traditional authority (Namusi, 1998:10). However, in Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs) chiefs and headmen were automatic ex-officio members and a chief or headman was elevated to the post of vice-president.

A remarkable development in this set up was that the Native Commissioner, who was then called the District Commissioner, played only an advisory role and had no voting powers to influence the course of council matters. Although this appears to be a more relaxed form of local authority which conferred more power to the local communities, the truth of it is that central government still retained considerable powers of control through the Minister of Internal Affairs who directly administered these institutions (Namusi, 1998:11). As point of interest, whereas African rural local government institutions were under the Minister of Internal Affairs, white rural local government was under the Ministry of Local Government. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was also in charge of the Police Force. As such, it would be easy for the Minister to know what these local authorities were doing and if there were any deviations from the rules, the Minister would swiftly call upon the police to exercise control by whatever means necessary. Such a process would be easier than in a situation where the local

authorities were under a different Ministry. Were this is the case, much coordination would be required, a process that would be expensive and ineffective. In addition to supervising these institutions, the Minister of Internal Affairs had powers to establish and abolish these institutions. These powers led to the proliferation of several African Councils. As an example, while there were 76 African Councils in 1967, there were 220 units in 1979 (Jordan, 1984:11). Their numeracy and small size weakened the institutions seriously, especially in terms of their revenue generating capacities, political clout and general effectiveness and efficiency in discharging their functions. They also existed at the whim of the Minister and their authority and powers were expressed through him. It must also be mentioned that these councils existed at the height of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. As such, it would be naive for one to think that the government of Ian Smith would give African Councils added capacity to perform their duties or the autonomy to carry out their duties without central government interference. To do so would have been to engage in a self-defeating strategy that would impact negatively on the whites. For all intents and purposes, the councils would be effectively used as organising fora for upstaging white rule in the country.

WHITE RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE COLONIAL ERA

As indicated earlier, Zimbabwe had a dual local government system in rural areas. There was local government for blacks and that for white farm owners in rural areas. The structure for the rural local government for whites can be discussed under Road Councils, Intensive Conservation Area Committees and Rural Councils. Each is discussed in the section that follows.

- **Road Councils**

Formal rural local government structures for whites did not exist until 1930 when the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 came into being. Before that, white rural

local government had no legal framework. Farmers and miners made agreements on a person-to-person basis to provide them with whatever services they needed to expedite the handling of their products. Government also assisted on an ad hoc basis. Formal structures, such as Road Councils, were put in place in 1930. The main purpose of Road Councils, as the name implies, was to oversee the construction and maintenance of feeder roads that were critical for the movement of the landowners' products from their areas to the towns (Jordan, 1988:14). Road Councils were composed of the District Commissioner, who was a central government official that served as the chairman of council, and up to six members who were elected from amongst landowners (Jordan, 1984:14). These were given legislative and decision making powers to determine courses of action that were seen as necessary for the life of the locality and its people.

Road Councils obtained their funds from taxes levied on one another, particularly unit tax and vehicle fees. These councils also got the bulk of their funding from central government, which awarded them grants for road construction and maintenance as well as the general upkeep of council.

It should be noted that Road Councils were meant to service the local white population. This community was given the right to participate in the formulation of policies that affected them. There was no subjugation of this white community by central government or its agents. Instead, central government supported this community extensively on financial matters and even assisted it to move their produce from their farms and mines to the towns. Apparently, central government was aware of the need to 'let go' institutions of a local nature so that they can determine their destiny with minimal central control. It is this awareness that raises interest in that when dealing with the African rural local government, the same government did not see the need to 'let go'.

- **Intensive Conservation Area Committees**

In 1941, Intensive Conservation Area Committees (ICACs) were established in

line with the demands of the Natural Resources Act of 1941. These committees were tasked with soil and water conservation. Although the committees consisted of members elected by landowners in each area, the remuneration of these members and all other expenses of the committee, including the implementation of conservation programmes, were met by central government (Namusi, 1998:13). Although central government was responsible for funding and control, ICACs had decision making autonomy. They also had the capacity to implement these programmes as they were provided with the funds and had the technical expertise to put these conservation programmes into practice. It should also be noted that ICACs existed side by side with Road Councils, although the two fell under two different ministries.

- **Rural Councils**

ICACs and Road Councils merged in 1966 to form Rural Councils. This was made possible by the introduction of the Rural Councils Act of 1966. This merger also came to be because of the new political dispensation that saw the rise of the Rhodesia Front of Ian Douglas Smith into power and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence that came with this party. Rural Councils had wider powers compared to the Road Councils and ICACs combined. They were tasked with regional planning; the establishment of town boards, area committees in villages, and area boards in African townships; the construction and maintenance of feeder roads within their areas; the provision of health and sanitary facilities; and any other social services they saw fit within their areas of jurisdiction (Jordan, 1984:14). Rural Councils were composed of elected white property-owners.

These councils had the power to employ a Chief Executive Officer to run the affairs of council. The District Commissioner was a member of council but he had no voting powers, nor any power to derail the course of development of a particular council, as long as such development processes were within the parameters set out by central government. Besides the payment of levies by each property owner and several license charges and rates, the Rural Councils

received substantial grants from central government. These grants came in the form of general grants and categorical grants for purposes considered a priority by government, especially natural resource conservation and the provision of water (Hlatshwayo, 1992:17). There was very little, if any, interference from central government.

THE TRANSITIONAL ERA (1980 – 1993)

The colonial system of rural local government, which existed before independence meant that the Transitional National Government which took office in April 1980, inherited a dual system of rural local government together with its strengths and weaknesses. While the white rural local government system had reasonable autonomy and functional capacity, and was thus, fairly competent, effective and efficient, the black African Councils had no autonomy at all. The councils were generally weak with very little financial resources. Their human resources were not well trained for the positions that they had and as such, they were generally inefficient, ineffective and incompetent as local institutions that were meant to take charge of peripheral development. Central government was faced with the mammoth task of rehabilitating these institutions to create responsive and accountable local government units, while at the same time dealing with the problem of rural fragmentation in terms of the white/black rural separation manifested by the two institutions of rural development, namely Rural Councils and African Councils.

It must also be noted that at independence, the Lancaster House Constitution in all its actions limited central government. All development processes were supposed to be undertaken within the framework of reconciliation, a process that was expected to take into consideration black/white differences and proceed with the introduction of development policies on a conciliatory note, without unnecessarily disadvantaging either party (Mandaza, 1987:42). The progress, or

lack of it, of rural local government transformation, should also be seen within this light.

The transitional era covers 1980 up to 1993 when rural local government was amalgamated. Of note here is the fact that the rural local government transitional era goes beyond the life of the Lancaster House Constitution. This, according to government sources, was necessary so as to come up with a well thought out rural local government system that could effectively and efficiently service the rural populace. The transitional era as indicated above, is faced with two institutions of rural local government (RCs and DCs). A brief outline and comments on each, is necessary in order to take note of the effects of the transitional phase in rural local government development.

- **Rural and District Councils**

 The rehabilitation of African Councils led to the development of District Councils under the District Councils Act of 1980. The rehabilitation process led to the consolidation of 242 African Councils into 55 District Councils. It is significant to note that among the major weaknesses of African Councils were:

- their lack of representativeness within the communal areas (former Tribal Trust Lands – TTLs);

- strong centralisation tendencies where the centre through the District Commissioner and the Ministry of Internal Affairs controlled the decision making process;

- a weak financial base that rendered these councils non viable entities of local governance; and

- the lack of confidence in these institutions by the local communities as they were associated with oppression (Jordan, 1984:10-12).

District Councils were created to surmount these problems. The councils were expected to usher in a new sense of purpose and local participation in self-governance by the local people. It should be noted that District Councils were just one part of the rural local government transitional process. These DCs represented the black communal people. Side by side with this local government structure were the Rural Councils that represented commercial farming areas and small urban centres. This rural local government dispensation indicates the continued maintenance of the dual processes of rural development. However, the same government department, the Ministry of Local Government Rural and Urban Development, now coordinates the two.

As indicated above, the GOZ strengthened these structures by providing a great deal of financial resources to these councils. Although this seemed to contradict Zimbabwe's policy of self reliance, the resource provision initiative was a rational awareness of the objective conditions of these institutions, which was aptly summed up by the ZANU-PF Department of the Commisariat and Culture in 1985, when it indicated that District Councils faced a monumental challenge of funds and means of generating revenue to attain self-sufficiency in all respects. This problem meant that central government entry was inevitable, as a means of rationalising resource scarcity and providing these institutions with the necessary capital injection that would allow them to stand on their feet. Consequently, GOZ assisted DCs with block grants and loan facility arrangements. for these institutions. The pattern of DC revenues indicated in Table 3.3 on page 164 indicates this heavy reliance on government funding by these institutions. Thus, DCs have a very narrow or limited resource base. They receive more than 80 per cent of the annual budget from central government. This money largely pays the salaries of DC staff and also funds selected, specific projects. It is also used for the provision of education and health facilities. The money cannot be used for the funding of unapproved people initiated projects without government approval. DCs raise funds locally through the collection of a development levy, rates, and

license fees on business properties and through the sale of alcoholic drinks Hlatshwayo, 1992:27-29).

This analysis paints a picture of financially constrained institutions. Such constraints definitely have a telling impact on overall DC autonomy and functional capacity. This means that central government, which controls the funding will inevitably extend its arm of control to these institutions to monitor expenditures and ensure that they are utilized as per the stated provisions of issue. Such a scenario also reduces the functional capacity of DCs as they can only act with the concurrence of central government, which provides them with the financial 'life-line'. Above all, it has the effect of decreasing local participation in local affairs, especially in decision-making and policy making which are vital criteria for measuring self-governance.

Table 3.3 District Council Pattern of Revenues, 1985-1988

Category	% of Total
Central Government Grants	85.10
Local Taxes (Rates and Development Levy)	0.30
Rents/Charges/Lease Fees	0.40
Utilities	0.01
Social Services Fees	5.10
Operational Surpluses	0.80
Other	7.50
Total	**100.00**

Source: Adapted from Hlatshwayo, 1992:29. *Demarcation of center-local fiscal relations and financial viability of rural local authorities (District Councils).*

District Councils were weakened in that they were closely interwoven with central government departmental structures, since the District Administrator was made the Chief Executive Officer of DCs, much the same as in the African Council

scenario. These local authorities did not see themselves as agents of change and development but as central government creatures whose lives depended on central government. This situation led to weaknesses in understanding local initiatives by both councilors and administrative staff, as whatever initiatives they had planned or which were in progress, would be subordinated to central government development plans.

It must also be noted that government funding, which increased the role of central government in local affairs, although not an ideal situation, had several benefits. These include:

- Central government initiated resettlement programmes to resettle landless and displaced Zimbabweans;
- A rapid expansion of both health and education provision was witnessed throughout the country especially in the communal areas;
- A redirection of agricultural state services to peasant farmers was evident through the extension of loan facilities for agricultural purposes to these farmers;
- An extension of loan facilities to intending rural commercial entrepreneurs was evident;
- A rapid expansion of rural infrastructure such as roads and water services; the development of growth points; and district service centers to strengthen the spatial structure of the communal areas; and
- The creation of development structures from the village level upwards to the controlling ministry (MILGRUD). These include VIDCOs, WADCOs, DDCs, and PDCs (Hlatshwayo, 1992:9-10).

The question is: Was direct funding of DCs and direct involvement in local affairs the only viable options for strengthening the financial position of DCs? A closer look at this scenario indicates that central government had other options. The ideal one would have been one where central government improved the resource

base and resource raising capacity of these institutions. This involves giving local authorities added taxation and levying powers and refraining from unnecessarily charging taxes from the businesses of these institutions. This option is in line with recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry into Taxation in Zimbabwe in 1986 as cited in Hlatshwayo (1992:1). The recommendations were that:

(a)   There must be a clear division of responsibilities between the central Government and local authorities.

(b)   There must be minimum dependence of local government on central grants through the provision of certain substantial sources of revenue to local authorities.

(c)   Local finances should be placed on an assured basis instead of being dependent on year-by-year Central government grant decisions. The finances made available should be commensurate with the responsibilities transferred to them.

(d)   Local government tax bases should be broadened and, in particular, communal areas should be enabled to raise some resources of their own.

(e)   An appropriate compensatory grant mechanism should be instituted to equalize for difference of income and revenue potential between local authorities.

A study carried out by the Association of District Councils (ADCs) in 1992 indicates that these recommendations were based on the principle of maximum possible autonomy for local governments within their designated spheres, financial responsibility, efficiency in the use of resources and inter locality equity Hlatshwayo, 1992:2). It is important to find out if this principle was used after amalgamation. This can be determined after a discussion on the amalgamation era.

THE AMALGAMATION (RURAL DISTRICT COUNCILS) ACT

The Rural District Council Act No. 8 of 1988 as indicated in chapter one, is a major rural local government reform policy in Zimbabwe. The fundamentals of the policy lie in the acceptance by government – at least theoretically – that the broad masses of the Zimbabwean populace should be both the principal agents of development as well as the chief beneficiaries of this process. This is an undeniable right of the masses, which is in line with the local government values of liberty, equality, efficiency, and development.

Although the process of coming up with the amalgamation policy was long and protracted, both before the adoption of the policy and afterwards, it eventually came to fruition in July, 1993 when 57 RDCs were established countrywide. Taking into cognisance the racial fragmentation that existed in rural local government and the paternalistic approach of government to District Councils; government's commitment to principles of decentralisation, democracy and people's participation in decision making should be applauded. It should be noted, also, that what is applauded at this point, is not its practices so far but the mere change of strategy in rural local government as it is hoped that the new system would bring with it proper decentralisation, efficiency, effectiveness, equity, and responsiveness. To reiterate this commitment to decentralisation, the GOZ issued a statement in 1993, which reaffirmed government's commitment through '13 general principles of decentralisation' adopted as a guiding light for Zimbabwe's decentralisation and rural local government system. What follows is an outline of Nkomo (1993:6-8)'s pronouncements interspersed with comments of this study.

1. Decentralisation is necessary and desirable in Zimbabwe since it promotes and strengthens democracy and civic responsibility, as it gives a chance to citizens to participate in their own governance and development.

2. Decentralisation in Zimbabwe be defined and understood to mean the legislated transfer of functions and authority on a permanent basis from central government to local authorities; and that once provided for in law, such transfer of powers and functions can be reversed only on the basis of an amendment to the appropriate law.

3. All ministries in Zimbabwe should use the same rural local government institutions (RDCs) for the implementation and management of decentralised functions and not to create parallel or separate institutions. This means that where such parallel institutions are in existence, they are to be harmonised.

This principle reaffirms that all other decentralised government institutions that came to be through deconcentration should be subordinated to RDCs, to create a unified structure of rural local government under the devolution principle. This scenario simplifies the process of coordinating departments and also raises the confidence of communities on their RDCs. As it is, RDCs are in competition with other deconcentrated structures, which because of the visible single service, which they provide, are more visible and acceptable to the communities, more so than RDCs. For example, the Ministries of Health and Education have made a more visible impact on rural people than has any other government institution. On the other hand, RDCs are viewed with suspicion as they are said to come to people only when they want to collect levies and taxes.

It should be stated here that RDCs have a legacy of unpopularity with communities. This dates back to the days of the liberation struggle when their predecessor institutions, African Councils, were viewed as instruments of oppression that should be shunned by the African people. Politicians preached negatively about these councils. However, at

independence they forgot to undo the damage they had caused these institutions of local government. They forgot to go to the people to repopularise these institutions.

4.   Decentralisation should be viewed as a process not an event, as such it should be implemented systematically, cautiously and progressively, with the necessary regard for the nature of resources such as human, material and financial, which local authorities may have at a particular time to effect the necessary transformation changes.

5.   In the execution of their legal powers and responsibilities, RDCs should comply with the requirements of national policies, laws and regulations. In addition, where activities and projects of other sector ministries have to be implemented, RDCs have to understand that these ministries have the power and authority to set standards, monitor performance and intervene appropriately to ensure compliance.

6.   A Ministerial Committee of Ministers be established to manage decentralisation and capacity building initiatives. Such a Committee was established in 1995 and is known as the Working Party of Heads of Ministries (WPHM). It is made up of:

      i.   the Minister of Local Government and National Housing;

      ii.   the Minister of Finance;

      iii.   the Minister of Health and Child Welfare;

      iv.   the Minister of National Affairs, Employment Creation and Cooperatives;

      v.   the Minister of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare;

      vi.   the Minister of Education and Culture;

      vii.   the Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Water Development; and

      viii.   the Minister of Transport and Energy.

This committee/working party works in close liaison with the Rural District Council Capacity Building Coordinating Committee (RDCCBCC), which is composed of representatives from the above stated ministries as well as those from the Office of the President, the National Economic Planning Commission; the Association of Rural District Councils; and the Public Service Commission. The interests of the WPHM and the RDCCBCC are particularly in enhancing RDC capacity, with special emphasis on institutional, human resources, and capital development.

7.   Central government in its bid to make sure that RDCs are effective institutions should endeavour to strengthen RDCs especially in so far as their human and financial resources are concerned.

8.   Central government should retain the responsibility to provide trunk services that are national in character or those that impact on more than one local authority. These are mostly programmes and projects that need a lot of resources such as the construction of major national roads, railway lines, electricity and all other infrastructure and economic projects that are national in character. To determine which projects exhibit such a character, there has to be a close liaison between each RDC and line ministries as is the case with the presence of the WPHM and the RDCCBCC.

9.   The MOLGANH exhists to promote and facilitate coordination between line ministries and RDCs but as a matter of principle, RDCs and line ministries should endeavour to work together so as to determine the sharing of responsibilities for programmes and projects of line ministries that are implemented in local authorities. This is vital so as to determine how resources for the successful implementation of these programmes will be channeled.

10. All grant moneys for recurrent and capital expenditure sourced by line ministries and earmarked for RDCs be disbursed to the RDC soon after the promulgation of the Appropriation Act. Such grants should not pass through the MOLGAHN to avoid unnecessary bureaucratic delays.

11. All loans for RDCs should be channeled through the MOLGAHN. At face value, this principle is problematic. It is partly inconsistent with principle 10 above and is likely to cause a lot of unnecessary delays in the provision of finance to the RDCs for their programmes and projects. Unnecessary bureaucratic delays are likely to manifest themselves in the process, a situation that may be detrimental to RDC development strategies.

12. RDCs through their enabling Act are mandated to levy, collect taxes and user charges or fees for the purposes of financing those services that they are legally bound to provide in terms of any appropriate laws or regulations.

13. In situations where there is need to transfer personnel from central government to RDCs as part of the decentralisation process, the Public Service Commission will handle such transfer processes for the good of central government and the recipient RDC.

These principles form the basis through which the RDC Act of 1988 was modeled. However, questions still remain about this policy, such as how was this policy conceived? Who were the major architects of the policy? Taking into consideration these principles, what are the provisions of this policy? How has the policy been implemented for the past five years? What has been the performance of RDCs so far (1993 – 2002)? Have they been able to raise and utilise funds appropriately; provide services as expected by communities; and has RDC management performed its duties in an excellent manner, that is, to

avoid waste and stimulate growth? All these questions form the fundamental focus of this study.

In analysing this policy, government is taken as the unit of analysis for a variety of reasons. It is government, which took it upon itself to champion the process of transforming rural local governance in Zimbabwe. In fact, one may argue that transformation processes need strong governments with purpose and vision to play leadership roles in processes of change and development. This fact is supported by development processes that have taken place elsewhere particularly in Asia. For example, the giant Asian economies particularly of Thailand, Taiwan, Korea and China were characterised by powerful military based authoritarian regimes that took a leading role in shaping the economies of their countries. The dictators who ran these countries had development and national reconstruction visions, foresight, and clarity of mind and purpose about the development initiatives that were appropriate for their countries. This also serves to indicate that a visionary state can take a leading role in shaping developmental processes in a given state. This, it can be argued, was the case with Zimbabwe when it undertook to develop a new rural local government dispensation, which was aimed at transforming Zimbabwe's rural areas.

In fact, the process of transforming Zimbabwe's rural local government system and, indeed, the birth of amalgamation should be analysed in relation to the Prime Minister's Directive on Rural Development that was issued in January 1984. In this directive, the Prime Minister called for the establishment of structures that would enhance popular participation throughout the country (Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, 1993:123). This directive was an attempt to strengthen the involvement of people, in the rural areas, in matters of self-government and development. This notion of people's participation in development, led to the pronouncement of several policies by central government. One can indicate in line with Marsden in Crook and Jerve (1991:32-34), that the conviction in the participatory approach was that:

- participation was a prerequisite for development;

- people's participation would lead to the alleviation of poverty, enable rural restructuring and promote growth and development;

- people's participation would lead to well conceived programmes being made and implemented, that is, people's participation would facilitate appropriate programme planning, project design, and implementation;

- people's participation was a foundation for self-reliant and self sustained development;

- people's participation raises people's confidence and self esteem as well as bringing power to the people; and

- people's participation brought power to the people, strengthened democracy, brought government close to the people and ensured the development of innovativeness, initiative and accountability.

This conviction underlined the government's socialist policies. The Prime Minister's directive showed support for these policies. The Prime Minister, Robert Gabriel Mugabe indicated that there was a need for a comprehensive and more democratic system of involving the local communities both horizontally and vertically in the process of planning and effecting their development, thus providing Government with a viable channel for receiving and assessing the developmental needs and priorities of the district, ward and village areas within the province (Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, 1993:123). Prime Minister's Directive led to:

- the creation of the Posts of Provincial Governors appointed by the Prime Minister from among MPs. These were raised to the level of Cabinet Ministers in order to give them the essential powers necessary for coordinating socio-economic, political and environmental development in the provinces;

- the creation of the Provincial Council to act as an engine room for the development of provincial policy; and

- the creation of development structures from village level upwards (Rambanapasi in Helmsing and Wekwete, 1993:123-124). These structures are illustrated in Figure 3.2 on page 175.

Amalgamating Rural and District Councils started as a concept in the early 1980s. In 1982/83 officials from the Ministry of Local Government conducted an in-depth study of the Swedish System of Local Government. Swedish consultants were also hired to assist the government in its endeavor to unite rural and district councils. In order to come up with rural local government policy, the GOZ set up a Forum for Rural Development (FRD) in 1984 whose duty was, among others, to coordinate ideas on rural transformation. In its duties, the FRD used the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) as the main consultant/advisor (Chipangura, 1996:11). As their terms of reference, these institutions were expected to:

1. to diagnose Zimbabwe's rural local government problem;

2. develop a remedial policy to usher in a new era of rural local governance, which would lead to local participation, democracy and development. Thus, most of the contents of the RDC Act of 1988 are the product of these organizations, albeit with several modifications made by central government; and

Figure 3.2 Local Government Structure in Zimbabwe.
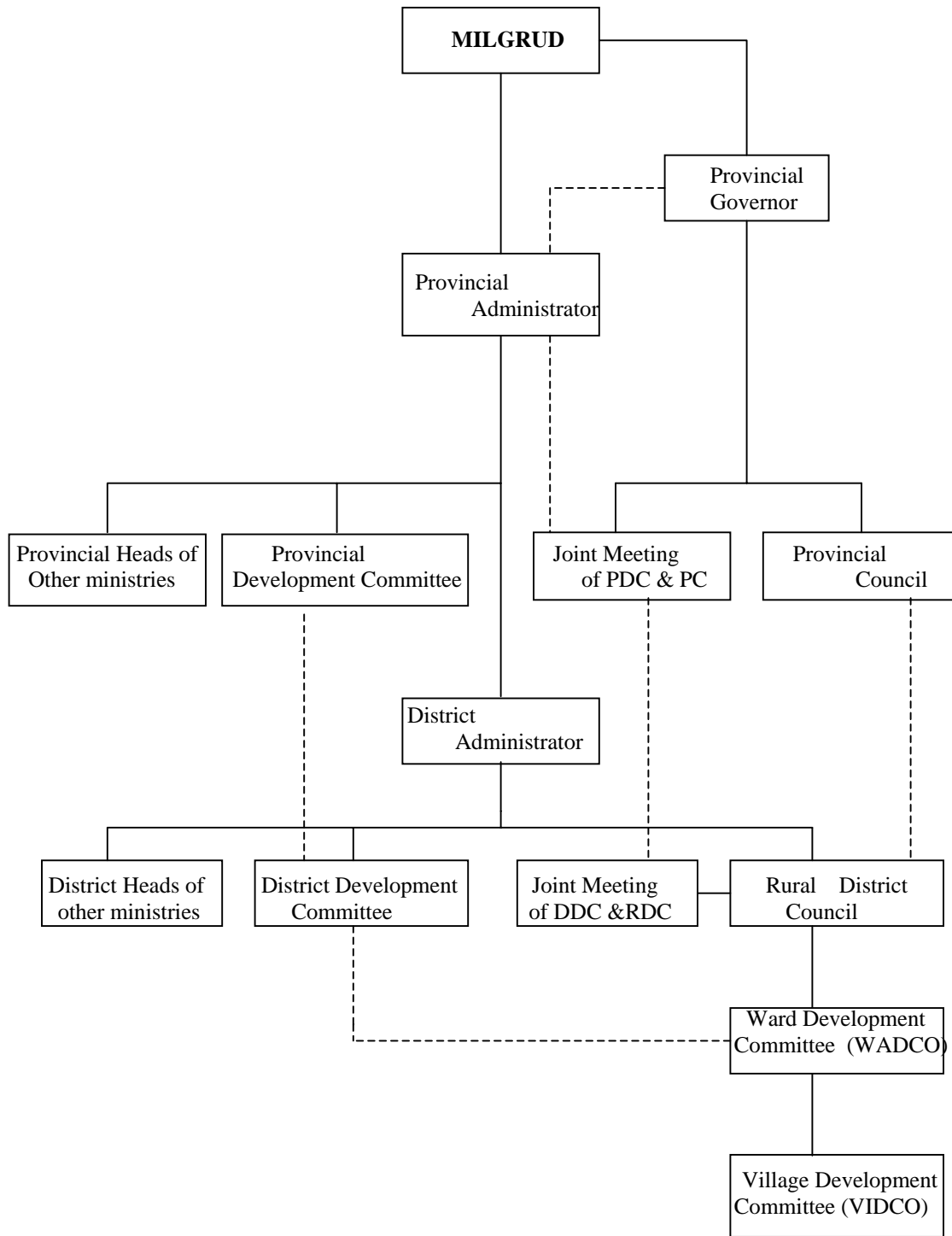
Source: Chipangura, 1996:13. *Decentralisation in Zimbabwe.*

3. recommend to the Minister, the following:

- the boundaries of the proposed councils;

- the headquarters of the councils;

- the name of each of the proposed councils;

- appointment of assets and liabilities of the former local authorities that were breaking up and joining different councils;

- the placement of staff of the former local authorities;

- the organisation plan of administration for the new councils;

- the need for area committees, their composition and how they would function vis-à-vis council; and

- wards and committees of the new councils

After several meetings, recommendations, debates and revisions thereof, the Rural District Councils Bill was drafted. This led to the promulgation of the Rural District Councils Act of 1988. The processes of amalgamation involved appointing District Administrators as returning officers to register all interested voters within each area and ward as provided for in part IV of the Rural District Councils Act, 1988 (Chipangura, 1996:19).

A brief analysis of the above scenario indicates that the appointment of the FRD was a purposeful move by government. The move was intended to create a 'mediator' between government and other stake holders, particularly the development structures rooted in society such as WADCOs, VIDCOs, political parties, traditional leaders, the former DCs and RCs and their bureaucracies, the business and the donor community. As far as setting up this policymaking institution was concerned, government had both structural and situational autonomy, as it did so without consultation.

The FRD processes culminated in the production of the RDC Act of 1988. The Act, in line with universal local government, exhibits the following generic

characteristics:

a) A non-racial rural local government system was designed and adopted;

b) An elaborate system of voter qualification, disqualification, nomination of candidates and the electoral process itself, was put into place;

c) A well stated procedure of carrying out council business, as well as an elaborate committee system;

d) Well-stated powers and duties of RDCs with clear relational provisions that the RDCs have to maintain with central government and other institutions that directly impact on them (RDCs); and

e) Well-stated provisions for making by-laws, collecting levies, and other finances; budgeting, staffing and other ancillary provisions peculiar to Zimbabwe (general provisions).

The Act has fifteen parts and a hundred and sixty two sections. These are arranged as follows:

i.   Part I: covers preliminary issues such the name of the Act, interpretations (definitional issues), the classification and specification of RDC land.

ii.   Part II: is on the naming, alteration and abolition of districts, as well, as the consultation processes that go with these issues.

iii.   Part III: is a provision on the establishment, nature and membership of RDCs. This includes dividing the area into wards, consultative provisions for establishing these councils and the process of

coming up with first councillors for the RDC.

iv.   Part IV: is on qualifications, disqualifications and enrollment of voters.

v.   Part V: deals with qualifications, disqualifications and terms of office for elected and appointed concillors.

vi.   Part VI: elections and election procedures are the major issues provided for in this part.

vii.   Part VII: is on how RDCs are expected to conduct their proceedings. Of note, is the election of the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson, holding meetings, attendance by councillors and provisions for certain resolutions, which need ministerial approval.

viii.   Part VIII: directs council on the committee system of RDCs. Thus, specifications are made as to which committees RDCs should have, for example, the Finance Committee, Area Committee, Roads Committee, Ward Development Committee, the Rural District Development Committee and other general provisions applicable to other committees.

ix.   Part IX: is on staffing issues, particularly the appointment of senior officers, employment of other general staff, conditions of service, labour relations and other issues of ethics.

x.   Part X: is an elaborate section, on the duties of RDCs, as well as, provisions for ministerial consultation. Most of the issues will be discussed later.

xi.   Part XI: is a critical area on making by-laws and consultations with the minister on such laws.

xii.   Part XII: is another critical part of the Act. It deals with levies and other charges, which RDCs should collect from their communities.

xiii.   Part XIII: Yet another crucial section on financial matters, which specifies the accounting system and issues of borrowing.

xiv.   Part XIV: deals with alteration and abolition of RDCs.

xv.   Part XV: deals with general provisions and matters of ministerial supervision.

This study does not deal extensively with all the issues but selects those it considers crucial for RDC performance, as stated in the statement of the problem. These are centred on issues of democratic participation; RDC funding: collection and utilisation; and service provision. The selection of these brings in the problems of measuring local government performance, which is discussed in Chapter Four.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from this chapter that decentralization is a necessary condition for a viable local government system. The preferred model in a democratic polity is devolution. This form enhances local participation, self-determination and mutual coexistence between central government and local government units. The RDCs in Zimbabwe operate under this devolution policy framework. However, it is significant to note that a well articulated decentralization policy does not necessarily mean that it would be implemented accordingly. The world of

practical policy implementation is a different one. It is full of unpredictable administrative, personal, political and community influences that may facilitate or hinder the attainment of policy objectives, hence the need to gauge the performance of specific institutions to see if they are able to fulfill the demands of policy. In this case, the performance of the BRDC receives spotlight attention. The profile, organization and operations of this institution are covered in the next chapter.