

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In any scientific research, the worthiness of the findings would depend largely on the manner in which data is collected. With this in mind, and in keeping with the need to maintain comprehensiveness of issues, through descriptive evidence coupled with empirical observation and reporting, the case study method, within an evaluative framework was selected for this study. In addition, the need to investigate and illuminate the rather complex system and dynamics of the RDC structures and functions led this study to further utilize the intensive case study approach rather than use a large scale case investigation. Because of the size of large-scale investigations, they tend to ignore certain minute processes and procedures whose occurrences may have a fundamental impact on the functioning of RDCs. It is significant to note that cases are not generally used to outline or traditionally demonstrate generalisability. The results obtained are applicable to that specific case. However, the tendency to generalize is not ignored in this study, particularly where some assertions are seen to be relevant to most local authorities if not all, in Zimbabwe.

It is important to emphasize the fact that this study is located within the parameters of government studies where the overall rationale is to expose governmental activities at the local level; activities that are geared to enhancing good governance, at the same time, ensuring societal change, development and human progress. Thus, this is research in public affairs and, specifically, public administration/management. It analyses policy execution and the results thereof. It tries to find out if local authorities are achieving the ideals of the state and if

they meet the needs of local communities. Hutchins in Botes (1995:1) indicates that a state exists:

... not merely to make life possible but to make life good ... Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good. The state derives its very nature and existence from the aspirations and ambitions of mortal beings to obtain those things they regard as good.

It is clear, within this synopsis that the fundamental drive of mortals is to improve their social welfare, either on their own or through state action. As such, the mortal being is confronted on a daily basis with issues of choice: to choose what is good or what is bad, or to decide what is right and what is wrong. In this process of making choices, the mortal being is regulated by the need to avoid pain and suffering in order to enhance his/her happiness. Putting a form of governance in place is to desire the fruits of pleasure and gain that such a governance system promises to offer to the mortal being. It is with this in mind that the study approaches issues of rural local governance in Zimbabwe, as a system that has been transformed to offer some benefits to society that to an extent, maximize gain and minimize losses to the individuals of each locality. The need to systematically analyze the forms of gain and losses of RLGs propels this study to adopt a scientific research methodology with its proven research procedures that allow one to conclude findings with reasonable accuracy and certainty of their authenticity.

The purpose of this chapter therefore, is to describe the research design and to outline the cases used and the sampling frame. The chapter also discusses the methods of data collection and the data collection processes utilized. These are discussed, taking into consideration issues of validity, reliability and ethics of the research process. Data analysis methods utilized in chapter four of the study, are also discussed in this chapter. The final section is made up of the data collection plan or schedule and a summary that encapsulates the whole methodological approach utilized in this study.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

Different scholars have different conceptions of research. However, the conception here, as indicated by Botes (1995:26) is that:

... research in Public Administration is a purposeful and systematic investigation of behavior, processes and techniques in the administration of public institutions in order to describe, explain and predict certain phenomena pertaining to these behaviors, processes and techniques.

Thus, the orthodox image of research is that which is consistent with natural science methodologies where research is carried out to test hypotheses that, in turn, are derived from various theories offered to explain some feature of the physical world. This means that research is about the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake or for improving certain ways of doing things. This study acknowledges this view as its fundamental interest is to determine the performance of the Beitbridge Rural District Council in Zimbabwe, provoke interest and thought on rural local government issues from different sections of the community and make contributions to improve the system for good governance and overall societal upliftment.

Knowledge can be obtained through different ways such as traditional ways that accept the knowledge repository nature of the elderly. It can also be acquired through rational processes. Rational processes rely on the powers of reason possessed by human beings. To reason is to use “pure abstract intelligence” in order to discover laws. This process is used in fields such as mathematics that uses the axiomatic approach and as such, relies purely on the power of abstract reasoning. However, such a process, though it has positive factors within it, has limits in social science inquiry because of the inherent nature of human intelligence and knowledge, that is, that human beings have limits in their rationality. The other process of acquiring knowledge is through empirical processes. These processes rely on observation. It is only that which can be

observed that constitutes knowledge. Although these methods are plausible, they have been criticised. They are said to possess an inherent inability to establish relationships of facts and explanations of these in terms of how they are connected in time and space (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:2). These weaknesses undermine the utility of the methods as independent methods that can be utilised for a meaningful far-reaching study. As such, a high breed method has been developed, the scientific method. The scientific method uses description, explanation and prediction as fundamental processes of any inquiry.

Many scholars of research methodology such as Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:2-3) and Botes (1995:33-34), agree that the scientific method of acquiring knowledge is a systematic investigation of a question, a phenomenon, or a problem using certain fundamental research principles. As such, the scientific method is indeed, the scientific research method. All different sciences are united not by the nature of their subject matter but by their common method of inquiry and as such, by the way knowledge is acquired. This method is the guiding philosophy of this research.

Important in scientific inquiry is the realization that the researcher starts with being curious about a particular phenomenon and has inconclusive answers that seek to describe and explain such a phenomenon. The researcher undertakes to define the phenomenon so as to have the correct answers should he/she be asked about it. The researcher then undertakes a systematic process of determining what the truth is about a phenomenon. Once this has been established, the researcher can input the utility of the answer he/she has obtained about this phenomenon, so that anyone confronted by similar doubts can use the same process to arrive at the correct answer. In the process of finding the answer, the researcher enhances his/her knowledge about a phenomenon. The researcher's process of inquiry and how he/she arrives at answers provides knowledge for other scholars who are curious and want to know more.

This process clearly indicates that the scientific method starts with the realization that a problem exists. Thus, it is this problem that arouses research interest and sets the basis for scientific inquiry. Once a problem has been identified, the scientific process of unraveling the truth about phenomena and enhancing understanding of such phenomena should involve description, analysis, and ultimately, prediction.

Rural local government has been a problem in Zimbabwe mainly because of its duality, excessive interference in local affairs by central government, and general administrative ineptitude (Roe, 1992:15-16). The introduction of amalgamation does not in itself mean that scholars should sit back and pretend that rural local government problems are over. What is required is to get into the rural local government fray to see whether the institutions are performing accordingly under their new mandate; whether all past problems have been solved; and if there are new ones that have come up.

TYPES OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

There are different types of scientific research and different authors use different names to describe these. There is exploratory and descriptive research; correlational and explanatory research; evaluation research; participatory research; and action research. Without dwelling much on each of these, it is of importance to indicate that this study used evaluation research as a suitable research type for an in-depth inquiry into RDC operations. This approach allowed this study to look into the intervention, that is, the policy; the operations of the policy; the strong and weak points of such operations; recommending remedial action or developing some room for maneuvering where anomalies have been noticed.

The policy on the amalgamation of DCs and RCs is an intervention mechanism to restructure, reorganize, reorient and rationalize rural local governance. It is a transformative mechanism designed to enhance effectiveness, efficacy, equity and representativeness in rural local governance. This intervention mechanism has not been assessed to check its performance within a given institutional setting, that is, that no meaningful academic effort has been made to gauge the performance of RDCs, taking into account the provisions of the Rural District Councils Act, No. 8 of 1988 and the competence of implementers.

Evaluation research is used as a premise of operation to investigate and diagnose the extent of autonomy and functional capacity provided for by this policy vis-à-vis what used to be the case prior to such an intervention. The aim here is to identify those areas on autonomy and functional capacity that have been neglected by the policy or the actual conduct of actors in guiding the implementation process. It also checks on the operations of the policy against the substance of the policy as per its legislative provisions. The idea here is to check on deviations and, thereby determine the effects of these on the outcome of policy. It is also aimed at validating the policy and to give it credibility in the eyes of the communities, government and any other agencies that wish to assist the rural local government institutions in their development processes. Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:47-48), define evaluation as a method of social science used to assess the design, implementation and usefulness of social interventions. The authors make further vivid explications of evaluation research and its utility when they indicate that:

Evaluation research used as a diagnostic tool may help the people implementing an intervention to identify neglected areas of need, neglected target groups and problems within organization and programmes. A comparison of a programme's progress with its original aims is another of the functions of evaluation research. This may serve to adjust the programme to the particular needs and resources of the community within which it is situated. Further, evaluation research can furnish evidence of the usefulness of the programme.

Three important types of evaluation can be ascertained from these explications. These are diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation. These evaluations, though different, are mutually compatible and complementary (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:48). This study considers it important to focus on all of them so as to provide a holistic assessment of the policy. To explain the rationale for such an approach, one needs to provide explanations of these types of evaluation.

Diagnostic evaluation is for the provision of data that can be utilized to plan new courses of action that are meant to redress an existing problem, be it explicitly known or perceived. The rationale here is that, as an example, communities (consumers of policy), boards of directors, management and the generality of the workforce may have perceptions of some inadequacies of a particular organization. However, these people may have a problem of identifying exactly what the problem is so that they can design intervening mechanisms. Diagnostic research becomes particularly useful in such a situation; to explore and identify the problems at hand; to highlight the implications for such problems; and to provide sufficient information for reorienting a particular mechanism within the desires of the people concerned, or completely formulating a new strategy.

Formative evaluation, also known as process evaluation, is that evaluation whose aim it is to shape a particular course of action (policy) so that it is consistent with the desires of the intended beneficiaries of the action. No matter how well formulated a course of action is, obstacles always manifest themselves. It becomes important for an organization interested in efficiency and effectiveness to always include this type of evaluation as part of its planning, service delivery and other functions, as a continuous process of remodeling the policy to rid it of distasteful system destabilizers that may be a result of many varied factors.

The third type of evaluation is summative evaluation, also referred to as end

evaluation. This evaluation particularly focuses on the aims and objectives of the programme of concern and is used to determine whether the project or programme of action has attained these objectives or is in the process of doing so. It should be noted that although the term suggests something that is done at the end of a process, the reality is that this evaluation is also carried out during implementation, simultaneously with formative or process evaluation, but, on a more controlled interval basis consistent with the sub-objectives within the life of a particularly long life project or programme. Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:51-53) enumerate five steps through which summative evaluation should proceed.

These are:

- (a) the identification of the programme's aims and objectives;
- (b) the formulation of the aims and objectives in measurable terms;
- (c) the construction of the instruments of measurement;
- (d) designing the evaluation study and data collection; and
- (e) reporting back.

While it may not be necessary to explore these steps fully, as they represent the whole research process, what seems to be important is the fact that the three types of evaluation tend to have similar elements so that this study has integrated all these into a broad framework of evaluation, where elements which manifest themselves in each type, may actually be determined in this broader framework, hence, integrated evaluation. As indicated earlier, the rationale is to offer a comprehensive and holistic approach to the issues at stake as the viability, or otherwise, of the amalgamation policy can be determined through a deliberate process of trouble-shooting the system (diagnosis), understanding its implementation process and endeavoring to come up with corrective action (formative), and checking whether the policy is on course, that is, checking it against its aims and objectives (summative). In fact, as is, the differences seem to lie in the reasons for the evaluation rather than the process of evaluation. This study, accordingly, integrates these reasons and unifies the process into a coherent whole, in order to come up with a holistic evaluation of RDC operations.

This approach to evaluation brings in a high level evaluation in which Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:54) note that:

... although presented separately, ... diagnostic, formative and summative evaluation are all interrelated and occur side by side in the course of ongoing interventions. The aim and methods are assessed using formative evaluation and recommendations for improving the project are discussed. Finally, the summative evaluation determines whether the aims have been met. If not, those responsible for the programme must consider further diagnostic and formative research in order to isolate and resolve problem areas. Comprehensive and integrated programme evaluation, which uses all three forms maintains the ongoing effectiveness, facilitates flexibility in response to changing circumstances and ensures credibility and the ongoing existence of programmes.

This, as indicated in the preceding citation, is the manner in which evaluation research is viewed in this study.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The word 'design' connotes planning. To design a research project is to put together the various components of that particular research project. A research design is, therefore, a grand plan of a particular research project that shows how one wishes to proceed with the research and how to guard it against both internal and external factors, which may interfere with its processes. It is supposed to be a full proof plan that enhances a research's validity, thereby improving its acceptability as a knowledge base within the discipline in which it is rooted. More importantly, a researcher should be able to handle extraneous variables, as these are a major source of invalidity of a research. Two major categories of extraneous variables can be discussed. These are uncontrolled variables and confounding variables (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:33-34). Uncontrolled variables are those influences that are known to be present as an integral part of the social phenomenon under study, but which the researcher does not want to address. For example, when one considers RDC performance, variables such as

those rooted in personal differences between councillors and bureaucrats may influence performance but may not be of interest to the researcher. These can only be acknowledged and noted. However, this study is not interested in most of these personality variables, although their presence is acknowledged and noted.

As indicated above, another category of extraneous variables is that which is referred to as confounding variables. This is a category of those influences that are unknown to a specific research project, but can influence the results of the research. Ignorance of these leads to erroneous conclusions being made about the research in that the researcher may attribute his or her conclusions to the variables he or she has been dealing with under control, yet the hidden variables may have had a tremendous influence on the nature and substance of the research findings (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:34).

The purpose of a research design, therefore, is to manage these extraneous factors so as to minimize their influence on the research findings of a particular study. Several procedures can be followed to manage such factors. Exclusion is one of them. In this case, researchers try to 'keep out' some of these known variables to render them insignificant in so far as their influence on the study is concerned. Another approach is known as accounting for extraneous variables. This is a situation where some known extraneous variables and their influence cannot be excluded. As a result, these variables are allowed to influence the study. An attempt is then made to measure the nature and magnitude of their influence. After that, another attempt is made to exclude or eliminate these influences from the actual results. Other variations of exclusion are controlling, through an experimental design approach, which uses the experimental and control groups and the randomization method, where some factors have these variables and others do not. This approach takes care of these scattered but unwanted influences (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:41).

Several research designs can be enumerated. These include descriptive

research, correlation research, causal or causal comparative research, *ex-post-facto* research, experimental and the quasi-experimental research design, developmental research, ethnographic research, action research and the case study research method (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:41).

As indicated in the introduction of this chapter, the case study method is the basic design frame that has been adopted for this study. This method is used within a qualitative research framework that is associated with a naturalistic research paradigm, that is, a social-anthropological approach. This is a preferred paradigm for qualitative research rather than the agricultural-botany approach that involves experimentation (Kuye, 1997:3). In addition, Kuye distinguishes between social anthropology (naturalistic) and the agricultural-botanic paradigm. Kuye prefers the naturalistic approach to the agricultural-botanic paradigm for most qualitative research on the grounds that pre-ordinate, experimental methods are inappropriate in social science.

However, emphasis on qualitative approaches is not intended to nullify the importance of quantitative methods in case study methodologies. In fact, it may be unwise to try and draw a hard-and fast distinction between qualitative and quantitative studies. The difference is not absolute; it is one of emphasis. One emphasis should not be considered superior to the other. The appropriate approach would depend upon the nature of questions under consideration and the objectives of the researchers. Many social scientists draw a line between these two because of the technical nature of the quantitative dimension and sheer fear of the abstractness of mathematical or statistical approaches. Because of this problem, many social science scholars shy away from such methodologies, although they acknowledge their (statistical methods) utility in research. Thus, the apparent dismissal of quantitative methods from social science research borders on 'mathophobia' or 'statsophobia' (fear of mathematics and statistics respectively), or both. This study, however, integrates these two methodologies although mostly, it uses the qualitative thrust.

A definition and explanation of the case study method is appropriate at this point, as it would clearly set out a picture on how and why this study proceeded within this framework. Bell (1999:10) indicates that the term case study is an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on inquiry around an instance. It is an extensive description and examination of a single action, a decision, an individual, an organization or a system. In line with this observation, Mouton (2001:149) notes that case studies are usually qualitative in nature and aim at providing an in-depth description of a small number of cases. This means that the case study approach is about making a deliberate choice of a particular entity as a unit of analysis of whatever phenomena a social scientist wants to focus his/her attention. The case becomes the object of the study and is isolated, taking into consideration the peculiarity of its characteristics or, for that matter, the similarities of its characteristics with other cases, which for different reasons cannot be included in the study.

Kuye (1997:5) in describing the process of coming up with cases, notes that the method involves selecting a number of cases, usually institutions or sites in which fieldwork will be carried out. The sample may be selected on a purposive non-probability basis. This note by Kuye is consistent with how this study selected its cases, that is, by purely using an opportunity sampling approach that will be explained shortly. The case study method tries to build a detailed picture of the selected case(s), bringing out all the factors under consideration so as to make a well-informed judgment about issues being raised. Thus, it is important for a researcher to make justifications of his/her selected cases in line with the nature and demands of his/her study. Such justifications may for example, be in line with trying to make generalizations or merely to table information meant to improve an intervention or the case itself. As such, the case may lead social scientists to revisit certain theoretical misconceptions about certain phenomena and to reformulate and correct such misconceptions for the improvement of knowledge of a particular discipline that forms the broad frame under which a particular problem is being investigated.

In fact, there is no intellectual alternative to getting knowledge from the actual case, describing its experiences and explaining why it had to undertake certain courses of action as opposed to others. Thus, the case focus gives any researcher or policy analyst, a chance to analyze isolated policy developments within a given political order. It gives the researcher a chance to understand human and organizational behavior under certain conditions fully and thus, enhance his/her understanding of a given system. Cases expose the operational reality of organizations and allow one to bring out the strengths and weaknesses of such organizations and enhance one's chances of engaging or suggesting remedial action for such organizations. The medical fraternity and law societies use case approaches in their operations, as they appreciate the uniqueness of each incident. Such appreciation enables them to develop remedial action that is peculiar to the case as it is uniquely affected by a complexity of factors that distinguishes it from other similar scenarios. It is after a thorough diagnosis and analysis of different cases that, where possible and depending on the degree of representativeness of the cases selected, generalizations can be drawn.

Sometimes cases are utilized under a comparative framework. The comparative framework allows one to draw similarities and differences between or among different case phenomena. Comparison liberates the study from ethnocentric tendencies. This is especially so where cases are drawn from two or more distinct regions where different viewpoints on doing things are a distinguishing factor of the two populations. Two types of case comparison can be enumerated and discussed. These are, the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and the Most Dissimilar Systems Design (MDSD). MSSD involves a limited number of similar cases, normally between two and five cases. Most characteristics of these cases should be similar. However, any characteristic differences should be noted, highlighted and explained so as to bring out the complications or advantages for that matter, that such differences may bring to the study. This is important for a social scientist where upon the differences, though apparently minor, may influence the substance of the research findings (Bell, 1999:10-12).

For example, two different regions, may be interested in getting assistance from government to alleviate hunger. If the two regions are such that one does not support the government of the day, intervention by government may not go well for the group that does not support government fully. Such a scenario demands that any researcher, who is interested in looking into the nature and extent of desirability of the intervention, considers the fundamental case differences, which for example in this case, may be rooted in issues of ethnicity, environmental diversity, or other socio- economic or political factors.

MDSM, as a comparison framework, normally involves a large number of cases, which include both similar and dissimilar ones. These cases are exposed to statistical tests to indicate the inherent similarities and differences. This method is acknowledged as a useful one in testing hypotheses and producing or validating generalizations. The comparison approaches have not been adopted for this study because of limits in terms of time, finance, and other human and material resources, which would have been required to include several RDCs in this study. The focus here is on one case, the Beitbridge Rural District Council.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

The paramountcy and process of acquiring data cannot be overemphasized in social science research. Data creation entails a deep analysis of issues, a focused exposition of phenomena and an exploring mind that is determined to link different factors in terms of causality links, in order to indicate how a particular phenomenon under investigation manifests itself. The process is not a layman's field of endeavor, but that of a competent social scientist with the ability to select and isolate needed data from a complex environment of a phenomenon under investigation. Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:99) note that data can be classified variously, and especially by the way it was collected. There is primary data, which is that data that is collected by the researcher for a particular purpose. Data that is directly related to the study is essential in any research

undertaking as it precisely tries to answer the problem for which the study has been initiated. There is also secondary data. This is data that has been collected by others for their own purposes but which a particular researcher sees as useful to his/her research and as a result, tries to incorporate some of the information in his/her own work. This data is also referred to as historical data. Its utility lies in the fact that it can be used to support one's research or refute points of view raised by other authors. This data can be both quantitative and qualitative. A resourceful researcher finds it incumbent upon him/her to accumulate as much of this data as possible so as to develop theories and conclusions about a particular discipline. Bless and Higson-Smith (1994:100) further indicate that whether data has a property of being quantitative or qualitative is very important since it determines the way data can be utilized. Although the tendency exists to consider numerical (quantitative) data [although many social science researchers do not want to involve themselves in the actual development of such data] as more reliable and easier to utilize, in particular by statistical techniques as science is inconceivable without non numerical data which may assist in interpreting numerical data and the disregard of which would lead to incomplete description of the social reality.

This study in particular, utilized the questionnaire, interview and the record/historical profile as data collecting instruments. The three forms constitute what is known as the triangulation method of data collection.

Interviews

Interviews provide a direct encounter between researchers and respondents. The interview method is an acknowledged way of collecting data in social research. Moser and Kalton (1971:271) describe an interview as a conversation between interviewer and respondent with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the respondent. Thus, the purpose of interview to probe beneath the surface of events (such as the behavior, including utterances of an individual), in order to explore the underlying processes from which these events arise. Thus, a skillful

interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which other methods can never do (Bell, 1999:135).

The approach to an interview can be likened to that of a therapist who, on certain occasions, takes control of the interaction process and asks clear probing and specific questions and reacts to the client's responses. In another instance, the therapist puts the client in control of the proceedings and allows him or her to explore the conditions under investigation and occasionally guides the process to keep the investigation on track with the objectives of the therapy. Constant probes and prompts are made to solicit more information and compel the respondent to agree with the interviewer's point of view or to refute it thereby, giving reasons why for disagreement or agreement. Although probes and prompts are a crucial interview strategy, they have to be used with great care as they might disturb the spontaneity of a respondent's responses. It is significant to note that the foundations of interviewing are to be found in the mundane observation that people can resort to what they feel, tell others about aspects of their lives, disclose what their hopes and fears are, offer their opinions and state their beliefs. To state it simply, people have the ability to impart masses of information about whatever it is that is under study. Interviews, therefore, take this fact into account and utilize it for gathering information about their research.

In this study, a combination of structured and unstructured interviews was used. Armed with structured questions, the interviewer was given the chance to probe for clarification of responses. The method of combining the two also gives the interview flexibility and increases rapport and cooperation between the interviewer and interviewee. Information provided is more likely to be valid as it is given instantly (Bell, 1999:138). The data collection plan, which is discussed later in this chapter, clearly indicates how this method was utilized. One should also mention that there are different techniques such as the standardized interview, exploratory interview, group interview, and the telephone interview that were utilized by this study. A combination of all these was used to spread the interview and data sources especially where some people, mostly officials, were difficult to

contact for interviews. Besides the interview method, questionnaires were used to collect data.

Questionnaires

The concept of questionnaire denotes a set of questions with fixed wording and a sequence of presentation, as well as fairly precise indications of how to answer each question (Bless and Higson-Smith, 1994:106). The standard questionnaire is presented to different respondents so they can provide responses freely, without the interference of the researcher. Such questionnaires (self-administered questionnaires) are distributed by the researcher or his/her assistants and then collected after completion. Some of these can be mailed to the respondents where it is difficult for the researchers to get to the intended respondents. The self-administered questionnaire, together with the interview method, allowed the researcher to gather information from others, in addition to observing issues at hand. This situation also allowed respondents to state what they knew, in terms of knowledge and factual information; to state their value preferences, interests and tastes; to give their thoughts, attitudes and beliefs; and to state their experiences of what happened before and what is happening now. Bless and Higson Smith (1994:116-119) further outline certain conditions that have to be met in research in order to ensure that objectivity prevails. The first condition pertains to the respondents' cooperation. Respondents have to cooperate in sharing their knowledge. Secondly, they should also give responses that are consistent with reality and not what they think reality should be. Thirdly, they should be aware of their feelings about an issue and what they think should be done about it to align it with normality. It is from this realization that meaningful information can be communicated to form a basis for decisions, conclusions and recommendations based on the results of this study.

The use of interviews and questionnaires raises the issue of sampling. A sample as a group of items selected from a given population. It can also be viewed as a

subset of the universal set, that is, the population of concern (Bell, 1999:126). A population in social science research is the total collection of factors, items, people or events that are being investigated in a particular research scenario so as to make inferences about it. Three types of sampling procedures can be identified. These are random sampling, theoretical sampling and opportunity sampling. A random sample is that which is drawn from a population in such a way that every member of the population has an equal chance of selection as a member of the sample, and that inclusion or exclusion from the sample could not be affected by any factor other than chance (Botes, 1995:103). The rationale for a random sample is to minimize issues of bias allows the researcher to take the sample as a statistically reliable representation of the population. This approach was not considered as suitable for this study, since the selection of the case in this study was affected by a preference system that was built into the process.

The second theoretical sampling is also referred to as non-random sampling. It includes procedures such as stratified sampling, cluster or multi-stage sampling and quota sampling. Non-random sampling is employed where the researcher has a desire to include certain specific samples that may otherwise be excluded if subjected to a random sampling procedure. This approach was used in this research and had the effect of changing the nature of the research results from results, which would have allowed generalizations to be drawn for the whole population of RDCs to results, which are case specific and which only allow conclusions and recommendations to be drawn for the specific case under attention. It was with this in mind that non-random opportunity sampling was used to select the case.

It is significant to note that the smaller the sample, the more features are left out and the greater the chances that it is not representative. Statistically, a representation of ten percent is considered as a fair representation that can allow one to draw generalizations for the whole. This study does not fall into this category, as the selected RDC, in percentage terms constitutes a representation

of only 1.75%. As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, this study is not about drawing generalizations. The main aim is to know whether these entities can stand on their own as organizations in terms of their capacity to perform, and whether government has really 'set them free' for self-determination. In addition to interviews and questionnaires, the historical method (documentation search is used to collect data. A brief discussion of this method is provided in the section that follows.

Documentation Search

While interviews and questionnaires involve, to some extent, a certain degree of manipulating the context within which an inquiry takes place, documentary search also referred to as the historical or the records method involves the mobilization of already existent information produced during the daily activities of individuals or organizations (Tosh, 1991:54; and Evans, 1995:18). Such information can be derived from minutes of meetings, policy documents, organization plans and employment records, statistical reports, annual reports and budgetary documents. The researcher needs the skills to sift such documents in order to come up with information that relates to his/her study. In the process, there is need for ethical considerations where such information may be considered confidential. Documents have to be coded in order to conceal the actual document that produces certain kinds of information.

This study utilized a lot of documented information from the following sources:

- Meeting of council, wards, administrative/management staff, and councils and NGOs;
- Parliamentary Acts such as the RDC Act: DC and RC Acts; the Education Act; the Health Act: the DDF Act; and the Roads and Transportation ACT;
- Parliamentary reports: e.g. Hansard Reports of the House of Assembly;
- Reports of the Forum for Rural Development;
- Policy statements and Cabinet memoranda;

- Circular letters and official directives; and
- Books, periodicals and bulletins that deal with the research topic.

Documentation search has its own advantages and disadvantages. The following advantages led to the choice of this technique:

- The researcher acts independently of the organizations under scrutiny, that is, while in certain cases he/she may ask for documents from the institution concerned, some of the information can be obtained from the national archives, libraries and government printers.
- There is no reliance on the memory of individuals as sometimes recall may not be accurate, although not always intentionally.
- First hand information of what actually happened can be obtained through scrutinizing documents, especially minutes of meetings and parliamentary reports and policy pronouncements by ministers in meetings.
- Any original facts from the documents can be easily made available for the research, although with considerations for ethical provisions of course.
- Documentary information allows the researcher to use a selective mind by carefully scrutinizing the information made available for the study and selecting that which he considers useful for his/her purposes (Botes, 1995:98; and Bell, 1999:112-116).

However, disadvantages also accrue from documentary search, especially the following:

- The time consuming nature of reading documents and ultimately not finding much information related to the study. Even if much information

useful to the study can be obtained, the process is painstaking and needs a lot of time, which is normally not available to researchers.

- Personal views of authors may distort certain facts. This sacrifices objectivity, a situation that can have a multiplier effect of distortions to other studies that rely on such information.
- Written material is by nature secondary information as it expresses the ideas and perceptions of others. As such, it must be viewed critically (Botes, 1995:98; and Bell, 1999:112-116; and Mouton, 2001:108). All the same, and after considering the pros and cons of this technique, this study used documentary search as its advantages were considered to be greater than its disadvantages. In fact, using the technique with the knowledge that weaknesses exist actually strengthened the researcher's resolve to be objective and thorough in this form of data gathering. As soon as different types of information are collected, analysis should follow.

DATA ANALYSIS

As indicated earlier, the study uses both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This means that it has to deal with both types of data in its analytical framework. Issues of data analysis, although they receive much attention from researchers, find themselves not adequately articulated by social scientists, such that its presence in reports and methodology sections of studies is usually scant with very little explanation of the data and its analysis. In simple terms, the section on data analysis provides or explains the stage at which the information that has been gathered is transformed into data via the process of analysis (Mouton, 2001:108-109).

Data analysis is sometimes discussed within the qualitative and quantitative

divide. However, a closer look at such polarization and the interest of some scholars in pursuing it brings out traditional epistemological divisions of linking the qualitative/interpretive framework with what is often termed the 'soft' approaches of the social science, while the link for the quantitative/statistical frame is for the 'hard', and apparently, more cognitive focused natural sciences. Such polarization manoeuvres seem to have a 'political motivation' of distancing the two fields (social and natural sciences) and sending a message that one is more superior than the other specifically, that natural science, acclaimed to require higher cognitive capability. This study rejects this apparent binary choice. Instead, it integrates the two within the study to show that the two are compatible and complementary and work well together to produce well focused social science research that does not compromise both reliability and validity in its analytical frame. These two are important concepts in any research. They are discussed more elaborately in the section that follows.

ETHICS, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

As indicated above, reliability, validity and ethics are important terms in any scientific research. Reliability is a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would field the same results each time (Bell, 1999:103). Reliability is the level of consistency of an instrument. In this study, to make sure that the interview schedule elicited for the same answers from interviewees, questions were focused on specific variables. Carrying out a pilot study also ensured that all questions were clear and designed to obtain the relevant information needed for the study. Reliability should also ensure that the researcher should be in a position to ask the same questions, or similar questions more than once and to determine whether or not in each case he/she receives similar responses. If any one of the questions does not result in the same answer as before, then that question is not reliable and should be removed or restated. The same people should be asked the same questions at different

times (test-retest).

Validity, on the other hand, refers to the degree to which a test succeeds in measuring what it is set out to measure (Bell, 1999:104). It is the extent to which a specific measurement provides data that relates to commonly accepted meanings of a particular concept. Validity measures the truthfulness of the provided data. It answers the question whether the test measured exactly what it is supposed to measure. To check for both reliability and validity, the following approaches can be used: triangulation, repetition of the research questions, or asking the participants over and over again about the truthfulness of the information they have provided. For this study, the use of questionnaires, interviews and document search provided the necessary triangulation that allowed different methods to provide sufficient corroborative evidence and support for one another. During the interview sessions, some questions were repeated to check on the truthfulness of the answers provided.

However, within this scenario, it should be realized that the intended participants have a right to refuse to cooperate. Such a right needs to be respected by researchers. As such, the issue of the rights of respondents raises the issue of ethical consideration in research. The following ethical issues have been considered in undertaking this research. Research is about interfering with other people's liberties or private domains. For the purpose of this study, the researcher explained to the respondents what the research was all about so that they could make an informed decision as to whether or not to participate. The thrust of this study, its benefits and costs to the researcher were explained, except some of the unforeseen spillover effects, both positive and negative. Another ethical issue that the study took into consideration was that of anonymity. The issue of anonymity is vital where respondents have to respond to certain questions that require information of a private nature. Respondents, in this case, may demand anonymity and this should be guaranteed. This study covers several sensitive issues of government policy and the internal dynamics

of rural local government institutions. As such, most respondents were not in favor of publicizing their names being given. These requests were accordingly granted. The impact of guaranteeing anonymity lies in respondents providing truthful answers, as they would be aware that their identity would remain undisclosed.

Demands for anonymity go along with those of confidentiality. An organization can only agree with information about its internal dynamics if it is certain that such information will not find itself in the hands of competitors. Such assurances are likely to produce honest responses and sufficient information related to the study. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality are particularly important in case study research, where respondents can be easily singled out and 'persecuted'. Organizations can also find themselves under fire from the public or government that have learnt what actually goes on in a particular organization. Such precautions have been taken into consideration in this study, hence the free and meaningful responses from the various samples that were targeted for data collection. The following section lays out the data collection plan for the research.

DATA COLLECTION PLAN

The data collection plan indicates the manner in which the researcher organized the process of collecting research information. This process was designed, taking into cognizance the fact that three different data collection methods had to be used, that is, the questionnaire, interview, and the historical/record method. Secondly, there was a realisation that there were three distinct parts to the study: democratic participation, service provision and management capacity. Below is an outline of the issues considered, the effects and indicators for each of them, and the means of verifying the presence of democratic participation.

Democratic participation

Behind the success of local government is the capacity of those institutions of a local nature to involve communities in their affairs. Communities have to be seen to be performing certain tasks, from their own volition. These should contribute the well being of such communities and that of local government. These tasks or activities include engaging in self-help projects, neighbourhood watch committees, and building schools and clinics. This is not only democratic but a humanizing approach, which allows people to determine and shape their future. In fact, democratic participation is the foundation upon which decentralization and local government are based and can be built. It includes genuine consultation, involvement in project design and implementation, and soliciting public opinion on the performance of local institutions (Blair, 1977:92-93). This makes them feel part of the local institution and they would more than likely go out of their way to make it succeed. In light of this, one can measure whether or not a local government system is democratic by focusing on the quality of functions by private citizens. These functions indicate the extent to which communities accept a local government system and are satisfied with its work. Thus, they are critical in gauging the performance of these institutions. The questions to ask are, do communities participate in the affairs of local government and is this participation meaningful? Answering these questions helped the research to determine the ability of the Beitbridge Rural District Council to involve communities in local authority affairs. The following indicators were used to investigate these questions:

- Presence of instruments for use in democratic participation;
- Evidence of democratic participation advocacy by councilors;
- Community participation in local elections;
- Involvement in volunteer services like neighbourhood watch, clubs, building schools and clinics;
- Attendance at ward and village meetings;

- Consulting communities in decision making;
- Participation in self-help projects;
- Report back to communities by councilors;
- Payment of development levy;
- The presence of a public relations post;
- The presence of a local authority magazine or any information circulars to communities;
- Getting public opinion on performance related matters; and
- Black/white harmonization initiatives.

Questionnaires, interviews and documentary search were used as instruments for collecting data. The physical presence of some of these indicators was also ascertained. Data were collected from communities in the wards, councilors, council staff, and private organizations.

Service Provision

The question of service provision was in relation to whether or not the Beitbridge Rural District Council is providing adequate service to the communities it was expected to serve. The following services were focused upon: health, education, housing, roads, water, transport, recreation facilities and refuse collection. Service provision was expected to lead to improved conditions of living for the communities in Beitbridge. A breakdown of the service and their indicators follows below:

a) Health

- the presence and nature of health facilities;
- the number of health facilities per given unit of population;
- RDC health policy;
- budgetary allocations for health;

- central government involvement in health in terms of annual financial outlays as a ratio to local finance;
- ownership of Institutions of Health;
- task division between the RDC and the MOHCW; and
- changes in health provision facilities since 1993.

The information was obtained from the RDC Department of Social and Community Services, Council Committee meetings, Council Meetings minutes, Communities, District Medical Officer of Health documents, Council Chairman and selected councillors, CEO and SEO interviews, and questionnaire responses.

b) Education

- educational establishments: council versus central government schools, both primary and secondary schools;
- presence of qualified teachers;
- teacher/pupil ratio;
- changes in teacher accommodation since 1993;
- availability of adult literacy classes;
- improved changes in educational facilities since 1993;
- increased budgetary allocations for education since 1993; and
- presence of RDC instruments on education.

The information was obtained from the RDC policy documents, Department of Social and Community Services documents, District Education Officers documents, Council files and minutes of council and committee meetings, School Development Committee meetings, and information from interviews and questionnaires.

c) Roads

- improved condition of RDC roads;

- RDC budget for road maintenance since 1993;
- presence of RDC equipment for road construction and maintenance;
- presence of other players like central government private companies in road construction and maintenance; and
- presence of RDC instruments on road construction and maintenance.

The information was obtained from RDC committee and council meetings; budget statements, DDF documents; questionnaire responses and interview information.

d) **Water**

- improvement in the provision of water since 1993;
- dam construction planned and actual number of dams constructed since 1993;
- RDC instruments on water provision;
- central government involvement in water provision; and
- budget allocation for water.

The information was obtained from minutes of Council and committee meetings, Department of Projects documents, Department of Community and Social Services documents, Ministry of Energy and Water Development documents, questionnaire and interview responses.

e) **Housing**

- number of housing units constructed since 1993;
- number of houses and waiting list comparisons;
- central government involvement in housing provision;
- donor community involvement in housing provision;
- BRDC instruments on housing provision;
- annual budget provisions for housing; and
- involvement of private sector in housing provision.

The information was obtained from minutes of Council and committee meetings, Department of Community and Social Services documents, MOLGAHN documents, RDC policy documents, interviews and questionnaire responses. The third issue to be considered is management capacity.

Management capacity

The administration of council falls under Council Committees and appointed workers. There is a Chief Executive Officer who heads the Council's administration. Below the Chief Executive Officer, is a team of trained administrators who are expected to resource different departments that make up the Council. The function of this team of specialists is to see to it that Council programmes are implemented, in line with the enabling instruments. Apart from implementing policy, they are tasked with making policy recommendations, managing the Council's financing, planning and designing intervention measures that are designed to improve Council functions, and control all operations of Council. The argument here is that the ability of these functionaries to manage organizational activities is vital for the manner in which the Council runs its business. This is an important variable in gauging the performance of Council, hence its incorporation in this study. One should also add that the history of rural local government in Zimbabwe indicates that administrators of these local institutions have always been attacked for lack of professionalism and seriousness of purpose. They were considered to be basically corrupted; unaccountable and ill qualified to handle these institutions (Roe, 1992:10-11). In order to determine their performance levels after amalgamation in 1993, the following factors were considered:

- a) **Corporate planning:** The indicators for corporate planning included:
 - Mission statements;

- organisational and departmental objectives;
- action plans;
- financial management plans;
- total corporate plans; and
- evidence of advocacy regarding RDC activities.

The information was obtained through interviews, questionnaires and council documents. A physical check of plans was done to authenticate the presence of these documents.

b) **Integrated strategic and policy planning:** The indicators here included:

- Policy documents;
- master plans;
- VIDCO and Ward projects;
- nature of RDC planning staff;
- NGO involvement in projects; and
- presence of information systems.

The information was obtained from council documents, questionnaires and interviews. Physical check up was done to authenticate the presence of these documents and activities.

c) **Project planning and implementation:** Indicators included:

- Evidence of project appraisal and prioritisation systems;
- availability of implementable projects;
- evidence of three or five year rolling plans for projects;
- evidence of proper implementation scheduling with a clear outline of project costs;
- the nature of project personnel; and
- project implementation initiatives since 1993.

The information was obtained from council documents, questionnaires and interviews. Physical check up was done to authenticate the presence of these documents.

d) **The management of finance:** This includes aspects such as financial viability measures, revenue raising capacity and expenditure patterns. Specific focus was on checking:

- Financial autonomy ratios, that is, local revenue versus government and other revenues;
- the disparities that exist between expected revenue and collected revenue;
- methods of improving resource raising capacity and actual operationalisation of these, together with evidence of improved efficiency yields;
- additional sources of revenue identified and implemented; and
- budget deficit considerations.

The indicators for the above included checking the:

- Existence of standard financial accounting systems;
- production of timely budgets (there should be one budget at least one month before the end of each financial year);
- production of end of year accounts (within three months of the end of a particular financial year);
- production of financial plans and cash flow forecasts. These are financial statements that indicate how funds will be utilized, mechanisms for appraising and implementing budget plans;
- production of regular statements for RDC commercial enterprises;
- production of up to date asset inventories and maintenance budgets;
- nature of financial accountability; and

- qualifications of RDC financial personnel.

The sources of information for the financial aspect of the study included audit reports, annual budget statements, Finance Committee meeting minutes, monthly financial returns, CEO and SEO interviews, and questionnaire returns.

e) **Transport and equipment management:** The indicators included:

- Evidence of inventory registers;
- evidence of inventory register;
- evidence of procedures for use and hiring out;
- evidence of equipment maintenance records;
- evidence of stationary and office equipment accounting;
- procurement and stores management procedures; and
- evidence of personnel in charge of transport and other equipment.

The information sources included council documents, interviews and questionnaires. Some of these can be checked to verify their presence.

f) **General administration:** Indicators included:

- Evidence of proper personnel management procedures;
- clear reporting structures;
- presence of information management systems;
- evidence of a public relations system;
- evidence of dispute procedure systems;
- evidence of use of staff motivation strategies;
- evidence of RDC Health and Safety procedures;
- evidence of standard tendering procedures in use; and
- general office administration and record keeping.

The sources of information for the administrative frame includes policy documents, different kinds of plans, minutes of meetings, departmental and council reports, project documents, implementation plans, certificates of project completion, monitoring and evaluation reports, qualitative evaluation reports, personnel files, inventory registers, vehicle log books, interview and questionnaire information.

g) **Coordination, Monitoring, and Evaluation:** Indicators included:

- Documentary evidence of an established system of coordination;
- documents showing minutes of coordination meetings;
- evidence of meetings between council committees and management;
- attendance registers for these coordination meetings;
- evidence of collaboration between ministries, RDCs, NGOs, and the private sector;
- presence of monitoring and evaluation documents;
- presence of well outlined formats for monitoring and evaluation;
- presence of monitoring and evaluation teams;

- fund allocation for monitoring and evaluation of programmes; and
- evidence of project lists and their performance.

Information was obtained from council documents, interviews and questionnaires. A physical check of documents was done to authenticate their presence and determine the quality of information in them.

The study used the services of two research assistants, one with a Masters degree in Public Administration and the other with a Bachelor of Business Studies (Marketing specialisation) degree. The duties of these research assistants were broadly, to distribute questionnaires; carry out interviews; retrieve historical data; and write brief reports on their findings for onward transmission to the researcher. It should be noted that, although the research assistants were required to write brief reports, all the interview information was recorded with the aid of a tape recorder so that the researcher could also be exposed to the responses first hand and have the opportunity to record his interpretations apart from those in the research assistants' reports. The layout for the data collection plan was as follows:

- **Questionnaire Distribution:** This was carried out between 15 and 22 February, 2002;
- **Interviews:** These was carried out between 8 January 2002 and 15 February 2002; and
- **Documentary search:** This was carried out between 15 December 2001 and 15 April 2002.

To collect data, questionnaire and interview schedules were designed. In addition, there was extensive use of historical data. The section that follows

provides a brief discussion on the interview and questionnaire schedules and the focus of the historical data.

Questionnaire schedules: Two schedules of questionnaires were drafted in accordance with the people being invited to participate as respondents. Schedule A was prepared for distribution among members of the community selected through opportunity sampling. These included members of Village Development Committees (VIDCOs), Ward Development Committees (WADCOs), District Development Committees (DDCOs), Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the general public. Two hundred and fifty (250) questionnaires were distributed for this schedule. Some questionnaires were mailed to those VIDCO and WADCO members who were physically distant from the RDC head office. Schedule B was prepared for councillors and staff of the BRDC. Fifteen questionnaires were distributed among the selected officials. These included seven councillors, three senior managers, three middle managers, and two junior managers. All these were selected through opportunity sampling. Each official in this schedule was asked to respond to the questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires were collected between February and June 2002. This time was considered to be long enough taking into consideration the diversity of questions that were asked in the questionnaire, and the fact that respondents were also busy with their normal work schedules.

Interview schedules: Research assistants were asked to carry out standardized and group interviews. Within this context of standardization, an element of exploratory interviewing was allowed to set in towards the end of the interviews. This was done in order to give the interviewees a chance to explore widely on issues of RDC performance and by so doing, input much information that was vital for the study.

The following were selected for interviews:

1. Councillors

- (a) The Chairperson of Council; and
- (b) Four (4) other councillors, two black and two white.

2. Management Officers

- a) The Chief Executive Officer of the RDC;
- b) Head of Administration and Services;
- c) Head of Finance;
- d) The District Administrator;
- e) The Resident NGO Head; and
- f) The Provincial Administrator.

3. Group interviews

- a) Middle management and other selected council employees;
- b) Selected RDC residents, VIDCO and WADCO members;
- c) The Finance Committee;
- d) The Development Committee; and
- e) The General Purpose Committee.

4. Head Office and Other

- a) The Deputy Minister of MOLGANH;
- b) The Permanent Secretary of MOLGANH;
- c) The President of the Association of Rural District Councils; and
- d) The Former CEO of BRDC.

Historical/Recorded Data: Several documentary sources were used. These included central government, provincial and district level documents. Some of these sources included the Hansard, Acts of Parliament, national constitutions, gazettes, provincial meeting minutes, and circulars. Employment records were also sought, including information related to staff rationalisation and training,

especially with respect to management staff and councillors. Information on development projects and how they were being implemented was also obtained. It should be noted that apart from current RDC records, records on the now defunct RCs and DCs were also obtained.

CONCLUSION

As indicated earlier, there is no intellectual alternative to getting knowledge from the actual case. However, it all depends on how one blends the different data collection instruments for both primary and secondary information. The use of the interview, questionnaire and the historical method was seen as a balanced attempt to extract as much policy relevant information as was necessary. Besides, this information was considered to be sufficient to answer the concerns of the research question and to make scientifically relevant recommendations that would help to build the capacity of the BRDC to offer community relevant services to the local people.