

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The performance of public institutions has received worldwide reviews in recent years. This is mainly due to, among other reasons, a common perception that these institutions are at the centre stage of discourses on democracy and good governance, national economic growth, global integration, improved social welfare, and sustainable national development. Thus, failing to expose the nature of their performance denies society the chance to understand the strengths and weaknesses of these institutions as they try to fulfill their role. Public sector institutions are many and varied. They include central government departments or ministries, public enterprises, courts, provincial or regional government units and local authorities in both urban and rural settings. Their multiplicity and diversity presupposes the existence of differences in operations, location, autonomy and functional capacity. Attempting to carry out an analysis of all of them in one research project would be exposing oneself to a mammoth task that would be difficult to handle. Consequently, this study focuses on the performance of rural local government units known as Rural District Councils (RDCs) in Zimbabwe. As the name implies, these are rural based local government units run by locally elected councilors and a local bureaucracy appointed by the former. These units are popularly referred to as local authorities. There are fifty-seven (57) RDCs in Zimbabwe. The need to highlight the minute details of their performance compelled this study to select one RDC, the Beitbridge Rural District Council (BRDC). Thus, this is a case study research focusing on the performance of the BRDC between 1993, when these institutions were established, and 2002.

It is generally acknowledged that trying to measure the performance of public sector institutions is a complicated and complex matter. The complexity of it lays in the lack of generally accepted performance indicators in this sector, unlike in the private sector, where variables like profit and market share are commonly used. Objectives of public sector institutions are usually broad and tend to encompass the economic, social, political and other environmental domains (Hughes, 1994:205-206; and Burger and Ducharme, 2000:59-61). Besides, there is a plethora of complex relations among government institutions that may enhance or undermine the performance of a particular institution.

The lack of standard indicators also makes it rather risky to compare the performance of one institution to that of others. The institutions may have different missions, resource bases, social settings and operations. Moreover, the institutions may be faced with completely different influences from political office-bearers. All these realities reduce the commonality of standard indicators and complicate both measurement on a comparative basis and benchmarking

Although performance measurement is embedded in complexity, it is essential as it helps the institution to know how well it is performing and whether or not it is focused on achieving its goals and objectives. It is only through the results of such measures, that strengths and weaknesses can be noted and capacity-building mechanisms put in place to enhance the viability of such institutions. This is critical, particularly to nascent institutions whose operations may easily go wrong if the negatives are not noticed on time. They may be easily disorganised. Dysfunctional conflict between the institution and the communities it serves may manifest itself. Negative and incapacitating reporting from the media may worsen their situation and they may eventually die. It is with this in mind that public sector performance is under the spotlight in this study, to try and determine the *modus operandi* of public institutions and their capacity to serve communities well. This is the fundamental mission of the state: to improve social welfare and to make life

good. Aristotle, one of the classical philosophers, is cited in Botes, Brynard, Fourie and Roux (1992:3) as saying:

Every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always acts in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which is the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good.

The state cannot achieve the 'highest good' if public institutions are not performing well. It cannot be left to chance that these should perform as expected. What is needed is to determine the levels of performance and indicate whether or not such is acceptable.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

RDCs were established in July 1993, during the Third Republic of Zimbabwe, and thirteen years after independence. These institutions are expected to provide services of a local nature to communities within their areas of jurisdiction. RDCs are expected to initiate sustainable development projects for Zimbabwe's rural population estimated to be 65%. They are expected to ensure that these people's welfare is improved and that they enjoy the good life, which independent Zimbabwe is expected to offer. It is significant to note that most of these people are poor. This means that RDCs have the responsibility to enhance the socio-economic and political growth of these people. They are expected to empower these people to enable them to make decisions on issues that affect them, and encourage mutual coexistence and resource sharing among them regardless of race. They are expected to provide communities with essential services like water, health, education and housing, and manage communities efficiently and effectively. Whether the multiplicity or diversity of functions they are expected to perform are fulfilled, can only be ascertained through gauging their performance since their inception in 1993.

In order to understand RDCs better, it is important to provide a brief outline of Zimbabwe as an African country that has emerged from colonial rule and has, over the years, tried to chart its development path with internally induced strategies, albeit with successes and failures.

### **Zimbabwe: A socio-economic, demographical and political brief**

Zimbabwe is a land-locked country in the Southern part of Africa. Its geographic coordinates are 20 00 S, and 30 00 E. It is one of the fourteen Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries. Zimbabwe shares its borders with South Africa in the south (225 km); Botswana in the west (813 km); Namibia in the north west (0 km, i.e. at the quadripoint where Zimbabwe, Botswana and Zambia share a common border point); Zambia in the north (797 km); and Mozambique in the east (1 231 km). That Zimbabwe is land-locked is significant in that its access to overseas markets greatly depends on its relationship with its neighbours and the political milieu obtaining in these countries. For example, Zimbabwe faced problems during the debilitating civil war in Mozambique (1980 – 1990). It also had economic problems before South Africa became independent in 1994. However, this does not mean that all its economic problems can be attributed to this geographical setup. Some, if not most, of them are due to poor economic policies and ineptitude in the management of the national economy. The other problems are attributed to the political environment in the country, where political leaders have become insensitive, unresponsive and tend to ignore the rule of law (Mattes, Bratton, Davids and Africa, 2000:6).

The total surface area of Zimbabwe is about 391 000 square kilometres. Of this area, about 387 000 square kilometres is land mass while the remaining 4 000 square kilometres is water. Zimbabwe has a tropical climate. Its temperature ranges between 5 degrees Celsius and 38 degrees Celsius. Its rainfall is between November and March and ranges between 450 mm and 1200 mm. The land is made up of Savanna grasslands with high plateaus and low velds. The

highest point is 2 592 metres at the Nyanga mountains and the lowest is 162 metres above sea level at the confluence of the Save and Lundi rivers in the southeastern part of the country ([www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html), 15 June 2001:1-2).

The population of Zimbabwe is about 11 million people (1998 estimates) of whom 98,8 percent are blacks and 1,2 percent are of European origin, Asians, and mixed races. Sixty five percent (65%) of Zimbabwe's population is rural based, hence the paramountcy of RDCs. The two main ethnic groups are Shona (71%) and Ndebele (16%). Other smaller groups like the Tonga, Sena, Hlengwe, Venda and Sotho make up 11,8%. As indicated above, the other 1,2% is that of Whites, Asians and Coloureds or Bastards (mixed races). The population growth rate has been relatively high at 3% per annum since 1980 although the 2001 indications are that this has dropped to 1,12% due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Forty-four percent (44%) of Zimbabwe's population is between 0 – 14 years; 54% is between 15 – 64 years; and 2% is 65 years and above. This places the country's life expectancy at 39,19 years ([www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html), 15 June 2001:2-3).

Zimbabwe is very much dependent on mining and agriculture. Minerals such as coal, chromium ore, asbestos, gold, nickel, copper, iron ore, vanadium, lithium, tin and platinum are found. There is a lot of crop and animal farming by both black and white farmers. Apart from South Africa, Zimbabwe has the largest number of whites in sub-Saharan Africa, about 250 000 at independence in 1980 and an estimated 112 000 in 1998 ([www.nationamaster.com/country/zi/people](http://www.nationamaster.com/country/zi/people), 15 June 2001:1). Although this number seems to be negligible, its significance lies in the fact that it controls, together with foreign companies, about 75% of the country's wealth through its ownership of commercial farms, the commercial and industrial sector, and the mines. It also makes a fairly large contribution to the country's senior managers in the private sector, professionals like lawyers, doctors, accountants, economists and technicians. The significance of these

explications is that there is an unhealthy distribution of resources between the races. This means that the pre-independence situation of skewed resource distribution has not changed fully and yet it was one of the rallying points of the liberation struggle between 1965 and 1980. For example, this can be illustrated through the assertion that early in 2002, about 4 400 whites owned 32% of Zimbabwe's farmland (News.bbc/1/zi/world/Africa/594522.stm, 8 August 2002:1). However, although the latest land distribution figures are not available, one should hasten to say that the rather irrational land redistribution policies introduced in 2000 by the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) have changed the land ownership outlook. These are irrational in the sense that most white farmers have been evicted from their land and replaced by black farmers. The eviction process has not been constitutional to say the least. It has violated individual rights, particularly the right to own property and to be protected by the law and the state.

The duality of Zimbabwe's structure is also evident in both the urban and rural areas. For example, no whites are found in the formerly black townships throughout the country. It is only in the former white suburbs that one can find affluent blacks. In the rural areas, blacks are classified as Small Scale Communal Farmers (SCCFs). These are relatively backward and impoverished. They live in communal areas that constitute 41,8% of the total land area. However, 75% of this land is located in the worst regions with low and erratic rainfall, poor soils and poor grazing land (Chipika, 1998:7). This means that most of this land is generally incapable of sustaining meaningful cattle and crop farming. On the other hand, white farmers are located in what are referred to as Large Scale Commercial Farms (LSCFs). These make up 35,2% of the total land area. However, these LSCFs cover about 66% of the best agricultural land. While each white farmer owns about 3 000 hectares of fertile land on a free hold tenure, the average size of a communal farm is 3 hectares, excluding grazing land (Rukuni and Eicher, 1994:3). It is also significant to note that communal land is owned by the state and cannot be bought or sold. There are also what are

referred to as Resettlement Areas (RAs), which occupy about 7,9% of the land and which are allocated to about 60 000 blacks on a state permit tenure system, where each family owns about 12 hectares of land (Chipika, 1998:12). If anything, all these figures help to depict the unequal resource distribution that exists in Zimbabwe, the poverty that exists in rural areas and consequently, the type of person found in RDCs and the assistance he/she needs from the local authority, central government and the international community for him/her to develop.

Zimbabwe gained its independence on 20 April 1980, after a bitter-armed struggle lasting about 15 years (1965 – 1980). The liberation movements that were in the forefront of this struggle were the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Ndabaningi Sithole, and later Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Significant is that ZANU is a result of a splinter faction that defected from ZAPU in 1963. The fundamental reason for the split, it is argued, was on the modalities or processes for bringing about independence to Zimbabwe, and not the basic principle of liberating the country. While the splinter faction leaders favoured an outright war against the colonialists, the remaining part of ZAPU, led by Joshua Nkomo favoured a strategy of calculated diplomacy and negotiation. Interesting enough, a closer look at the parties after the split indicates the birth of ethnicity in Zimbabwe's politics. ZANU was mainly dominated by Shona ethnic groups while ZAPU although its leadership was mixed, had a Ndebele support base (Mandaza, 1987:31). This political dispensation managed to split blacks into two distinct ethnic groups that remained divided and antagonistic towards one another throughout the struggle and after independence. The split created a wound that is difficult to cure (Herbst, 1990:28). Even now, there are doses of both overt and covert tension between Shonas and Ndebeles. This is a reality no rational person can deny.

In 1975, ZANU and ZAPU formed the Patriotic Front. This was firstly an acknowledgement of the importance of both parties in the liberation equation and secondly, it was an attempt to have one voice when negotiating for funding from the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the international community. Thirdly, it was an attempt to join forces and subsequently unite the armies: the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), under ZAPU and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZNLA), under ZANU (Mandaza, 1987:31-33). Consequent to this, ZAPU changed its name to PF-ZAPU and ZANU became ZANU-PF. The Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) was formed to join the two armies. However, this development was short-lived as differences between the two parties still existed and each had a high degree of operational autonomy. ZANU-PF waged the liberation war from Mozambique while PF-ZAPU was based in Zambia.

The liberation struggle led to the Lancaster House Conference (LHC) in 1979. It was during this conference that a Transitional Constitution for the independence of Zimbabwe was drafted. Britain assumed its colonial master status and Lord Soames became the Governor of Zimbabwe replacing colonial Rhodesia's (Zimbabwe's name before independence) Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) leader Ian Douglas Smith, who had usurped the power to rule Zimbabwe from Britain in 1965. On 20 April 1980, the Zimbabwe flag was hoisted and the day declared Independence Day. Robert Gabriel Mugabe became the first Prime Minister and ZANU-PF, the ruling party, up to this day. The Constitution of Zimbabwe has since been amended to enable the Prime Minister to become the Executive President (Mandaza, 1987:34). Thus, President Robert Mugabe has continuously ruled Zimbabwe from 1980 to this day. It is significant to note that the locus of decision making in terms of policy formulation has not changed. Whatever changes government has put in place, are a result of ZANU-PF's initiative more than anything else.



In 1987, PF-ZAPU was incorporated into ZANU-PF under a Unity Accord signed to end the civil war that had engulfed Matebeleland between 1982 and 1987. Since then, a new ZANU-PF has emerged with political incumbents from both the Shona and Ndebele ethnic enclaves. Although this is the case, traces of ethnicity are heavily evident. Because of the deteriorating economic situation in Zimbabwe, a new political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) has since emerged to challenge ZANU-PF's rule. In the 2000 elections, this party won 59 of the contested 120 seats in the House of Parliament. Appointed parliamentarians from among traditional leaders and eight (8) governors (all appointed by the President) occupy the other 30 seats in the 150 seat unicameral legislature ([www.zimbabwesituation.com/results.html](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/results.html), 15 June 2001:1). The leader of the MDC party, Morgan Tsvangirai challenged Robert Mugabe for the Presidency of Zimbabwe in the 2002 elections. However, the former came second best. There are numerous accusations that ZANU-PF rigged these elections. However, these elections are not a subject of this study.

Just like other African countries, Zimbabwe's economy depends very much on the economies of developed countries. Problems in the latter are easily translated into African economies. In like manner, turmoil in one African country can easily affect the economies of neighbours. This is in line with what Chazan, Mortimer, Ravenhill and Rothchild (1992:232) call the principle of *complementarity* where the colonising countries wanted to have close economic relationships with African states with the principal objective of satisfying colonial needs. This relationship created 'an economic umbilical link' that was difficult to sever. Africa became excessively dependent on the metropolis and the economies of the former were fashioned on the lines of the colonizing countries.

Zimbabwe inherited a control oriented economic system. These controls were necessitated by international sanctions directed towards the Rhodesia Front Government of Ian Douglas Smith (1965 – 1980). When Smith cut 'the political umbilical link' with Britain through the UDI, Britain called for international

sanctions against its colony (Mandaza, 1987:105). This means that colonial Zimbabwe had to develop a home grown economic system that was expected to sustain its commercial, industrial, mining and farming sectors. It managed to do so with highly innovative import substitution initiatives geared towards weathering the storm of economic sanctions. The resilient Rhodesian economy was able to even supply neighbouring countries with tobacco, maize, fruits, beef, agriculture, mining implements and highly skilled human power. Its major trading partner was South Africa, a country that at that time was also facing economic sanctions (Herbst, 1990:35). One would have expected that since 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe would have built on this resilience and would have created a more vibrant economic giant in the region. True, the government did not nationalise private business. However, it came up with unique and incapacitating administrative and policy controls, particularly on prices, employment, and the transfer of funds to parent companies outside Zimbabwe. This, together with its socialist rhetoric and antagonism towards private enterprise, was a license for capital flight, disinvestment and economic decline.

More than half the whites (approximately 125 000) had left Zimbabwe by 1985. Most of them were skilled 'White Rhodesians', as whites are commonly called even now, in both the public and private sector (Herbst, 1990:223). Bureaucratic delays in approving foreign investment and the general policing attitude of the state, portrayed Zimbabwe as an unfriendly country, too risky in which to invest. These macro-economic policies marked the decline of Zimbabwe's economy, which was not helped by severe draughts in 1983, 1986, 1991 and 1992. Consequently, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) fell by 8% and agricultural output by 25%. The manufacturing output also fell because of a combined effect of agricultural input shortages, a drastic decline in domestic demand, shortages of water and electricity, and tight credit control policies (Leistener and Cornwell, 1996:128). Rural communities suffered the most as their farming potential was drastically reduced. Most of their livestock died, crops withered away, and consequently, they had no disposable incomes for food and other necessities like

paying school fees for their children, restocking and even paying RDC levies that would contribute to a local authority's development efforts.

As a consequence of the developments highlighted above, Zimbabwe's economic growth rate has been quite variable and volatile. In the early years (1980 – 1982), the economic growth rate reached double figures (Kadhani in Mandaza, 1987:107). However, a general decline can be noticed in the other years. During this time, the public sector deficit ballooned to unacceptable levels, as the new government tried to redress colonial imbalances by expanding its expenditure on social goods and services. On the budgetary side, the fiscal deficit remained unchecked. Inflation also rose to about 48% in the drought years particularly during 1991/1992. After that, it stabilized at about 20% but has since worsened particularly between 1997 and 2001. The expectations are that worse is still to come ([www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/zi.html), 15 June 2001:2).

In order to harness the economic downturn, a mammoth macro-economic programme, popularly known as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), was introduced in 1991. Its broad aim was to create incentives for private investment in manufacturing, reduce government deficit, encourage exports, allow free market forces to determine efficient resource allocation in the economy and hence, generate economic growth and employment (Chipika, 1998:8). ESAP was based on four key components:

1. Trade liberalization: This involved moving away from a regulated socialist type economy to a free market economy, driven by the need to encourage foreign investment and expand the economic base of the country. This led to currency devaluation, expansion of the Open General Import License (OGIL) and several tariff reforms.
2. Budget policy/Fiscal Deficit Reduction: The major focus here was on reducing the fiscal deficit to less than 5% of GDP by 1995, as well as

increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the public service. This led to the minimisation of subsidies, reforming parastatals to enhance their viability, cost effectiveness measures in education and health, and reducing the size of the public service.

3. Domestic deregulation/monetary and interest rate policy: The focus was on shifting from direct controls to market based monetary and interest rate policy instruments. The need to mobilise savings and reduce inflation was articulated under this component. This led to the removal of price and wage controls as well as consumer subsidies. This was supposed to lead to more competition and allow enterprises to react to market forces rather than control oriented economic parameters of government.
4. The Social Dimension of Adjustment/The Social Development Fund: This was to help vulnerable groups like women, children, and the unemployed and retrenched workers (Chipika, 1998:8).

Chipika (1998:9) vividly summarises fiscal and monetary outcomes of the ESAP effort as follows:

The broad outcome of ESAP was macro-economic instability characterised by high government budget deficits which remained at around 10% of GDP and were largely domestically financed. This increased the demand for loanable funds, thus pushing interest rates up. This, together with a tight monetary policy, pushed interest rates to unbearable levels of 40% - 48% from 1992 to 1994, rising from 13% in the 1980s ...high interest rates have crowded out private investment and suppressed economic growth and employment creation.

Apart from these weaknesses, ESAP led to the devaluation of the Zimbabwe Dollar and left it weak and vulnerable. While it was Z\$ 0.40/US\$1 in 1980, it fell to Z\$9.31/US\$1 in 1995; Z\$19.00/US\$1 in 1998; and Z\$40.00/US\$1 in 2000. Because of a lack of foreign reserves, people resort to the black market where the rate in 2002 is approximately Z\$250/US\$1. The signs are that worse is still to

come as the economy is getting worse and the country finds it difficult to service foreign debt. Even unemployment has grown to unacceptable proportions. In 2001, it was estimated at 55% ([www.odci.gov/cia/publication/factbook/zi.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publication/factbook/zi.html), 15 June 2001:2).

Zimbabwe inherited a society polarised along racial boundaries, just like any other typical African state emerging from colonialism. It can be found that Europeans are at the top level commanding the large industries, major mercantile concerns and plantation farming. At the second or middle level are Asians particularly those of Indian origin. These control medium level industrial wholesales as well as larger retail outlets. At the bottom level are Africans. Most of these are engaged in peasant farming, petty trading and the provision of cheap labour services. However, these are not watertight categories, as occasionally there are some overlaps. Significant, however, is the fact that these divisions were left to continue unabated even after Zimbabwe became a sovereign state. Despite the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) calling for economic justice between races, the colonial legacy has grown unabated. Most of the people affected by this economic disparity are those found in rural areas. The existing system has marginalised the rural people further and created an army of poor Zimbabweans who are barely surviving (Jayne, Chisvo and Rukuni in Rukuni and Eicher, 1994:301).

Land ownership has remained skewed, despite promises of redistribution. The mal-distribution is not only in favour of whites, but an emerging black elite who are being allocated land that is confiscated from white commercial farmers. This has led to heated demands for redress by both peasant farmers and whites that have lost their land. The international community has also entered the fray accusing the GOZ of naked violence, failure to safeguard the property of the minority races, abuse of human rights and corruption.

Despite the high levels of poverty that are rising daily, special mention should be made of the fact that the GOZ has managed to broaden education and health services, two significant social services. Primary and secondary education enrolment has grown manifold from 74 012 in 1980 to 670 615 in 1989. In 1992, about 61 500 students were attending institutions of higher learning (Leistener and Cornwell, 1996:125). Because of educational expansion, the literacy rate in 2001 was estimated at 90% ([www:nationmaster.com/country/zi/people](http://www.nationmaster.com/country/zi/people), 15 June 2001:1).

Through its elaborate health policies, the GOZ managed to raise the life expectancy of the population from 45 years in 1980 to 53 years in 1993 (Leistener and Cornwell, 1996:126). Infant mortality was reduced from 100/1 000 live births in 1980 to 67/1 000 births in 1993. The HIV/AIDS scourge is now threatening these plausible contributions. In 1995, the Minister of Health and Child Welfare, Dr. Timothy Stamps indicated that 1 million people were HIV positive during that year and 90% of deaths between 0 – 5 years and 20 – 35 years were associated with this virus. Besides, there was a high exodus of medical doctors to neighbouring countries, Britain and the greater world. Of the 500 doctors trained since 1990, about 52 were still in the country in 1992. As a result, Zimbabwe finds itself relying on expatriate doctors, 89% operate in the rural areas (Leistener and Cornwell, 1996:126). Significant here is the fact that, apart from doctors, other highly trained personnel are leaving the country for what is popularly termed 'greener pastures' in South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, the United Kingdom and other countries. For example, informal conversation with academics at the University of Zimbabwe indicate that in 2001 the university was operating at 67% of its capacity meaning that at least a third of the academic posts are not filled each year. This has a negative effect on the quality of education.

The brief historical background of Zimbabwe reveals several points that are important for this study. These are outlined below.

1. Rural areas in Zimbabwe are characterised by poverty and social insecurity. This poses a challenge to RDCs who have to provide basic social services to local communities, stimulate confidence in the government and motivate locals to participate in self-help projects to obviate their desperate economic situation. Faced with these incapacitating historical facts, the RDC performance may be negatively affected, yet the success of these institutions is critical for community development.
2. Rural communities still face a shortage of land that is necessary for developing their agricultural prowess and enabling them to be self-sufficient. Without land, rural poverty is likely to prevail making the life of RDCs difficult in their bid to mobilize resources of a local nature from communities. This would inherently lead to poor performance.
3. The general decline of the economy indicates that a considerable level of economic and political mismanagement exists in Zimbabwe. This means that wrong economic policies are made and there may be laxity in implementing good economic policies. There may even be no political will to implement reforms that would improve the economic situation. The question is, is it not possible that these management anomalies may replicate themselves in RDCs leading to poor performance by these institutions?
4. The locus of decision-making in government revolves around the Chief Executive, the President and his deputies, Cabinet Ministers, and senior members of ZANU-PF. This means that decisions are made by 'political heavy weights'. The question is, is it not possible that 'RDC heavy weights' also make decisions without consulting the common person in the district? For, according to Paolo Freire (1982:33), 'to be is to be like'

meaning that, if dominating tendencies are characteristic of the political process at the centre, these would inevitably manifest themselves at the periphery. This would reduce democratic or popular participation and self-initiated development by communities in RDCs.

5. The downturn of the economy has reduced government spending both on a national and sub-national level. This means that RDCs can no longer receive a fair share of the national allocation of development funds, yet the deregulation of prices and labour on the other hand, have exposed rural communities to spiraling price hikes and retrenchment by unscrupulous traders and commercial farmers. This has inherently reduced the disposable incomes of rural communities who end up adopting unsustainable survival strategies. These include poaching, prostitution, relying on government food handouts, withdrawing girls from school, relying on traditional healers, as they cannot afford the cost of medicine, and even stealing from one another. What can be seen on a daily basis, are people gathered in growth points drinking the meager income that they have, to allow each day's misery to pass by with little notice. A desperate situation of survival indeed. It is these people who are represented by the RDCs. The question is, how do these institutions cope with these problems so as to maintain some modicum of social sanity and acceptable development levels? These questions among others make it imperative to gauge the performance of RDCs in Zimbabwe.

### **Rural local government brief**

As indicated above, the first of July 1993, witnessed a major policy transformation for rural local government in Zimbabwe. The date marked the birth of Rural District Councils (RDCs) as local institutions tasked with championing and coordinating peripheral (rural) development. It also marked the end of District Councils (DCs) and Rural Councils (RCs). These two institutions represented

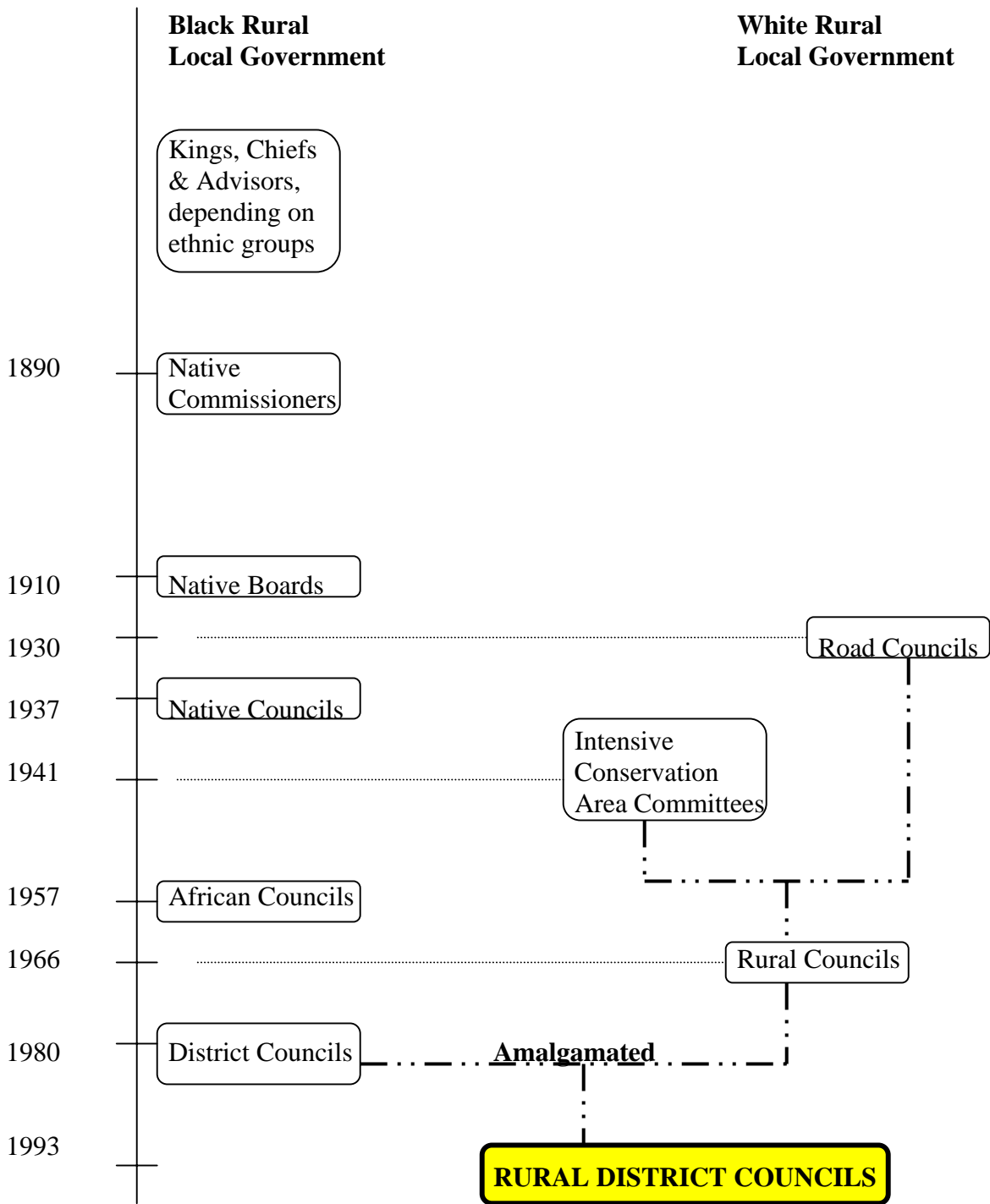


rural local government for blacks (communal land) and white areas (commercial farming lands), respectively, between 1980 and 1993. In fact, RDCs emerged under an amalgamation (bringing DCs and RCs together under one administration) policy that created a unified rural local government (RLG) structure in Zimbabwe (Roe, 1992:5).

Before this date (1 July 1993), rural development apartheid manifested itself. DCs and RCs reflected a two-pyramid policy framework that was characteristic of the *modus operandi* of colonial governance between 1890 and 1980. The colonial scenario was characterised by racial segregation policies. Africans were regarded as second-rate citizens in social, political and economic processes of the country. Several administrative instruments were put in place to regulate African activities and settlement patterns in a manner that was considered as non-threatening to the first-class citizens, the whites. Paramount among these pieces of legislation was the Land Apportionment Act of 1930. Through this Act, blacks were bunched onto the so-called Native Reserves that were characterised by unfavourable climatic and economic conditions. It is these areas that form the present communal areas (former DC land). They are still considered to be overly populated, overgrazed and incapable of sustaining the present rural populations. On the other hand, the rural white population was located in the sparsely populated and vast commercial farming areas (former RC land) bordering the communal areas (Herbst, 1990:181-182; and Rukuni and Eicher, 1994:18). Figure 1.1 on page 18, illustrates the racial separation that existed before amalgamation.

As can be seen from the illustration, the history of Zimbabwe's rural local government system is that of separate development. Each administrative district had two local authorities, one for blacks and the other for whites. It is interesting to note that this colonial set up prevailed for thirteen years after Zimbabwe's independence – 1980 up to 1993. The reasons for this are many and they include the following:

**Figure 1.1 Black and White Rural Local Government in Zimbabwe, 1890 – 1993**



**Source:** Social Change, No. 37 of 1995:13. From separation to amalgamation

Firstly, this period was part of the transitional phase of Zimbabwe's independence. The Lancaster House Constitution of 1980 that was independent Zimbabwe's first Constitution, provided for a ten year transitional phase in which minimal change was to be effected on certain racially based structures to enable citizens, particularly whites, to cope with change processes that were to be effected. It was to facilitate a smooth change for them.

Secondly, the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led government, adopted a reconciliation policy as a fundamental philosophical guide for its development strategy. This policy advocated for a smooth transition of socio-economic and governmental institutions to reflect the accommodative nature of government as well as to assure the white community that it had a role to play in the development of Zimbabwe. In fact, these whites are indeed Zimbabweans and need to be treated as such, that is, with respect and dignity and thus, to be appropriately mobilized for development purposes not as appendages of the political system, but as an integral part of the whole.

Thirdly, the delay allowed the ZANU-PF government to perfect its rural local government policy and put in place what it considered to be the necessary operational mechanisms that would minimize the chances of failure at the policy implementation stage. As an example, the Rural District Councils Act of 1988 was adopted during that year but was only implemented fully on 1 July 1993. This delay was a rational exercise free to a certain extent, of rash politically inspired decisions that normally have the effect of backfiring at implementation.

The new rural local government dispensation was born out of this brief historical background. It was born out of a system with racial overtones; a system that was unacceptable for an integrated holistic rural development strategy, as it divided districts into two authorities governed by separate policy instruments, that is, policies that led to different development trends in terms of population density,

land utilisation tendencies, the provision of resources, particularly those of a financial nature, and the provision of services to the local communities. At independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) was conscious of the fact that rural local authorities were difficult to coordinate and control. Thus, discussions about changing the dual system were, in fact, part of the rural local government agenda since 1980 (Msika, 1993:2).

The amalgamation policy marked a positive step, particularly towards undoing the effects of colonialism and developing and strengthening rural local governance in Zimbabwe. The policy, therefore, should not be viewed as a basic decentralisation initiative but as one that deals with the transformation of Zimbabwe's rural local government system. The policy sought to re-orient Zimbabwe's rural institutions, unite rural blacks and their white counterparts, bridge the racial gap and usher in a new era of harmony and social coherence in a bid to propel the nation to greater heights of sustainable socio-economic prosperity in the new millennium. Thus, the reasons for amalgamation can be discussed within four analytical strands: the political, social, economic and administrative imperatives.

- **The Political Imperative for Amalgamation**

1. One of the reasons for this imperative is to bring to an end the racially based two-pyramid policy of rural development. This policy (two-pyramid policy) thrust favoured white communities at the expense of blacks in the allocation of resources. Amalgamation brings to an end institutionalised legacies of colonialism and provides a springboard for an equitable distribution and redistribution of resources. It also sets in place the trickle down effect where all the communities in a given place can share the advantages of the former RCs. This argument stems from the realisation that unfair land distribution, unfair labour practices and unfair allocation of resources during the colonial era gave whites an unfair advantage

over their black counterparts. Now that they are one, both peoples should share advantages and disadvantages that accrue in each local area (Roe, 1992:15-18).

2. Another reason is to develop a political culture of unity among blacks and whites and to create conditions for them to be partners in development. Political culture entails the collective political attitudes of a population, their views and orientations towards the body politic in general and towards specific political events, symbols, and activities. It is part of the more general culture of society and as such is deeply affected by it, and its orientations are implicit, conscious, and often taken for granted and treated as a priori. It expresses itself in the daily activities and thoughts of a given community. Political culture is a shared and society-wide framework for political orientation and encompasses the society in its entirety. It is the manifestation in aggregate form, of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics. It has the same effect on political behavior that the general culture has on social behavior; it shapes and provides guidelines not only for political values and orientations but also for patterns of mass political behavior (Blondel, 1995:18; and Du Toit and Nel, 1996:176-179).

It can be seen from the preceding explication that political culture is about socialisation and as such, it is hoped that bringing blacks and whites under one institution of self-governance would have the effect of socialising these peoples in a culture of tolerance of each other, a situation that is desirable for transformation, reconciliation, democracy and mutual coexistence.

3. A third reason for this imperative is to strengthen local government institutions, while at the same time, reducing state interference in local affairs. This allows local authorities to take charge of local affairs with

minimal state interference, a position that enhances democracy, local participation and self-determination. The state should come in as a partner in development, and in most cases, it should enter the development fray only through the invitation of these local institutions. This political imperative is fundamental to this study. It is about recognising the abilities of local communities for self-determination, creating local decision making confidence in the local people and rendering local government institutions acceptable by the communities of concern. It builds credibility for these institutions and the enabling instruments thereof, and is in fact, a recipe for good governance. Besides, the rationalisation of the responsibilities of the centre and local government has the effect of improving accountability and institutional performance (Nkomo, 1993:3).

- **The Social Imperative for Amalgamation**

The social imperative for amalgamation expresses sentiments of service provision. The rationality of social considerations is that rural local government institutions should be well placed to provide both pure and impure public goods of a local nature. Thus, the GOZ saw it fit to create unified local institutions in order to improve their service provision outlook in line with the needs of the local people. The GOZ sought to create machinery that would be effective and efficient in customer service provision (Roe, 1992: 10; Mhlanga, 1993:10-11). An analysis of Roe and Mhlanga's articles indicates that the objectives of the social imperative can be enumerated as follows:

1. The first objective of the social imperative is to rationalise resource allocation for the provision of essential services, such as water, health, education, roads and sanitary facilities. The thrust here was on achieving equity in resource provision within one district.

2. A second objective is to enhance quality service provision within the public sector and for all rural communities. The understanding here is that service provision will never be qualitative where discrimination exists. Such discrimination necessarily provides a skewed service provision framework that is bound to favour one group over the other. An amalgamated system is likely to consider, in a rational manner, what the people want and proceed to develop well-conceived processes geared at responsiveness, and the timely provision of the required goods and services. The thrust of this objective is on acknowledging local communities as active, rational and politically conscious customers rather than passive recipients of public services.

The issue here is that amalgamation was expected to reform the system of local governance and entrench efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability within the system. Local authorities should take a leading role in promoting locality welfare within those functions provided for by the enabling Act, including any other activities it considers necessary for societal gain. Local authorities should be involved in and be concerned with all aspects of community life, not just those areas of responsibility allocated to them by Parliament, but also the right to undertake any activities which they feel to be in the interests of their citizens, unless such activities are actually forbidden or assigned to other bodies (Reddy, 1996:23). In fact, the argument is that local authorities look after their citizens from the cradle to the grave. They register births, deaths, and if necessary, any intervening marriages, and then, finally play a role in funerals or cremations.

- **The Economic Imperative for Amalgamation**

The economic imperative for amalgamation advances the notion that economic development is a vehicle for self-sufficiency, independence and

growth. It is concerned with the promotion of efficiency in local resource mobilisation and carrying out council activities. It emphasizes self-sufficiency and innovativeness. It acknowledges the existence of competitive advantage in any social setting and the need to be guided by value for money considerations in undertaking local authority activities (Reddy, 1996:23-24).

Below are the objectives of amalgamation within this framework:

1. The first objective is to minimise the dependence of local authorities on central government funding. This scenario has the advantage of enhancing local authority responsibility and ensuring economic self-sustenance through local economic growth (Roe, 1992:3).
2. Another objective is to promote locally initiated development that takes into cognisance the needs of the district and its peoples. The new RDCs have been given the functions of overseeing peripheral development in that they can formulate short and long-term development policies, monitor their implementation and rationalise funding for different projects, which they are implementing. In order to facilitate such developmental initiatives, RDCs have been empowered to develop land for residential, commercial and industrial purposes, to construct buildings and sell or let these according to their needs (Makumbe in Reddy, 2000:286).

- **The Administrative Imperative for Amalgamation**

1. One of the aims of this imperative is to empower local authorities and provide them with the capacity to influence, organise and shape the destiny of local communities. This is because councillors and the administrative arm of these councils are better placed to articulate local issues and to provide local service more quickly than central government. Thus, local authorities should have their local capacities



developed so as to respond rationally to the wishes of the people and be able, at the same time, to administer and manage local resources efficiently (Roe, 1992:15-17).

2. Another aim of this imperative is to enhance the capacity of managers to plan and lead organisations. The capacity of managers and their ability to lead organisations are crucial elements for local authority viability. Local authority managers should be innovative and entrepreneurial; be capable of driving organisational change and development; and be in a position to rationalise resource utilisation in order to maximise social gain. Local authorities should act as catalysts for planning, promoting and coordinating peripheral development (Msika, 1993:1). For example, it is through management capacity that they can be able to develop Growth Points, Rural District Service Centres and Business Centres. Local authorities should be allowed to control local resources as they are better placed to respond to the changing needs of the local people.

The new RDCs are charged with the responsibility of leading, directing and coordinating development in the rural areas. In carrying out their responsibilities in rural areas, all key actors should, as a matter of priority, exploit the potential of these RDCs. A strong partnership should be created between these institutions and all other organizations, be they government departments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and private sector organisations that have businesses in each locality. The Minister of Local Government and National Housing (MOLGANH) buttresses this viewpoint by saying that:

Ministries and other development agencies should acknowledge that given adequate resources and capacities, Rural District Councils have the mandate to do all those things that they are required to do in terms of the provisions of the first schedule of the Rural District Councils Act No. 8 of 1988. Ministries will be expected to formulate the basic policy framework and should only

come in where collaboration is needed between Central Government and the Local Authority concerned. As a matter of policy, Central Government should only come in (sic) where a local authority has no resources and capacity and has thus indicated a need for assistance (Msika, 1993:7).

This is a fundamental policy statement that outlines the extent of the autonomy, which local authorities should have. It also indicates government's interest in improving the functional capacity of these authorities so that they can meaningfully participate in local development processes. This statement comes after a rational consideration of past experiences where rural local government, particularly DCs, relied heavily on government financial assistance. This scenario, among others, contributed to the lackadaisic performance of these institutions and killed their innovative and entrepreneurial spirit. Within this light, the Minister adds that:

Ministries should redefine and establish appropriate functional relationships with the Rural District Councils ... success or failure of Local Government is measured by the impact it has upon the lives of the ordinary people. If decentralisation results in the over concentration of power and responsibility in a Local Government, but fails to improve the quality of life of the people, then our Local Government system will have failed. Local Government is not so much sharing of the political spoils of independence; it is the sharing of functions and responsibilities to make life happier for the majority of our people. Central government will thus retain the interest and accountability for the type of life that the people feel at the local level (Msika, 1993:7).

The Ministerial positions outlined here reflect government policy on how local authorities should be viewed in Zimbabwe. It is important then, to check if RDCs are performing according to policy provisions and whether they are achieving the goals for which they were established. This deliberate evaluative undertaking has not been done in Zimbabwe, yet it forms the basis for determining whether or not these institutions operate for the benefit of local communities.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Since Rural District Councils were established in 1993, there has not been a coherent study to determine the performance and capacity of these entities to meet their institutional obligations. Whatever evaluations can be found are piecemeal and tend to concentrate on a few services that these councils provide. Their basic aim is to serve as advocative instruments for NGO entry into specific local government areas for development purposes. As such, they lack a lucid theoretical focus. This is particularly so in the Beitbridge Rural District Council. There is no documentary evidence that studies to determine the performance of the BRDC have been ever carried out. Whatever investigations there were, into the performance of the RDC, have been in the form of complaints by communities and council deliberations where councilors came up with mixed reactions to the performance of the district council, particularly regarding the manner in which council handles its finances and the quality of services it provides. Central government, through its parent ministry, the Ministry of Local Government and Housing has also indicated displeasure with the manner in which the BRDC conducts its affairs. Adverse media reports have noted this and have portrayed council management as incompetent and not qualified to manage the local authority. An analysis of these complaints indicates that most of them focus on the relationship between council communities, the quality of services that the council provides and the manner in which council managers conduct their duties.

A preliminary survey, through observation, indicated that these complaints were justifiable as the researcher could observe a prevalence of litter throughout urban Beitbridge. Residents sometimes go without water and sewerage systems are frequently out of order. While this happens, there is no attempt by council to hold meetings with the community to explain these issues and the high propensity of their manifestation. Thus, these observations indicated that a systematic and

scientific study was essential to determine the magnitude of the problem and to determine what capacity building manoeuvres are needed to rectify the situation.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Given the nature of the problem identified above, the purpose of this study is to:

1. Critically examine the performance of the Beitbridge Rural District Council, focusing on:
  - a) its ability to institute democratic participation in the district;
  - b) its ability to provide quality services to communities; and
  - c) the ability of council management to manage the affairs of the local authority.
2. Synthesize the various findings of the study with a view to making policy recommendations that can be used to enhance the performance of the BRDC.
3. Employ Allison's Rational Actor Model to act as a guiding philosophy as well as both, a descriptive and normative tool for understanding current RDC dynamics and how these can be redirected or transformed to enhance the performance of the BRDC and other rural local government institutions in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

Perhaps a justification of the choices of these objectives needs to be made in order to clarify the substance and focus of this study. Firstly, in order to examine the performance of the BRDC, the study first provides a review of Zimbabwe's local government system and its performance from the colonial times until its amalgamation on July 1, 1993. It then focuses on the operations of the BRDC in the background of the enabling act, the RDC Act No. 8 of 1988. It also looks at

the actual performance of the BRDC in terms of its objectives and how these have impacted on local communities. The focus here is on efficiency, effectiveness, adequacy, equity and responsiveness considerations. These criteria are considered within three distinct variables: popular participation; service provision; and managerial capacity. Incapacitating factors are also analysed in order to determine how these can be corrected so as to create institutional capacity.

As indicated above, the RDCs are responsible for discharging duties of a socio-economic, environmental and political nature within their areas of jurisdiction. The duties include those of developing and managing local infrastructure such as roads, water, health and educational facilities; planning and coordinating rural development in the district; mobilizing both human and natural resources within the district; discouraging any activities that may lead to land degradation; securing wild life; and ensuring local participation in developmental endeavors and civic duties. These responsibilities allow the RDCs to forge a developmental alliance with the local communities, not as subordinate participants but active actors in the whole process of policy formulation and implementation. Such responsibilities and duties, because of their nature and diversity, cannot be performed without problems. Problems can be such as those of a financial nature; a weak local base in terms of the nature of the community and both the physical and social environment; a demotivated and intransigent bureaucracy; an incompetent bureaucracy because of poor training and inappropriate skills; interference in council affairs by central government and its functionaries; an incompetent council; weak definitions of lateral and vertical linkages; an uncooperative community; and general resource wastage and corrupt tendencies within council. It is the purpose of this study to explore this wide range of issues to establish the extent to which they limit the RDC operations and performance. It is from the framework of these problems that capacity building measures can be mooted.

The second objective concerns the best way forward for rural local governance in Zimbabwe in the context of the arguments and the strengths and weaknesses of the current rural local governance system. Every study endeavors to make recommendations for the future. This enhances the utility of the study as well as giving it meaning as a vehicle for change and development. This is a rational and utilitarian position with which this study wishes to associate itself. It is hoped that the utility of the study will not be limited to the BRDC and Zimbabwe only, but that it will be useful to a wide range of countries engaged in rural local government transformation, particularly in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).

The third objective provides a philosophical and analytical framework for the study. Allison's Rational Actor Model is selected as the philosophical and analytical tool of this study. Allison's rational actor model is a product of rational policy philosophy. The use of a policy philosophy in analysing and gauging the impact of a policy is seen as an important scholarly approach that relates actions to a particular mindset. The issue here is that, as public sector institutions make decisions about various courses of action they want to follow, they do not do so in a haphazard fashion. They follow certain beliefs and values that form a philosophical base for their actions. These values help these institutions to undertake action that they consider to be appropriate for a particular situation. Thus, for the BRDC to come up with good action, it has to discard certain actions that it considers bad. The 'good-bad' approach is an acknowledged value laden guide to rational human action.

Any policy philosophy should be understood within the framework of values such as political, traditional, professional, organisational and policy values. The values held by decision makers affect the political culture of society and direct society to a particular set of political developments that in turn, fundamentally affects the actions of decision makers. Once established and a particular life style is associated with such values, the actions of the political, legal and administrative

systems will be designed in accordance with such values and consequently, the whole governmental system acts within these limits (Bozeman, 1979:60). The notion of policy philosophy is important in this study as it helps the exploration within an acknowledged theoretical framework, the value premise of policy action, the predispositions of policy actors to these values and the influences therein that make them respond in a certain manner when confronted by policy options. It (policy philosophy) expresses a set of values that institutions consider important in setting out their priorities and in determining their actions. It expresses a decision frame and a means to achieving a desirable state of governance within considerations of the objective realities of a particular society.

Several policy philosophies can be enumerated such as rationalism, protectorism, brokerism, pragmatism, transferalism and egoism (Bozeman, 1979:62). It should be noted that different scholars, an examination of which falls beyond the scope of this study, label these differently. However, of importance are the substance and the philosophical roots of each policy philosophy that underscores its difference from the other.

### **The Rational Actor Model**

According to Bozeman (1979:63), 'rationalism is rooted in a faith in man's reason and the assumption that problems of governance are amenable to reasonable solution through scientific analysis, logic and systematic inquiry. The prototypical rationalist administrator is the management scientist.' The underlining premise of rationalism is that world phenomena, though complex can be solved by employing well calculated, reasonable, objective and logical arguments to unravel these complex phenomena and to provide answers that can lead to societal change and development. Rationalism employs the politics of reason to determine courses of action that should be followed for the amelioration of problems. It has its philosophical base in philosophers such as Aristotle, Locke, Berkely, Hume, Bacon and Weber. Fundamental to this philosophy is that a

public institution should input proper procedures and values of designing and planning what it wants to do. Thus, to be reasonable, both its political and administrative dynamics must be properly reasoned out, planned, designed and implemented accordingly. For public officials to engage in planning and designing they should portray a scientific mind in their approach to governance. The argument here is that decision-making is only plausible if it contains a scientific analysis of issues. This means that decisions on what courses of action to undertake should only be made after a proper weighing of the pros and cons of several decision options. It is only after this cost/benefit analysis exercise that a particular option can be undertaken. Preferably, the selected option ought to be that option that maximizes value within given national and institutional constraints (Bacon's sentiments in his *Novum Organum* – 1620 are echoed here). In Zimbabwe, the need for a new rural local government policy led to the establishment of a Forum for Rural Development. This consultative forum necessarily means that the policy went through several stages of policy option weighing. For example, government could have elected to have each authority go its way with increased capacity building for the black rural local government institutions, or it could have decided to nationalise white farms and create cooperatives to run these farms, thereby completely doing away with the apartheid face that still manifests itself in these rural areas, despite amalgamation. However, all these options were discarded in favour of amalgamation as it, presumably, brought socio-economic gains as well as political advantages for the government, since the amalgamation option takes into consideration the interests of both racial groups (Nkomo, 1993:6-7).

Public Administration should be considered as a science. As such, public administrators should be trained in liberal sciences such as decision-making techniques, quantitative management analysis and statistics. This should be done in order to improve their sense of reason. Thus, while the morality or value premise of political decisions is appreciated, emphasis should be on the quantitative thrust of decision-making, so that where appropriate, quantitative



advantages can be considered together with other moral/value laden considerations for a particular course of action. This approach has the tendency to sharpen the decision-making skills of administrators who should always be broad minded about issues in order to see different ways of solving societal problems. The rationale for this approach is that decisions made are likely to be based on an intendedly reasonable analysis of all these issues.

Reasonableness, logic, systematic thinking and the proper evaluation of the pros and cons of an action, are activities that are consistent with serious and business-minded officials whose interest is to fulfill the public interest. These actions have the advantage of avoiding half-baked decisions that are only remedial in nature. The issue here is that as public administrators respond to the policy frameworks of elected officials, they are actually responding to the public interest. It is therefore, important that they should make rational decisions and implement them in an efficient manner to avoid wasting the scarce public resources. Thus, making sound policy decisions should be complemented by sound procedural decisions to put a rational policy into operation. These sentiments are aptly summed up by Schubert in Bozeman (1979:64). The author indicates that in rationalism:

Government decision making [should] become a value neutral technical process with the authority of expertise. Their [public officials] job is to translate into specific rules of action the public policy goals already determined by the decision of the people ... Human discretion is minimised or eliminated [where possible] by defining it out of the decision situation.

The proliferation of centres for policy studies, offices of management and budgeting, institutions of development studies and departments of economic planning and management, the world over, is an acknowledgment of the utility of rationalism. The belief is that proper planning and designing are the keys to successful management of development and all economic affairs of a state. Thus, rationalism is fundamental in all policy actions. However, it must be clarified that the argument is not that all rational actions are implemented

accordingly. It is only to say that, at least before implementing any action, one has to determine what is best for a given situation. Such a process obviously does not dismiss rationality, instead it highlights that circumstantial rationality can be allowed to take centre stage where what is considered as best cannot be implemented.

Zimbabwe's rural local government system from the colonial times can be used as an example where two different systems of rural local government were put in place in a single country with different ministries being assigned the task of overseeing the development of these institutions. This emphasizes the point that the colonial masters knew very well about the best way to manage local affairs, but chose a control oriented system for black rural local governance and a liberal utilitarian system for the whites. This was done to extend government's control to the blacks in order to subordinate and subjugate them. This was consistent with their desire to promote values of their oppressive colonial system (Makumbe in Reddy, 2000:277). This does not mean that they did not know the best way, but that circumstances dominated by values of white supremacy took centre stage in determining the way forward for rural local governance within the colonial framework.

As indicated at the beginning, the rationalist premise has confidence in human beings. It asserts that human beings have been endowed with the power of reason. Besides, human beings are basically good and considerate. In order to relate to others, they do so through reason. The reasonableness of human beings actually inspires humans in their daily endeavors. It is through the belief in human reason that societies entrust issues of governance to a selected group of governors. They expect this group to use reason in planning and designing governance courses of action. Societies retain the right to change those who govern if they feel that the governors no longer carry out their tasks appropriately. Thus, in their selection process societies use reason when they select and change each group of governors. At least, in an ideal situation where

societies have the knowledge, political capacity and information about governance issues such rationality is expected to prevail in its best form. Bozeman (1979:66) sums up these sentiments by stating that:

... the policy philosophy of rationalism has been influential in policy making because it inspires confidence. It says that though the world may be complex and its problems of great magnitude, social, economic and political problems may be understood and perhaps solved ... The human condition is not irremediable, policy options need not inevitably entail conflict and power politics; and by resorting to reason we may find that the best way (or at least a close approximation). Thus unlike several policy philosophies, rationalism encourages government by design – planning, social engineering and intervention.

The rationalist philosophy explains the rational actor paradigm, which guides Allison's Rational Actor Model. By paradigm is meant a systematic statement of the basic assumptions, concepts and propositions employed by a school of analysis (Merton in Allison, 1971:28). It is an outlook or analytical view of the world using a set of analytical view points that express one's view of the world in so far as a particular phenomenon is concerned. The Rational Actor Paradigm by Allison, in line with the above definition includes several analytical factors such as basic units of analysis; organising concepts; the dominant inference patterns; and general and specific propositions (Allison, 1971:28). A systematic explanation of the paradigm follows below.

**Basic Unit of Analysis:** The paradigm takes government as a basic unit of analysis. Government's action is exemplified by the choice it has selected among competing alternatives and the operations therein. The term government here does not necessarily imply all institutions of government acting in unison, or for that matter, the actions of the management committee of government (Cabinet), but can refer to a few individuals in this committee or other government officials or even one member for that matter; or those sanctioned by government to make decisions on its behalf, such as commissions of inquiry. Of importance to the rational process, is to explain how government comes up with strategic solutions

to problems with which it is confronted. This is what is vital for this analysis in order to provide explanations and predictions for future actions, given the consequences or the outcomes of the selected policy strategy for the problem at hand. Allison (1971:28) emphasizes that the various actions of government can actually be packaged into a single actor, hence the rational actor model, implying as it were, action by one person.

In the RLG case in Zimbabwe, this approach indicates that central government and all who have been sanctioned by it to make decisions on the type of action to be implemented for rural local governance in Zimbabwe ought to be identified as a single governmental actor. The question is: Is the policy emanating from this actor consistent with the needs of the rural people? Is it sufficient to give rural local government institutions the power to champion the development of local communities or is it cocooned with central government self-preservation clauses that, in a subtle way, give this central actor overall decision-making powers?

**Organising Concepts:** These are the important elements on which an analyst focuses within the parameters of governmental action. These elements highlight the actual actor, the problem he/she wishes to solve, and the processes of rational action. The actor proceeds within the confines of the goals articulated, in line with what he/she wants to achieve by solving the problem. He/she considers the options open to him/her and the consequences of each of the alternatives. In fact, the organising concepts he/she uses to articulate his/her course of action express the actor's rational action. Thus, rational action is indeed, the rational actor model. It outlines the goals that have to be achieved; the options or policy alternatives open to the decision maker; consideration for the consequences of each action; and the choice that the actor finally makes, among the many competing options.

**Dominant Inference Patterns:** This explains the importance of the action in terms of it being a maximizer of values, a satisfying undertaking or just a stopgap

measure that is temporary and would as a result, call for in-depth considerations of the problem and the action that should follow later.

**General Propositions:** This is the process by which the rational actor gathers information to justify the objectives, actions and their consequences.

Explanations of rationalism and the rational actor paradigm highlight the basis of Allison's Rational Actor model. Thus, the model is contained within the rational actor paradigm and it is explained in the organising concepts of this paradigm, as indicated above. This model seeks to explain why government chooses a particular course of action, among others, in order to accomplish its goals. For example, given the historical condition of racially based separate rural local governance in Zimbabwe, and the disparities in resource bases of both the former RCs and DCs, one may ask the question: Why did government choose to amalgamate the two rural local government institutions? Why did government come up with this choice among other contending alternatives? These can be followed by the question: Is the selected course of action achieving the goals for which it was designed? Thus, the explications that follow in answering these questions can be found by gauging the performance of these institutions.

The centrality of the Rational Actor Model as in rationalism is that human behavior is purposive, well calculated and planned. It is goal oriented and thus, intendedly rational. The Rational Actor Model is a rigorous model of goal directed action emanating from well-constructed and well thought out decisions that follow proper human reasoning. Allison (1971:28-29) gives a vivid description of the model by indicating that:

The model's rigour stems from its assumption that action constitutes more than simple purposive choice of a unitary agent. What rationality adds to the concept of purpose is consistency: consistency among goals and objectives relative to a particular action; consistency in the application of principles in order to select the optimal alternative ... the rigorous model of rational action maintains that rational choice consists of value maximising

adaptation within the context of a given pay off function, fixed alternatives and consequences that are known in one of the three senses corresponding with certainty, risk, and uncertainty.

Allison (1971:29-30) further indicates that the model highlights a number of principles as important in guiding choice and action. These are listed below.

**Goals and objectives:** These are the favoured or preferred consequences of action. The rational actor looks at action in so far as it has some utility or pay off measured in terms of its ability to meet these preferred consequences. For example, in coming up with a decision to amalgamate RCs and DCs, GOZ is expected to have measured its benefits as indicated by preferred consequences of action. Increased benefits are to be expected; as more than what used to be the case under the separate rural local authority system (RCs and DCs respectively).

**Alternatives:** Alternatives define the range of optional courses of action that can be undertaken in order to attain the set goals and objectives. The point here is that the rational actor is confronted with several policy options (alternatives) that can be undertaken to remedy a given situation. He/she has to have ample knowledge of this situation. Armed with such a realisation, he/she should articulate these policy alternatives in an explicit and precise manner in order to differentiate one from another, for the purpose of analysing them further in order to gauge their viability.

**Consequences:** The tabling of the alternatives is followed by a clear and precise exposition of the outcomes of each alternative. Both socio-economic and political costs and benefits of each alternative explicitly identified. The assumptions here are that the rational actor can proceed identify these costs and benefits in an accurate manner and that he/she is capable of generating information on each of the consequences or outcomes emanating from each of the alternatives.

**Choice:** Following the weighing of the consequences and benefits of each of the alternatives, a rational choice is made. This choice is simply that of the alternative with the highest net benefit. It is that which maximises the rational actor's pay off function. The pay off function in this case should not be viewed entirely in financial terms but also in social and political terms where considerations for social and political acceptability of the course of action is weighed against the economic gains to establish its popularity and other spillover effects which are difficult to quantify.

### **In Defense of the Model**

To defend the rational actor model, one can start by defending rationalism from other policy philosophies such as protectorism, brokerism, pragmatism, transferalism and egoism. The rational actor model is a humanity-based model. It accepts the ability of human beings to govern themselves unlike in the case of protectorism, which has a pejorative view of human beings. Protectorism is based on the philosophies of philosophers such as Plato in the *Republic*, Thomas Hobbes in the *Leviathan* and Edward Banfield in *The Unheavenly City*. The fundamental philosophical thrust of protectorism is that human beings are, by nature, basically bad. They love conflict and creating problems for others and themselves. Their lives are embedded in chaos, violence, selfishness and suspicion. They have limited knowledge and thus, for mutual coexistence and harmony, they need strong government. Thus, government should act as a protector, protecting them from other human beings and themselves. In view of this, the chief actions of government should be to regulate the operations of human beings. This means that laws should be enforced to ensure compliance and where possible, ruthlessly, especially when rebellious attitudes are detected.

One can argue that in such in such a scenario, the politics of domination and constraint exists. Those with power determine policy action and expect society to comply. Thus, if such compliance were not obtained voluntarily, it would be made

possible by force, hence the concept quasi-compliance. Those in power set standards and procedures for doing things. Rule bound actions manifest themselves. All within a state act in accordance with the constraints set by those who govern. This philosophy exhibits dictatorial tendencies as it considers that those who govern possess the knowledge to do so and those who are governed should follow the designs of the governors, as such are intended to facilitate their livelihood. Colonial rural local government in Zimbabwe can be given as an example where black rural local government was placed under the Ministry of Internal Affairs rather than that of Local Government where its white counterpart belonged (Namusi, 1998:7). The local government system for blacks was monitored by a Native Commissioner. These government functionaries had power to determine the nature and content of local policy. Besides, they also determined who should represent the local people. They were not accountable to the people they administered. They maintained compliance in the locality with whatever means they saw necessary at the time. In fact, placing rural local governance under the Minister of Internal Affairs was designed to allow swift action by the ministry if any acts of subversion and non-compliance are detected in any locality. Since the ministry also controlled the state's coercive arm, the police, it was considered to be the rightful department to monitor African affairs, which needed maximum supervision and control (Namusi, 1998:8).

It can be argued that this is a rational move in so far as it allows those who govern, the chance to think of methods of effectively governing the "suspicious" human beings who need to feel the presence of government each time. The argument is sustainable in so far as this form of rationality can be given a qualifying epithet, such as 'protectorist rationality' since it is rational action only in so far as governing by suppressing others, is concerned. This type of rationality is unacceptable as it gives those who rule unlimited power over the ruled, a condition for authoritarian rule that is not responsive to societal demands and democratic principles.



The second policy philosophy that needs to be focused upon in defending rationalism is brokerism. This philosophy exhibits pluralist conceptions of governance and thus advances the notion of the politics of representation and involvement. The philosophical standpoint of brokerism accepts the diversity of society and the need by government to create a system of involving all the different groups of society in decision-making about governance. Government, in this instance, acts as a broker. It creates an atmosphere that enables different groups to interact bargain, persuade each other and make compromises about policy issues. Policy, in this case, is resultant of the varied policy inputs that are synthesized and weighed accordingly to produce what is best under the circumstances.

Sentiments by Schubert in Bozeman (1979:68) vividly emphasize the paramountcy of brokerism. The author indicates that:

The supreme virtue of any government is the multiplicity of points of access that it affords for the manifold conflicting interests ... in a pluralistic society. The function of government officials is to facilitate the continuous readjustment of conflicting interest...

In the same vein, Robert Dahl in Bozeman (1979:68) indicates that brokerism provides multiple power centers, which share power, with none in a position to dictate policy. Thus, in Dahl's contention, the existence of several loci of power:

will help... to tame power, to secure the consent of all, and to settle conflicts peacefully because: ... [if] one centre of power is set against another, power itself will be tamed ... while coercion will be reduced to a minimum. ... [when] even minorities are provided with opportunities to veto solutions they strongly object to, the consent of all will be won in the long run. ... constant negotiations among different centres of power are necessary in order to make decisions, [and in this way] citizens and leaders will perfect the precarious art of dealing peacefully with their conflicts ... not merely to the benefit of one position but to the mutual benefit of all the parties to a conflict.

While this philosophy, which is system based, is acknowledged to be central in good governance discourses, it does not receive centre stage in this study. The main reason for this is that group participation in policy making seems to suggest

that all groups have equal access to information and that they are adequately conscientised of the policy issues at hand. This is not normally the case in the practical world. Some groups are more advantaged than others in terms of information access and policy making literacy. As a result, group dynamics seems to promote the interests of the more powerful. Besides, it is difficult to carry out an appropriate group-balancing act that levels the policy field for every actor. Secondly, brokerism seems to have an inherent interest in conflict reduction. Such tendencies push the philosophy towards a regulatory approach to policy making which is a protectionist way of doing things and contrary to people empowerment especially, as policy power differs among groups. The end result is a situation where the powerful are protected from the weak a scenario that defeats the very fundamentals of the philosophy. If one wants to accord it a rationalist status, it can only qualify as brokerist rationality.

The introduction of District Councils in Zimbabwe sought to reform African Councils that existed just before Zimbabwe's independence (Jordan, 1984:11). Although District Councils were created to enhance mass participation and self-help initiatives in line with the government's socialist policies, those interest groups with power in the localities dominated local decision-making. This was despite the fact that structures for rural participation such as Village Development Committees (VIDCOs) and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs) were put in place. In certain cases, decisions of VIDCO and WADCO chairpersons always dominated the policy process although the local people in general, held different views. People's views were craftily subordinated to allow those with power to have their decisions accepted and converted into policy action. Besides, central government that provided funding for these institutions also dominated decision-making as it was interested in its programs and projects being implemented at the expense of those that the local decision makers had prioritised. Within this critique, it is acknowledged that there may be different settings for groups in which to participate in local affairs, but the questions ultimately are: Whose decisions prevail and what type of decisions are they? Are they decisions that

are a result of group dynamism, or do they reveal a skewed frame that is consistent with the different power centres of different action groups?

The rational actor model is also selected in the face of its major critics, that is, pragmatists. The works of James Dewey and Charles Lindblom are associated with this philosophy. The underlying principle of pragmatism is that in making policy, 'do everything that works.' Decisions should be made based on what has worked and any changes should be cognisant of this fact. Thus, pragmatism is incremental in nature and promotes incremental decision-making. Incremental decision-making has its benefits because the problems facing society are such, that they should be solved within the shortest time possible. Thus, policies have to be made quickly. Pragmatism likens policy makers to 'firefighters' who have to make decisions immediately. The assertions are that policy options cannot be pondered over a long time to search for the best way of doing things. It is a practical rather than a philosophical exercise and one has to be practical about its process. Anderson (1990:113) captures the thrust of incrementalism when he says that it is:

A decision theory that avoids many of the problems of the rational comprehensive theory [rationalism] and at the same time is more descriptive of the way in which public officials actually make decisions.

The assertion here, in line with pragmatist philosophy, is that incrementalism takes into cognizance what actually happens. Although it is normative in nature, it is based on reality. It is about what is observable in the real world of decision making. The basic characteristics of pragmatism are that:

- The decision maker, when confronted with a problem, attempts to define the problem within the realities of existing programmes and policies. He/she proceeds to select goals and actions within these parameters.
- The decision maker, who realises many limits affecting him/her, considers only those alternatives that vary marginally from the existing

course of action. This means that in his/her exploration of alternatives, he/she uses the existing courses of action as a basis for making decisions.

- The decision maker evaluates the alternatives, taking into consideration what he/she considers as important within a particular setting. In other words, he/she prioritises consequences and only attempts to know more of those that are considered crucial for goal attainment in a particular setting.
- A continuous process of defining and redefining the problem is undertaken, as more information becomes available and more unexpected consequences manifest themselves (Denhart, 1993:95-96).

The decision maker operates on the premise that there is no single right solution, but that a solution is adopted in so far as there is agreement by the various analysts that it can be adopted, within the limits in which the actors or organisations of concern are operating. Pragmatism or incrementalism offers a remedial frame of decision-making. It is geared more to the amelioration of present concrete social imperfections than to the promotion of future social goals. It is a 'something that will work' approach based on consent rather than on rigorous mathematical calculations. Further argument indicates that pragmatism is realistic and reduces a lot of risks and costs associated with undertaking courses of action that are revolutionary and with no relevance to what is already there. Besides, this decision frame accepts the limits of humans in terms of their intelligence, capacity to obtain all the necessary information, the time limits they face and the availability of resources that may limit other options that may be considered viable.

Major criticisms of this theory centre on its remedial nature. It is criticised as being a quick fix policy-making frame that shuns a rigorous analysis of issues to produce what can be considered best. This approach seems to exhibit a

conservative outlook, since what works is what has been tried and, therefore, there is no need to completely eradicate what was done before. Its lessons are that decision makers should, instead, build on what is already there. The approach seems to favour those who have been in power, as their decisions are likely to be perpetuated under such a decision-making system (Roux, Brynard, Botes and Fourie, 1997:139). As such, the approach is not suitable for Africa, a Continent that is emerging from colonialism. The challenge for African countries is to build a new political dispensation that is so far removed from the colonial framework that favoured a few whites because of the colour of their skin. The transformation policy for rural local government in Zimbabwe should be a complete departure from the dual system that existed. Secondly, it should be a complete departure from the unnecessary control of local institutions that was manifested during colonialism and during the transitional era. As such, pragmatism with its interest in preserving the past ceases to be a guiding light for the transformation process, since there is very little if any, acceptable past to be preserved. This policy philosophy undoubtedly, has elements of domination. It appears to reject innovation and creativity and have a preference for tradition.

Another interesting policy philosophy that rationalism, as adopted in this study, has to be defended against, is transferalism. Some scholars refer to it as a philosophy of the welfare state. It is a philosophy of taking from the 'haves' to give to the 'have nots' (Bozeman, 1979:70). Marx, Rousseau, Ricardo and Pigou are associated with this philosophy. This is essentially a redistributive philosophy. It acknowledges that poverty and deprivation are a result of the nature of society rather than of an inherent condition of the 'lazy' people who have no drive for success. Transferalism is mostly concerned with the ends. The central question here is: In the final analysis, have the poor benefited from governmental action? The problem with this as a philosophy of policy making stems from the fact that society is not, by nature, driven by the desire for equality. Issues of self-advancement to the full abilities of one outweigh these egalitarian frames of thinking. Thus, in policy making, although issues of redistribution are

acknowledged, policy makers should be guided by decision frames that offer the best courses of action for developing individuals to their fullest potential, rather than inculcating a receiver syndrome that is detrimental to the receiving individual as well as to overall national development. Surely, RDCs are not about taking from the rich and giving to the poor. They are about creating wealth through local initiative so as to enhance self-determination rather than create a dependency syndrome. It becomes a task of this study to measure the reasonableness of the amalgamation policy towards achieving this elusive goal of development.

The adoption of rationalism as a philosophical frame for the study can also be defended against the egoist policy philosophy. Egoism as a policy philosophy negates issues of public interest. The dominating concern of egoism is that gains from the policy process accrue to policy decision makers and bureaucrats. Thus, the concern of those in power is to accumulate power so that they can remain in these positions of authority. The survival of those in power overrides all decision-making. In analysing bureaucratic behavior as exhibiting egoist characteristics, Anthony Downs (1967:2) indicates that:

The fundamental premise of the theory [egoism] is that bureaucratic officials, like all other agents in society, are significantly – though not solely – motivated by their own self interest ... Bureaucratic officials in general have a complex set of goals ... but regardless of the particular goals involved, every official is significantly motivated by his own self interest even when acting in a purely official capacity.

Although egoism is difficult to measure, any analysis of governance that ignores issues of self-interest is not likely to produce far-reaching conclusions, because this is fundamental in human existence. While self-interest can manifest itself on an individual level, it also exists on an organisational level where the interest is to enhance the position of one's organisation vis-à-vis others. Bozeman (1979:73) notes that:

[At an agency level], egoism is reflected in extreme levels toward agency expansion, agency budget growth, 'territoriality,' and

bureaucratic imperialism (when these efforts are not designed to promote some social mission).

However, egoism cannot be used as a principle of this study as such an approach would be to encourage self-aggrandisement at the expense of society. It could be used to indicate what is actually going on, but subsequently, would cease to be of normative value to this study and overall policy making. The interest here is to bring out clearly whether or not reasonableness has permeated the policy process and whether there are shortcomings. If such shortcomings exist, what is it that can be done to remedy the situation? Rationalism is seen to offer both a descriptive and normative approach to policy making and is acknowledged in this study to be the most relevant policy framework for transforming rural local governance in Zimbabwe.

It is clear from explications of the rational actor model that, fundamental to this model, is the concept of rationality. Thus, behind every classical explanation of rational action is the fact that the rational actor undertakes a cyclical process of policy making where he/she identifies a problem; sets objectives to be achieved; identifies choices or alternatives (policy options) that can be followed to achieve the objectives; carries out a cost-benefit analysis to weigh these alternatives; selects a preferred choice that is, the one with the highest net benefits; prepares implementation procedures and actually sees to the implementation of the selected alternative; monitors and continuously evaluates the implementation process to ensure that goals are being achieved, as per the expectations. This classical explanation of rational action has been much criticized by several scholars. Although this looks like a perfect procedure to be followed when analysing problems with the intention of solving them, this very process is criticized because the rationality of the decision maker is limited by several factors that make it impossible for the decision maker to act in this ideal, logical manner. In fact, to expect human beings to act in this manner is to raise them to the level of a deity with unlimited powers of reason. Some of the limiting factors

enumerated by several scholars such as James Anderson (1990:114), Charles Lindblom (1993:27-28) and Jean Blondel (1995:363-364) include the following:

1. The complexity of problems makes the isolation and definition of problems rather difficult and a taxing exercise. This is especially so where a ripple causation – effect process makes it difficult to state what exactly the problem is. For example, when local authorities fail to perform as per expectation, the questions to ask are: What is the problem? Is it poor management, inadequate resources, central government interference, the general non-viability of local authorities or some other reason? The causation – effect process here is such that it is difficult to establish the actual cause. Establishing the cause becomes complicated such that a careless attack on poor management may actually lead to wrong policies being formulated in an effort to address the problem. For example, during the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, many injustices took place, where human rights violations were at their highest. The questions are: Should the individual perpetrators of human rights abuse be the targets of those who were affected or unjustly treated or should the target be the system of oppression that existed? What kind of policies should government implement to try and eliminate the problem? Are the correct policies those that take the unjust system as the cause or those that target individual perpetrators as the cause?
2. Decision makers often find themselves in situations where they have difficulties in getting information on the problem and the alternatives they want to institute to solve them. Besides, they are confronted with the problem of time since most decisions need to be made as soon as possible. Their capacity to predict the future is also limited, so is their ability to carry out complex calculations that assist in future predictions. The fundamental assertion of this critique is that human beings do not



know all there is to know. Their knowledge is limited and so is their rationality.

3. Decision-making is affected by many competing values such as political, organisational, personal and social values. These to an extent, tend to impede a rational comprehensive approach to making decisions, as numerous value conflict situations inevitably manifest themselves in such scenarios. For example, where one's decisions may affect one negatively while affecting the organisation positively, what decision is one likely to take? Is one not likely to take a compromise position and make decisions that only satisfy rather than maximise?
4. The issue of sunk costs also limits the rational comprehensiveness of the decision maker. Such costs may be in the form of decisions made previously or commitments and investments in existing policies and programmes. These may be such that it may be difficult to make certain sets of decisions that would lead to the cancellation of the existing decisions, commitments and investments. Within this scenario, the decision maker is bound by what already exists such that it becomes difficult for him/her to think of options that are outside this frame, as such decisions could be too costly and practically difficult to implement.
5. The rational model, apart from being criticised for placing too much emphasis on the intellectual capacities of the decision makers, does not allow the setting of objectives prior to, and distinct from, a consideration of alternative policies including both financial and time costs. It is also criticised for ignoring intra- and extra-organisational behavior as influential in the rational actor's decision making processes.

Although these points are acknowledged in this research, they are not taken as weaknesses of the model, but weaknesses of the intra- and extra-environmental

actors that tend to incapacitate the rational actor. These do not, according to this study, dismiss the model but indicate that the model should actually function with a clear awareness of these factors. They are thus, capacity giving criticisms where rational actors have to explore the width, depth and length of the problems they wish to solve and do so with the recognition of environmental destabilizers that may affect the thought processes of human beings. In fact, the model also acknowledges these points and projects itself as an ideal model of policy making, if the world was free of these environmental destabilizers. To further support this point, one would argue that the centrality of this model is that it can be used as a mode of thought that can open up a critical discussion about processes of policy making (Dunn, 1994:273-275).

The rational actor model allows one to critically analyse the way policies have been made or have to be made, such that, in a situation where policy makers resort to a little resourcefulness in developing policy, one can argue that the produced policy lacks excellence, insight and vision: positions that are inconsistent with an already existent model – the rational actor model. It is the contention of this study that policy makers, as a result, should not jump to the soft options of making incremental changes, when all that is required is some insightful thinking which can reveal other more satisfactory policy options.

The policy environment understandably is turbulent and full of information closures, and requires urgency in addressing social issues. Criticism of this model that it is not ideal for situations that exhibit such factors should not be interpreted as rejecting the model per se, but rather as using it within the context of flexibility and subject to contingent factors.

It should also be indicated here that whatever decision making model is adopted, a proper weighing of issues is required, to generate meaningful decisions. With this in mind, the onus is on decision makers to be as rational as possible in making their decisions. Whatever the model or approach adopted, they (decision

makers) cannot afford to be impulsive and irrational. Rationality is therefore, a fundamental concept within the realm of decision-making. Making decisions presupposes the ability to think logically. It also presupposes purposefulness arrived at through:

- (a) recognition of the need for a decision;
- (b) analysis of the situation at hand;
- (c) identification of a policy option that can remedy the situation at hand; and
- (d) operationalisation of the selected course of action or policy option to actually realise the objectives one is trying to achieve (Allison, 1971:29).

These procedural actions pervade all processes of decision making, in whatever mode. Thus, rationality can be viewed as the ability to make viable choices, given competing alternatives. To be rational therefore, is to be reasonable, objective, logical, sensible, purposeful, to defy haphazard action, and to take into consideration the consequences of an action. Thus, the rational actor model rests of course on the concept of rationality itself. This term has been used in a large number of different ways. In the policy making literature it is often prefixed by a qualifying epithet, sometimes, to convey a flavour to the concept, which the author subsequently wishes to use as a basis for criticism (Dunn, 1994:273).

Thus, qualifying epithets alter the substance of rationality to suit a particular analyst, a situation that to an extent, distorts rationality as it should be viewed but, on the other hand, acknowledges the many actions of decision makers that can be considered as rational, thereby underlining the utility of rationality and its pervasiveness in decision making. Hebert Simon, an adherent of incrementalism and pragmatic philosophy indicates that all human behavior has a rational component, but not in terms of 'economic rationality' (that is, value maximising behavior), but its '*multirational*' nature, which allows the selection of preferred behavioral alternatives in terms of some system of values whereby the

consequences of behavior can be evaluated (Dunn, 1994:274). Within this argument, it is important to note that different forms of rationality can manifest themselves such as:

- (i) objective rationality – which is rationality in line with identified values which have to be maximised;
- (ii) subjective rationality – which is maximising value subject to the knowledge of the decision maker;
- (iii) conscious rationality – consciously adjusting means to ends;
- (iv) deliberate rationality – the adjustment process of means to ends is deliberate;
- (v) organisational rationality – oriented towards the organisation's objectives; and
- (vi) individual rationality – oriented towards individual goals (Denhart, 1993:89-90).

Some scholars want to refer to the different rationality frames as value rational action, affectual rational action, traditional rational action, and instrumental rational action (Moyo, 1992:29-30). Other scholars such as Dunn (1994:273) refer to the rationality variants as technical rationality, economic rationality, legal rationality, social rationality and substantive rationality. These different forms of rational action acknowledge the ubiquity of this concept. Rationality therefore, among others, can help:

- (a) improve the nature and content of whatever undergoes a rational process;

- (b) enhance efficiency in resource utilization, bearing in mind issues of scarcity and choice. In fact, rational action has tremendous economic utility as it deals with these economic issues of choice under conditions of scarcity, the essence of the economic problem;
- (c) improve the effectiveness of actions geared to achieve set goals;
- (d) decision makers address issues of equity (redistribution) in a competent manner using the underlying criteria of efficiency; and
- (e) enhance the capacity to make judgments about diverse issues that affect the nation. In this case, making judgments on the nature, policy content, and operational procedures of rural local governance in a manner that ensures the attainment of the very values of local governance, liberty, participation, responsiveness, equity and development.

As indicated above, this concept (rationalism) has permeated most government organisations gearing themselves for change and development. Zimbabwe has set up an institute for public administration and management known as the Zimbabwe Institute for Public Administration and Management (ZIPAM). The institute, among other duties, is expected to carry out scientific analysis in the management and administration of the public sector, with a view to making recommendations to government so as to keep the management and administration of this sector up to date with current methods and techniques of running organisations. The institute also trains public sector managers in policy making and decision making as well as in project management and managing for change. These are rationally conceived aspects of public management, which help to enhance the capacity of public managers to make rational decisions.

The rational actor model is a model for realists, idealists and rationalists (Bozeman, 1979:63-66). One feels compelled to indicate that this is, in fact, the umbrella model of decision making and policy making. All these other models are not far removed from it but complement it in terms of emphasizing a particular

thrust of rationality consistent with certain contingencies, which they consider to be important. Thus, to talk of incrementalism, is really to talk about incremental rational action. To talk about the optimal model (mixed scanning) is to discuss optimal rationality. The argument is similar to all other arguments that apply qualifying epithets to rationality, such as comprehensive rationality, technical rationality and purposive rationality. All these are acceptable as they do not minimise rationality, but enrich it with consideration of rationality being a mother set and the epithets being sub-sets that need proper theoretical grounding. Thus, rationality ranges across a continuum bounded on one end by sub-conscious non deliberate adaptations of means and ends based on incomplete knowledge and on the other by conscious deliberate adaptations based on complete knowledge (Simon in Denhart, 1993:89-91).

This contention may be extended to the philosophies mentioned above, that is, protectorism, brokerism, pragmatism, transferalism, and egoism. All these have rational characteristics in so far as rationality is described in terms of purposeful, reasonable, scientific, planned, and logical action. All these –isms exhibit sequential steps of reasoning and decision making. They are not haphazard in nature. They aim at maximising the attainment of results within the limits they are operating. In fact, as indicated before, to say rationality does not consider the presence of limits in which such as the value premises of decision making, the self interest of administrators and politicians (egoism), and the need to be consultative in defining policy (representativeness and societal involvement), is to defy its characteristics of realism and utility that are the major theoretical thrusts of this philosophy.

This study argues that the GOZ in its bid to transform rural local government in Zimbabwe followed this rational process. For example, the formation of the Forum for Rural Development, composed of administrative experts with the necessary knowledge and proven scientific backgrounds for social engineering, is testimony of an attempt to be as scientific as possible in coming up with a new

form of rural local government. However, because of different philosophical orientations impinging upon political leadership, it must be recognized that purposive rationality can be derailed in the process, to accommodate the different interests expressed by central government. In each case where the Act (RDC Act of 1988) reveals the derailment of purposive rationality and where practice actually deviates from such purposiveness, especially where such actions affect the autonomy and functional capacity of RDCs, such variations are stated in this document and become subjects of recommendations geared to re-orienting these institutions in order to enhance their viability, efficiency and effectiveness.

This study considers the rational actor model as a useful tool as it helps in the management of change, programme planning and design, and programme implementation. It brings forth a sequential pattern of explaining the policy process using a process model that highlights policy initiation; policy estimation; policy selection; policy implementation; and policy evaluation and termination. Although this sequential pattern of policy action has not been spared the rod of criticism by the ardent critics such as Lindblom in Anderson (1990:114) and Ham and Hill (1993:84), who prefer the iterative framework. This process is indeed an ideal one where the iterative component becomes an addition to it, in order to remove its apparent rigidity and to cater for any system trouble-shooting mechanisms that are directed by activities in a particular environment.

As reflected in the preceding discussion, the rational actor model is based on rationality. Rationality stands for the notion of reflection as a prelude to action. Instead of acting upon hunches, the decision maker should analyse the situation carefully, consider alternative options and list their strengths and weaknesses. Rationality has an instrumental value. It is concerned with the maximisation of some goal or the application of some value judgment to a specific phenomenon. Rationality also stands for the popular idea of reasonableness, that is, it seeks harmony where conflicting aims abound. This is fundamental to this study,

hence the need to determine rationality of local government managers in serving communities.

## **THE RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question that guides this study is:

**How well has the Beitbridge Rural District Council performed between 1993 and 2002?**

To address the complexity of the research question, the following propositions surrounding this great debate are made. Firstly, the performance of the BRDC has neither lived up to the expectations of local communities, nor to those of the central government. This means that the BRDC has not appropriately carried out its duties to enable the grass roots people to develop. Secondly, while the BRDC is legally entrusted with the authority to provide services of a local nature such as education, health, housing, roads, and water, as well as initiate sustainable development programmes and projects, it has not managed to do so in the most appropriate manner. Thirdly, the BRDC has failed to institute effective and efficient management machinery with the capacity to formulate appropriate strategic plans and manage internal components of the organisation such as personnel and the council's transport section. It also has problems with collecting and utilizing revenue in the most effective and efficient manner. Council decision-making is highly centralized. There is no democratic or popular participation in decision-making and this tends to reduce compliance and the overall viability of council decisions. These hypothetical statements provide the scope of reviewing the performance of the BRDC so as to proffer recommendations that can help to improve the operations of the council.



## **IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is important and significant in a number of ways. Firstly, this study is a pioneering research project, the intention of which is to provide a clear picture of the operations of RDCs in Zimbabwe, albeit specifically the Beitbridge Rural District Council, and how these operations affect communities. This means that this is a results-oriented study. It is outcome rather than input based. How RDCs have translated objectives into actions and what impact these actions have on communities is fundamental to this study. The essence of local government is to proffer socio-economic advantages to localities, whereupon the ability to provide these (advantages) underscores acceptable performance. This is significant in this study.

Most of the studies on amalgamation were carried out before the current decentralization policy was implemented. They were basically analytical and prescriptive, but this study adopts a descriptive approach backed by a sound theoretical framework (the rational actor model) to help explain the current performance level of RDCs and reasons for this level of performance. This approach allows the study to develop prescriptive models of local authority operations. Thus, while the existing studies basically have a constitutional analytical focus, this study adopts a neo-institutionalist integrated approach that blends together both behavioral and constitutional approaches (Blondel, 1995:8-9), to emphasize the importance of institutions, behavior, constitutions and practices. This helps to produce a coherent and far reaching analysis of contemporary government activities. The approach allows the study to include both substantive and procedural policies in its analysis in order to come up with what actually happens and whether this leads to objective attainment or not. Of significance here is that the written word in legislative provisions and policy statements by government does not reveal what is happening on the ground. These legislative provisions are about what ought to be. They are normative in

their outlook, and therefore more often than not, those who are tasked with effecting these, fail to come up with proper procedural instruments that would lead to successful goal attainment. If they do, actual operation fails in most cases, to be in accordance with the intentions of the written word. For this reason, this study has departed from legislative analysis to practical and insightful exposition of the actual policy implementation dynamics.

Secondly, the influence of local government as an instrument of development, good governance and democracy has been noted the world over. Throughout Africa and the developing world, efforts have been made to give more power to the people at the grass roots level so as to enhance their participation in democratic governance. The materialisation of such cherished collaboration by all in raising socio-economic and political development can be, or is achievable through the institutions of local government that can have the requisite autonomous and functional capacities to service their locales. The study, therefore, notes and acknowledges, within this framework, that local authorities have a tremendous influence on the people they serve and *vice versa*. Therefore, not to study local authority operations is to neglect studies on how the political system responds to the wishes of the electorate. It is broadly, to neglect studies in democracy, good governance, and socio-economic development within a given polity.

Thirdly, public executives in Zimbabwe are not normally exposed to standard measures to gauge their policy exploits and general leadership qualities. This study wishes to provide a framework for these measures, as there is a general realization that the proper management of public organizations requires men and women of great vision and peculiar decision making abilities; men and women who are well trained and cherish organizational strategies for excellence and success under stressful political environments that dominate such organizations; and men and women who are endowed with the gift and experience to subvert undue political pressure for the good of their organizations. This study wishes to

check such management issues as they apply to local authority management as a way of developing local authority administration and management for enhanced performance and societal responsiveness. It is important to note that this study is a 'best practices' review of how far short an RDC is on service provision, work process management, cost effectiveness, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship.

Fourthly, government reform, at whatever level, emphasizes efficiency, quality service provision, customer orientation, efficient and effective financial management and accountability, participatory decision-making, and community empowerment. Gauging the attainment of these values is the essence of the performance measurement that is important in this study.

Fifthly, performance measurement enhances responsibility and accountability. These are the concerns of nearly all, if not all public sector institutions. It is from analysing performance results that RDC functionaries can determine whether they have satisfied these requirements or not.

The sixth point is that the study will make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of Zimbabwe's rural local government system so as to enable individuals, scholars and interested parties to engage in debates on the system. It should also be mentioned that local government is a practical discipline whose operations affect the ordinary people on a daily basis. These effects play a role as measures of the acceptability and unacceptability of the local government system. The study exposes these issues with the hope that more meaningful debate will be generated to build the capacity of rural local government the world over. It should be noted that during the past few years the wind of change and decentralization has been blowing in Africa. Efforts for strengthening democracy in Africa have to be complemented by invigorating the institutions and processes of decentralization. Local government has a special role in this context. Decentralization and good governance need to be promoted due to political,

social, economic, geographical and administrative advantages. Local government as an instrument of decentralization assumes additional significance as it facilitates involvement of people in the formulation and implementation of development plans and promotes self-help, decentralized and participatory government and can also be an important element in good governance (Sharma in Reddy, 2000:73).

The seventh point is that the study wishes to raise interest in local government studies. Most people outside the world of local government think that local government studies are boring. The poor performance of some local government institutions has also added to this lack of interest. Consequently, most people are not well informed about local government and its vitality in the whole process of national governance. This study hopes to raise the level of consciousness of most readers in local government and to stimulate their interest in these institutions and particularly the RDCs in Zimbabwe. After all, Zimbabwe is mainly rural and agricultural, such that the lives of the majority of the people depend on farming activities that are undertaken within these rural areas, which are supervised by RDCs. Now that African countries are in charge of the decision processes of what happens and should happen within them, it is important to examine how this has translated itself to institutions at the local level, and to determine by that very fact, the extent and nature of the democratization process in Africa, or to determine whether democracy remains an illusory phenomenon in this part of the world.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on the Beitbridge Rural District Council located in the most southerly part of Zimbabwe. A full exposition of this RDC is found in Chapter 4. Despite its focus on only one RDC, the study may be faced with the following limitations:

1. **Time:** This is an academic study that has to be completed within a specific time frame. As such, it was not possible to interact with all stakeholders to gather additional information relevant to the study.
2. **Information:** Not much is written on RDCs in Zimbabwe. There are base-line surveys, piecemeal instrument or legislation analysis, and workshop or conference papers that lack the academic coherence and rigour needed for a study such as this. Besides, the BRDC has no culture of recording all its proceedings, be it in the form of minutes of meetings or reports on projects or departmental performance. This, coupled with an unwillingness to share meaningful information by community respondents and councillors, made it difficult to obtain conclusive information on the performance of the BRDC.
3. **Funding:** The research was carried out without any supportive study loan or grant. This placed some restrictions on the researcher and assistants in terms of travel throughout the district to collect information.
4. Besides the limitations associated with items 1 to 3 above, others include the following:
  - (a) The degree of subjectivity and error that may be present in the interpretation of documentary and other evidence of the study.
  - (b) This is a study of past political and policy restructuring. As a result, the study is cognizant of the fact that there are difficulties in individuals' powers to recall the past. As such, some of the information may not be quite as accurate as documented material and this can affect the conclusions of the study.
  - (c) Information distortion may easily occur, as is the case when individuals want the researcher to believe that they are knowledgeable and

understand local authority dynamics, or when their interest is to portray a good or bad picture of the institution being studied.

- (d) The level of political privacy that is consistent with the 'black box' of political decision making should also be taken into consideration, as issues of official secrecy may have led to information distortion.

In spite of all these limitations, available data was collected and used to draw conclusions and make recommendations that could be used to enhance institutional performance. Below is a brief outline of the structure of this study.

## **ORGANISATION OF THE RESEARCH**

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter outlines the research problem and highlights the significance and importance of this study, in particular, and issues of local governance, in general. The chapter provides an introductory frame that emphasizes the problems of performance measurement in the public sector. It then provides an outline, albeit brief (as this is covered later in chapter 3), of the transformative nature of the new rural local government dispensation in Zimbabwe. This transformation is further clarified through an outline of the imperatives for amalgamation in order to provide a base that enables the study to engage in a critical analysis of the modus operandi of rural local government institutions in Zimbabwe and the objectives that they have to achieve. It is within the context of this information that the purpose of the study and the research problem and hypothesis were developed.

Chapter two deals with methodological issues. Particular emphasis is on the research design, research instruments, data collection schedule and an elaborate discussion on how the data is analyzed. This is an important section of the study as it helps to authenticate the study's findings. It also gives the study its

'scientific face' and guides the researcher towards adopting a systematic way of dealing with the data.

Chapter three deals with the concepts of 'decentralisation' and 'local government'. It further discusses the evolution of rural local government in Zimbabwe, from the colonial times, in order to show how rural local government institutions have performed over time. This provides a proper foundation for a discussion on the amalgamation policy as an instrument for transforming and developing rural local governance in Zimbabwe, since July 1993. It should, however, be noted that the historical development of local government during the colonial era is not discussed as extensively as compared to that of post colonial Zimbabwe, for the simple reason that the thrust of the research question is to investigate the impact of the current piece of legislation (RDC Act of 1988). Also, document searches have revealed that there are no meaningful details for pre-independence rural local governance in the archives. However, the discussion offers meaningful information that acts as a stepping-stone to the current rural local government dispensation and provides an understanding of the current performance of the BRDC.

Chapter four discusses the Beitbridge Rural District Council as the main area of this study. It lays out its geographical location and formation through the Rural District Councils Act, Number 8 of 1988. It outlines its structure, functions and operations and thus, lays a foundation for performance data that was collected and analysed.

Chapter five deals with data presentation and analysis. The data collected using the instruments highlighted in chapter two are presented and analyzed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as per the demands of such data. A summary discussion of the findings is also made, taking into cognizance the underlying theoretical framework of the study and the hypothetical statements that are being tested. Finally, chapter six outlines the conclusions and recommendations of the

study. This chapter also touches on those aspects of the Act that need to be altered in order to enhance the autonomy and functionality of RDCs. It also suggests a local government philosophy that should be adopted by government in order to enhance overall local government viability in the country.

## **CONCLUSION**

Assessing the performance of public sector institutions has become a critical process of building institutional capacity and ensuring that government organizations operate in a manner that safeguards the interests and needs of communities they serve. This is the essence of quality service provision. Consequently, any institutional reforms, such as has happened in Zimbabwe with the formation of RDCs, should be followed by overt action to gauge the performance of the new institutions. A rational process of developing corrective instruments should follow the results of such measurement. The instruments should be implemented so that the desired socio-economic and political effects are achieved.